

A scenic view of a narrow bridge spanning a deep canyon with steep, rocky cliffs and a river below. The bridge is a simple metal structure with railings, and a few people can be seen walking across it. The canyon walls are made of light-colored, layered rock. The river below is a vibrant green color. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

# OUR BUMBLE

## EXPLORING EUROPE IN OUR MOTORHOME

BY JOANNE, AN OCD HUBBY & FARTING DAWG





SPAIN





Zahara National Park

## ZAHARA TO MONTEJAQUE

### SUNDAY 12 APRIL

Pitter, patter, tap, paws, pitter, patter, tap, paws. Peanut is up and about and walking like a little robot. Still stiff, bruised and sore but at least he is more mobile and getting back to his old self.

We are parked right at the bottom of Zahara village, which is another Pueblos Blancos but this hill is extremely steep with a castle on top. We wandered up thorough the village stopping every five minutes for a break. Well, I did whilst Craig aka the steamroller just kept going. It wrecked my legs and villages like this should come with a health warning or at very least a winch. There are a myriad of zig zag streets and lanes all leading up to the main street which is about a third way up the hill. The houses are nicely decorated with hanging baskets and lovely doors. Yep, nice big wooden doors with fancy handles and tiny peep holes. The Main Street had several cafes, bars, a plaza, several look out balconies and two churches. A main church and an historic moorish looking church, which was nice from the outside but not so nice inside. Walking passed the church you take a right turn and climb the final two thirds to

the castle, which is painful. Narrow and uneven path with lovely wild flowers and wasps that are trained to attack on only the narrow points. Just before the castle they have erected an absolute horrid building that clearly stemmed from the 1960's - a concrete mess. A shame because inside it is like an archeological site were they have tried to preserve and display parts of the old castle building and walls. The final leg of the trek and you arrive at a 10th century Muslim fortress and castle. Nothing inside but the look out and panoramic view from the top are wonderful. You can see for miles across the Sierra de Zahara and Grazalema national park with endless mountains and hills all providing a great backdrop for the Zahara lake. We watched a few griffon vultures cruise along a thermocline before disappearing in to the trees. They were pretty damn big!

The walk down was much better and easier of the legs. The variety of wild plants, fruits and flowers was amazing - mint, sage, rosemary, figs, quince, oranges, olives to name but a few. After lunch we chilled for a while but didn't take long for Craig to get bored. We set off around the





corner or so I thought! An hour later and we were still bumbling in the hills. It was actually a nice change to drive in the early evening with the warm light of the sun until....Craig drove down a single track road that hugged a gorge. It was very steep and the drop made me cling for dear life. With every twist and turn my heart skipped a beat, God i hope no one is coming in the other direction or we are screwed. Not only did we have to watch the edge of the cliff but we had to watch the inside of the rock and overhangs for bashing Vin. All in all it was rather scary!

We went to stay at Benaoján but it was rather a Hicksville with a few smashed windows, so we opted for the more sedate village of Montejaque. It is a very sleepy town and not big, so we just parked on the main road outside the college. Perfect.



Top: The town of Zahara

Bottom left: Street in Zahara

Bottom Right: The climb to the top of the castle





## Views from the top of Montejaque

# MONTEJAQUE TO RONDA

## MONDAY 13 APRIL

Pitter, patter, creek , pitter, patter, creek. Peanuts up and about and walking like a wind up toy, he is stiff as a board poor thing. A bit of sunshine on his old bones and he'll be fine.

A stroll in to village and what a lovely place. The usual quaint, white washed village but it had a lovely atmosphere. The community were out repairing roads, painting shops and fixing the stones in the main plaza. Doesn't it just make things easier when everyone in the community joins in. The tiny houses merged in to the cobbled streets and at times you couldn't tell between the roof and the walk way. They call this the Nasrid neighborhood. We wound our way up to the top of Montejaque and

admired the panoramic views over the national park. As we stood on top we discovered we were stood on top of El Gato cave, an underground of cathedrals with ancient cave paintings. The town has a scientific centre for the study of limestone formation - I didn't realise that limestone is calcium carbonate dissolved by rainwater to form calcium bicarbonate. Centuries of rainfall creating weird and wonderful shaped rock, which will continue to change. The name Montejaque means lost mountain and the mountain range is around 6,000 year old.

