

CCCTS Mallorca Bike Tour 2023



In late March fifteen “winter weary” CCCTS members from Canada and the US arrived in Palma to start a 10 day cycling tour in Mallorca with our hosts Alfonso and Helena of Mills & Honey Cycling Tours.

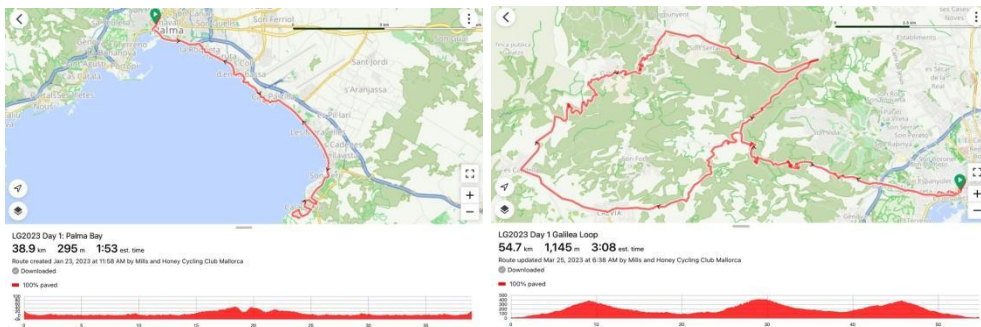
Mallorca is the crown jewel of Spain’s Balearic Islands and a very popular cycling destination with stunning coastlines, magnificent beaches, limestone mountains, old Spanish architecture, and sunny warm temperatures. The winding mountainous roads with numerous switchbacks offer a challenge for all levels of cyclists.

“Greetings”

A number of our group arrived a day early to explore the streets of Palma and tour some of the popular sites. A few of us hiked up to Bellver Castle which was built in the 14th century and housed a museum showcasing the Roman, Arab and Spanish periods of Mallorca. Also popular was the Cathedral of Santa Maria, a Gothic Roman Catholic cathedral with initial construction dating back 1226 and only finished in 1601.



Day 1 “The Feast”



After our large buffet breakfast at the Hotel Saratoga we met up with our hosts and tour guardians, from Mills and Honey to receive and fit our bikes. Ten cyclists chose an easier, out and back, route around Palma Bay (approximately 39km) on bike paths shared with walkers, kids, scooters and other cyclists. Comments from the group suggested it was very busy but could only imagine what it would be like during peak tourist season.



Five adventurous cyclists chose the Galilea loop (55 km/ climbing 1,145 m) which involved 3 climbs and numerous switchbacks. It was definitely a bit aggressive for the first day of cycling. At our lunch stop in the quaint village of Puigpunyent, we were impressed with the outdoor patio seating with elegant chandeliers.



The evening group dinner at La Rosa was a feast with a variety of seven different tapas dishes. There was lots of discussion about the octopus dish and a few were a bit reluctant to taste it. When we thought we couldn't eat another bite, we were served a huge piece of roast beef and then large slabs of chocolate cake and cheesecake. It was decided for our next group meal that we would check the menu first so we could pace ourselves and leave enough room to try all of the dishes.



Day 2 "Time Shift"

We started the day a bit sleep deprived due to our late dinner feast the night before and moving the clocks an hour forward to start daylight savings. After a bus ride to our start in the town square of Sineu we started our ride through the countryside with rolling hills and of course a few steeper sections. Our coffee stop at a cafe in Petra appeared to be a very popular stop with cyclists. Many languages could be heard and we were impressed that most were able to communicate in English.



Our route out of Petra was blocked due to emergency services practicing a train derailment. Some of us took a number of wrong turns before finally finding our way around. Everyone enjoyed the narrow country roads with very little traffic. We cycled past olive groves, farms with sheep, goats, ponies and a field of red poppies in full bloom.



