

## Almeria 2004

I spent a week in Almeria on a geological field trip. Within hours of arriving in Almeria, Steve and Mark (course instructors) hustled us up a hill in the hot sun to look at outcrops. These exposed cliff faces were awesome, but I had not slept since the day before so I was not as enthused as I could have been. We stayed out in the field until almost 8:00 PM as the sun was still out, and that set the tone for the extremely long and arduous days ahead.

The next day, when we broke for lunch in the field, I realized that the majority of the sandwich fillings were cheeses and smoked meats so I made a tomato and sweet pepper sandwich. Diego, who was helping the course instructors, asked if I was vegetarian and I told him I preferred seafood. I suspect the Spanish must not suffer with migraine as our lunch fare turned out to be the typical sandwiches available everywhere. So, Diego agreed to get some canned tuna for me, which was there the next day. The day after that, I was rooting around for the tuna and could not find it. That is when Diego, very pleased with himself, handed me a container of an indeterminate white meat. I made my sandwich and was halfway through eating it when I finally had to ask him what I was eating since it did not taste like anything I had previously, ever. It turns out I was eating an octopus sandwich. So, every lunchtime after that was a bit of an adventure for me since Diego did not want to give me the same sea creature twice.

The fieldtrips each day were in blisteringly hot conditions, half the time uphill and the rest in dried out winding riverbeds. The one day we checked the temperature it was 35 degrees C. In addition to geological locations, we also saw the riverbed that a tank scene was shot for an Indiana Jones movie and the film set of the "Good, the Bad and the Ugly". Because Almeria looks like a desert it has served for outdoor shots for a few other westerns and some of "Laurence of Arabia" was also filmed there.

Monday nights are typically the ones when restaurants are shut so our instructors arranged for us all to go to a spa in the mountains and have dinner. They told us to bring swimsuits and we spend an enjoyable hour in Turkish baths fed by hot springs before dinner. The spa building contained lots of Moorish influences – arches and Arabic writing was cut into the marble.

Back in the field, one day I was desperate for a bathroom, so I asked Steve about a pit stop. He did not understand why I did not go in the bushes like everyone else. He finally capitulated and got in the minibus to drive me to a gas station. Sue, Karen and Pedro all climbed in eagerly and afterwards told me they were glad I had spoken up. Sue is British and on the way there she regaled us with her concerns that her washed knickers would sail over the balcony when the wind blew at night. Pedro was from Portugal and spoke excellent Spanish, so he was continually saving us from ourselves. When we returned from the gas station, everyone else was miffed as we were still eating our lollies and they were hot as hell.

## Almeria trip 2004 (continued)

Since Diego was arranging sandwiches for lunch in the field, I was hoping to get paella for dinner but could never find it on dinner menus. I asked Steve and Mark if they could organize to have some paella made for us. They gently but firmly told me no, it was a dish served for lunch. This may seem superfluous, but I promise there is a reason I mentioned it.

So, on our last night we had two whole hours to ourselves before dinner, so I went wondering around town and stumbled on the "Olive Oil Museum". I'm not sure which is more strange, that such a museum exists, or that I went in. When we all reconvened, we had dinner at a seafood restaurant on the waterfront. Steve and Mark had arranged to have paella specially prepared for those who wanted which was so delicious. Our instructors then gave out some joke prizes. Pedro got a huge plastic bowl since he had once run out of our classes sick to the stomach, I got a paella pot because I was so keen to taste it. But the best prize went to Paul, it was a bag of nuts because he wore the shortest shorts any of us had ever seen.

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