The Spanish government started to open up Paradors. They are converted places of interest like castles, palaces and historic buildings. You can stay in one of the Paradors but they usually aren't cheap and often compete with 5 star hotels. The majority are situated in historic





Road to the abandoned dam, you can see Vin centre of the picture.

places, so a lot of people are now visiting Spain by hopping from one Paradors to the next. Not only do you get great and unusual accommodation but you get to see an historic town that you might not otherwise through of. Well here is Montejaque we spotted our 1st Paradors and very nice it was.

Before we set off for Ronda we wanted to have a walk to the cliff and dam. The narrow road with 100m drop was toe twitching. The dam took years to complete but they never opened it. Think it may be something to do with the dried up river bed?

The journey to our next stop, Ronda wasn't long. Another wind up and up town but this time this the town as pretty big and the streets were a lot wider. We needed some bits of food but unfortunately no Lidl only an Aldi and to be honest, the worst Aldi we've been in. Half the shelves were empty and loads of missing prices. We got out bits and bobs and then went and found our parking spot

The abandoned dam



for the night. After a quick scoot around we opted for a level car park (not many in Ronda) just on the outskirts of town.





Rather than explore the town we opted for a mooch around several China Bazaars. Craig was in his element looking at all the cheap crap and thinking of alternative uses. After several hours we escaped the dark tat alleys and ventured in to lovely sunshine. I treated Craig to bucket and some bungee...that's his birthday present sorted.



Top: The town of Montejaque  
Bottom Left: The Parador  
Bottom Right: Tiny houses of Montejaque





The Tajo Gorge at Ronda

## CRAIG'S BIRTHDAY IN RONDA

TUESDAY 14 APRIL

Pitter, patter, pitter, patter, Peanut seems back to his old self and just in time for Craig's birthday. As usual, Craig was up, dressed and making breakfast before I'd even opened my eyes. When I eventually crawled out of bed, I got his cards out the safe and then told to "shush" just as I was about to burst in to happy birthday song! La La, croak, My singing voice ain't what it used to be!

The weather wasn't great and the grey clouds didn't really do justice to a Ronda. We walked around the edge of town in to the centre of Ronda. The views across the surrounding countryside were stunning even in this dull weather. The town is perched high on a limestone cliff with a

massive gorge in the middle that splits the town in to the old and new. We had a scoot around the top looking down and then we walked down to the valley floor. The Tajo Gorge is some 100m drop to the valley floor and the track down wasn't easy and some of the small ledges got my heart pumping. This once secret passage was used by slaves to carry water from the river up to the town. We only passed a couple of people and once we'd done the trek, we found out why. Down at the rivers edge you could see remnants of old water works and the view up to the top was great. The Tunnel once used as an escape route was full of sludge and water, so we didn't bother wandering through although Craig did fancy it. The trek back up the broken path was exhausting.





Ronda's impressive setting is meant to contribute to creating a romantic town. That combined with soft, Spanish guitar music played in and around the little alleys...but we didn't quite feel it. Hemingway said it was a perfect place for a honeymoon, which is probably true in its hey day. Down in the cobbled streets of the old Arabic town it felt nice but up near the bridge, the tourist buses and tourist tat sort of spoil the ambiance. Plenty to see in the old town from the town hall with a two tier facade, the Santa Maria church with its minute very similar to the one in Seville, and of course the Roman baths.

The bullring is one of the oldest in Spain. Built in 1785 and perched on the edge of the cliff, it attracts crowds by the bus load. Although reading the history of the bull ring and the great matador Pedro Romero, you can understand why. We didn't bother going in the bullring and instead we just meandered in and around the myriad of streets.