The narrow streets in Arta made it a bit of a challenge finding our hotel but gave us an opportunity to check out the quaint shops and restaurants. The local Bike/Gelato shop was one of the group's favorite stops in town. Our hotel, the Yartan Boutique Hotel (my personal favorite), is an old manor house dating back to the 18th century and featured lovely gardens, sun terrace and swimming pool (the pool was freezing!). A few in our group managed the 180 steps to Santuario Sant Salvador, the walled fortress above the town.



The group dinner at Forn Nou was enjoyable and thankfully not as filling as the dinner the previous evening.

Day 3 “Picnic at the Beach”



The early morning hours were very stormy with high winds and much cooler temperatures. Our ride started with a steep climb and a short descent to an old church, Ermita de Betlem. We met with a number of young students on a class field trip who told us that they walked over an hour to get to the church (not sure this would have happened in North America).

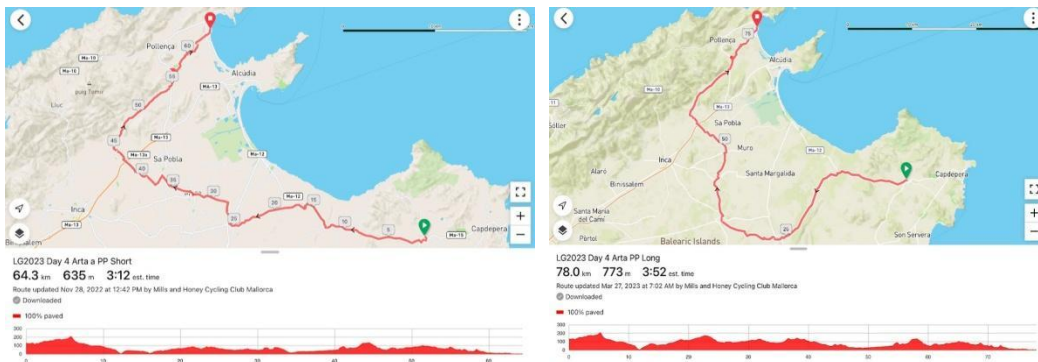


After a short rest we retraced our route back through Artà and continued on quiet country roads to Cala Mesquida for lunch at the beach. We were greeted by Helena and her great “tailgate” lunch with a variety of Empanadas (baked pastry with savory fillings), fruit, drinks and snacks.



Some of our group decided they had not climbed enough for the day and decided to venture up to Castell de Capdepera after lunch. The last bit was extremely steep (maybe 25%) and on cobblestone so a few turned back, some had to walk their bikes and one person on an e-bike used his “features” to ride to the top. Well done!!

Day 4 “Market Day”



We had two ride options, 64 km or 78 km, to Port Pollença. It was market day in Artà and most of us stopped to explore the wide variety of products offered from produce, sweets, clothing, baskets, jewelry and art.



We again enjoyed the ride through the countryside and many of us stopped at a farm to watch the cutest young, bouncy lambs following their mothers though the tunnels built under the roads.

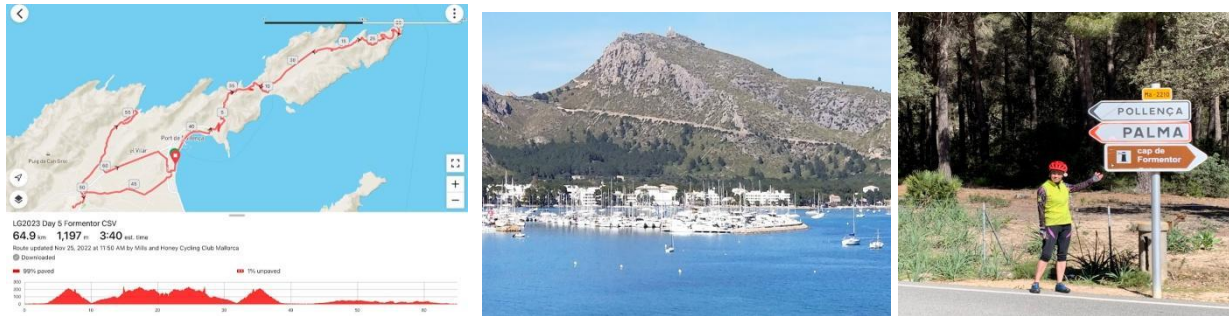


Although there were not any major climbs on either of the ride options, an Irish cyclist we encountered on the road described it as having a few “cheeky” hills.