On our way back, we walked down the main drag (new town), which is full of regular shops and bars. As a birthday treat, Craig avoided every shop and bar and headed straight to



**Top: town hall**

**Bottom left: View in to Gorge**

**Bottom right: Roman Baths**





our first ever Super Sol Supermarket. It was massive and the build up to the visit made Craig all the more giddy. He couldn't wait for the array of hams and all the Spanish goodies. Within 5 minutes he was gutted. Craig's bottom lip was nearly touching the floor, he was that disappointed with the crappy, old and very tired supermarket.

In the evening, we had another walk in to the town. I tried to temp Craig in to a cafe for a bite to eat and a beer but nope, he didn't fancy it. On the way back called in a mercado supermarket. It was miles better than Super Sol and the choice was excellent. Even though it's Craig's birthday he still wanted to go home to Vin and cook something.

Wonderful shop with prized ham and cheeses. You could even buy a ham butty!





Our Trek from the top of  
Tajo Gorge to the bottom







House built in to the rock

## RONDA TO CARRATCARA

WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL

Pitter Patter Pitter Patter...think Peanut is back to normal!!!!

Last night's rain had left its mark, dirty red water blobs all over Vin. Think he needs a little wipe before we set off. We had planned on staying in Ronda for another night but after 3 trips in to town and walking around every street several times we thought it best to head off.

Not long and we were at our Setinel de las Bodales. A tiny village that felt rather odd. The village sits in a volcanic gorge and the houses sort of cling underneath the rock and lava flow. Many don't appear to have any roofs. Apparently inside the houses they have their own microclimate,

cool in summer and warmer in winter. Not bad if you don't mind sharing your home with bats, bugs and birds. Other than the street with strange houses there was nothing here but the lost army tank, an army truck and half a dozen soldiers did provide entertainment for half an hour.

By mid afternoon, we were on our way to the next point. The limestone rocks amid a grassland provided a good home for 100's of sheep and their little lambs. I don't think we've ever seen so many sheep in one place there were loads of um. After the craggy limestone rocks it went flat as a pancake with lush green fields. It felt like you were at sea level when in fact we were 800 m up in what eventually looked like a volcanic crater. Then green countryside with the odd stone wall and mountain bump for as far as you could see with a very tiny wiggly road in the





middle. We wound our way up to the tiny village of Carratraca. We parked up on top of the village and what a fantastic view but not for long...the rains came and it bounced it down. We did manage a quick walk in to what we thought were the old spa baths only to find a load of graves and dead folk. We'd parked Vin right next to the cemetery, I do hope the spirits are kind to us tonight.



Left: The weird town of Setenil - houses built in to the rocks  
Above: View from Carratraca





Craig stood on top of weird rock formations

## CARRATCARA TO ÅLORA

### THURSDAY 16 APRIL

The sun battled with the rain clouds and eventually he beamed his way through. In its heyday Carratcara attracted high society masses to the sulphur bathing pool. The healing powers of the natural springs, the outdoor baths and picturesque setting created a great 19th century hub for wealthy Europeans. Nowadays it's a sleepy town with not much to offer (hence no photos). The once outdoor spring is now part of a 5 star hotel, which is very nice (we snook in for a toot) but definitely not in keeping with the rest of the town. The sulphur springs now commend a nice price tag along with the many other 5 star spa treatment, which must be booked in advance. The mineral waters contain sulphur, calcium and

magnesium, which are great for purifying the body. The Arabs named the town Karr-Al-Krak, which translates to scourge cleansing. The only downside to the hotel is the smell...not sure I could stick the smell of sulphur all day.

We tried to find the old bull ring but think someone pinched it but instead we found the government buildings and terraces, which were nicely painted in maroon and mustard. The groundsman said hello and asked us if we were the ones staying in the Motorhome near the cemetery (in Spanish). We replied but he could see we were fascinated with his big drum of paint, so he showed us what he was doing. He was mixing white lime rock (looked like a big piece of chalk) from the mountain behind us with cold water. Once agitated the the lime broke down it started to react





with the water. It heated up and started to bubble. Eventually, it made paint, which they use for white washing all the houses. How cool is that!

We walked back to Vin via dog shit alley and set off to our next destination, Ålora. Not far to travel around 10km. Round the corner (a rather big hill) and the rock composition started to change from limestone to sandstone. We are now entering the Natural Park of Gaitanes. Not only did the colour change but the rocks were more round in shape, as opposed to craggy. We went to pull in to a lay-by at the side of the lake but a film crew were busy filming cyclists hurling round a bend. This place is a haven for cyclist and guess they are starting this years promotional material. Never mind, we find something else. A few kilometers down a very windy road and we pulled in to admire some weird rock formations. We took a walk and then set off again.

The drive from Carratcara to Alora





Five minutes later and we found our spot for the day. And what a stop! We are right on the edge of the Guadalhorce River with El Chorro as our backdrop. What a place to park! This area is famous with climbers and often referred to as Garganta del Chorro. A 5 km cleft in a vast limestone massif. The immense chasm reach depth of 600 feet with the most beautiful chalky coloured water meandering through. The best bit, clinging half way up the rock face is the Caminito del Rey (kings path) that leads you to the precariously balanced bridge. The path was built in 1920 so the king could watch the construction workers finish the hydroelectric dam.

What seems odd are the number of walkers. We thought the Kings Path fell in to disrepair and closed years ago? Maybe we will have a walk tomorrow and see if it's opened but for now, we will sit on the edge of the river and enjoy the view in the warming afternoon sun.



**Top: El Chorro**

**Bottom Left: Peanut behind the door screen, no falling out today!**

**Bottom Right: Chillin @ El Chorro**





Dig the hard hats @ El Chorro

## ÁLORA - EL CHORRO

Up bright and early. First we did a load of washing before we set off with our walking boots.

El Chorro closed in 2000 because of the road and surrounding paths had fallen in to disrepair but guess what, it reopened again a couple of weeks ago.

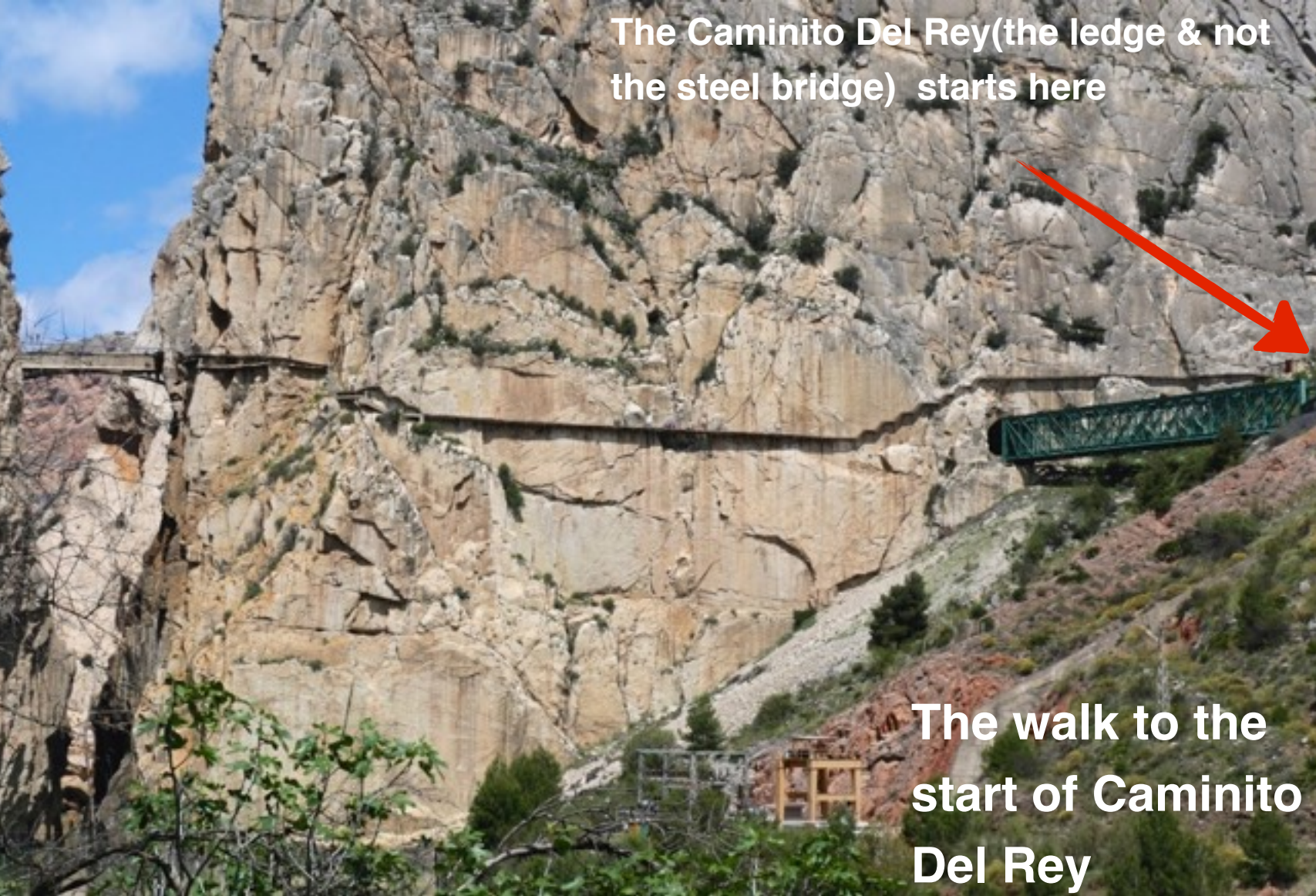
We arrived at the information point with our passports. Oh I do hope they let us climb the passage. A young Spanish chap checked us in, handed us two hard hats and asked us to wait outside. Due to all the number of deaths in 2000 they now restrict the access to only a few people at a time. They have tightened up on security - they log everyone in and out and everyone follow a set of basic rules.

A few minutes later and there were enough people to form a safety group. The guide briefed us, wished us luck and sent us on our way.

The Caminito Del Rey is a path that is built in to El Chorro gorge and suspended more than 100m above the river. The pathway is 7.7 km long of which about 2km is suspended in to the rock, which I didn't realise until I was mid way.

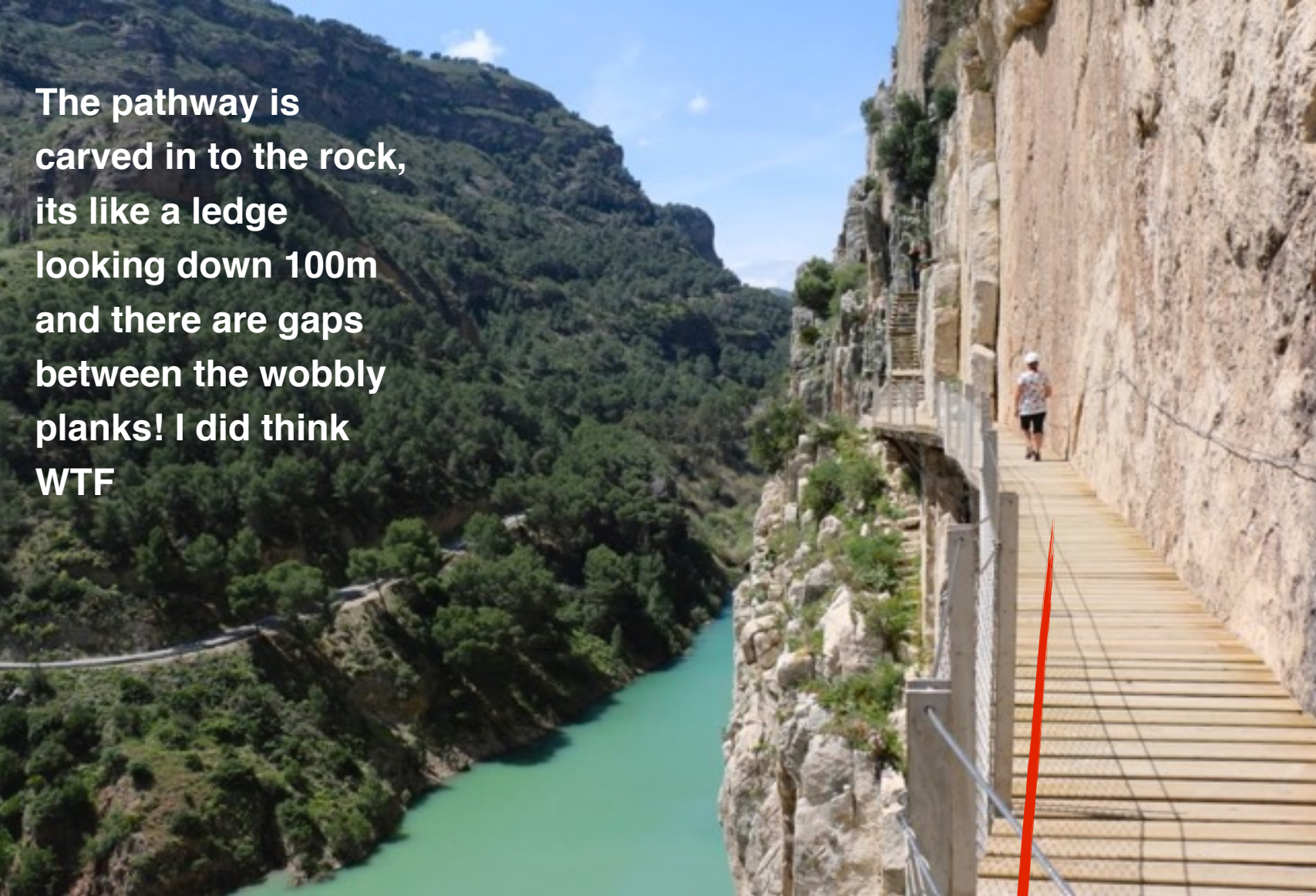
For the first kilometer we walked alongside the Guadalhorce River where the path gradually ascended to the base of the Caminito Del Rey. If you look on the photo, the start point is not at the bridge, it is half a kilometer before...look at the path carved in to the rock! The plank path is built over the original stone path but non the less, it is still high up and still



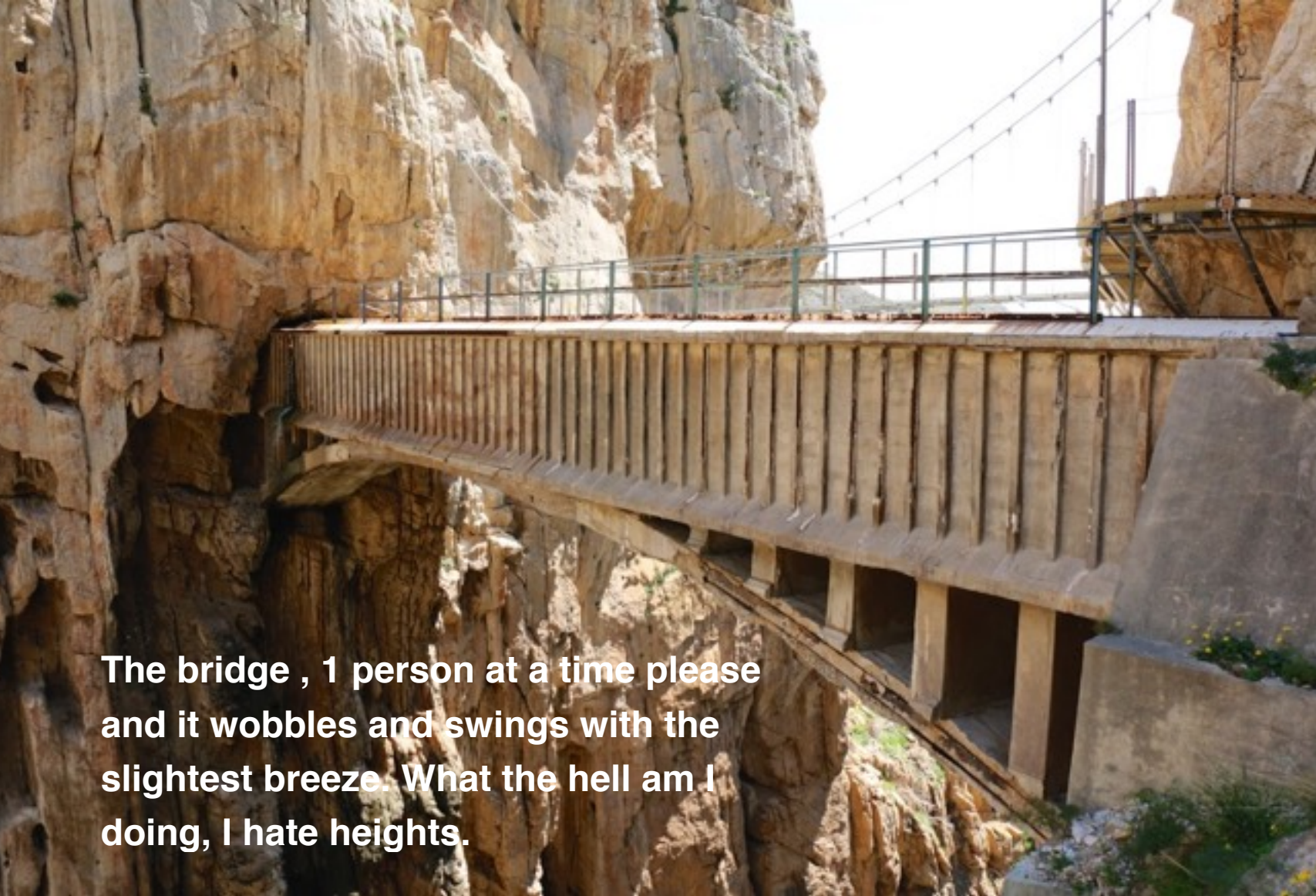




The pathway is carved in to the rock, its like a ledge looking down 100m and there are gaps between the wobbly planks! I did think WTF







The bridge , 1 person at a time please and it wobbles and swings with the slightest breeze. What the hell am I doing, I hate heights.







Once across the bridge the  
suspended path continued for  
another 2 kilometers







scary. At points the ledge is very narrow and when the rock sticks out, you have to hang over the edge! Yes, my stomach did do summersaults and yes, I did wonder what the hell. The bridge is horrid as it looks. Remember the Fun House? They had moving walkways that made you walk funny, well this thing did the same! I clung on for dear life. Once over the bridge, I was totally shocked to find the ledge continued for another kilometer or more. OMG, I can't believe I am doing this, from start to finish the ledge must be 2 kilometers plus. The views were breathtaking and really nice as long as you didn't look down. Craig wasn't phased at all and he merrily swung around every corner and lent over every ledge. My camera battery died at the bridge (mild heart attack) hence few photo's of Craig Del Rey.

Originally the path was called Balconcillos de Los Gaitanes because of the balconies that sit high in the rock face. In 1953. it changed its name to Caminito del Rey in memory of the visit of King Alfonso XIII, who walked the path in 1921.

The walk on the other side was beautiful and you could see the old water ducts, train lines and old abandoned stone buildings. The best bit, we had to do it all again in order to get back!

A wonderful adventure.

**Truly remarkable El Chorro,  
Caminito Del Rey.**



# ELLO

Tip for Spain...the best place to find drinking water is at a local plaza or football stadium.

I did find a rather large bug that amused me for half an hour. Meet Billy Bug.



# ELLO!







3

OUR ROUTE, LAST 6 DAYS



# Zahara de la Sierra to El Chorro