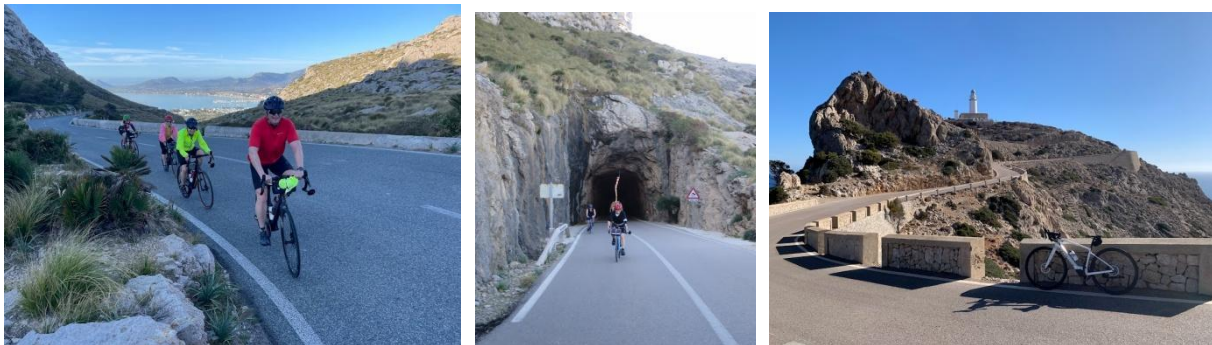
Most of us had stunning sea views from our Hotel Hoposa in Pollenca but one room had a view of the swimming pool with a toilet on the deck. (We know many Europeans like swimming in the nude, but a toilet?)



Day 5 “Cap de Formentor”



The Cap de Formentor literally means “end of formentor”, the name of the 20 km peninsula northeast of the Port de Pollença. (Some of us started calling it the “Cap de Tormentor”) On very good advice we started early to begin our ascent up the Cap Formentor Lighthouse route. We encountered very little vehicle and bike traffic on the climb up to the lighthouse and we were able to enjoy the spectacular views. Due to our early start we had to ignore a few closed barriers on the road. It was very windy on the last part of the climb up to the lighthouse and unfortunately due to construction we were unable to go all the way up to the lighthouse.



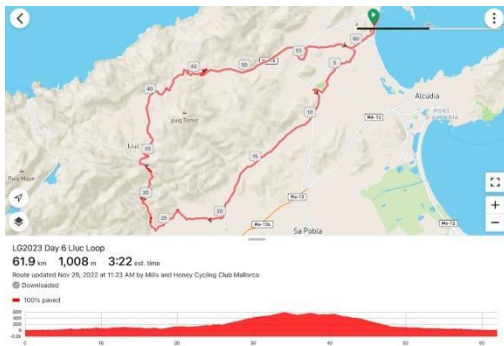
The final descent into Port Pollença can only be described as a major “gong show”. Many of us have tales of “close calls”, especially on the hairpin turns avoiding groups of cyclists, hikers, cars and buses (buses took up the entire road on the tight turns.) A few in our group noticed the pod of dolphins out in the water on the ride down but some of us (me included) were too occupied watching the road instead of looking at the scenery at that point.



Our short ride to the beach and a scenic fish shack in Cala Sant Vicenc for lunch was much less stressful with very little climbing and traffic. Paella, one of the best-known dishes in Spanish culture, was the popular shared lunch entree.

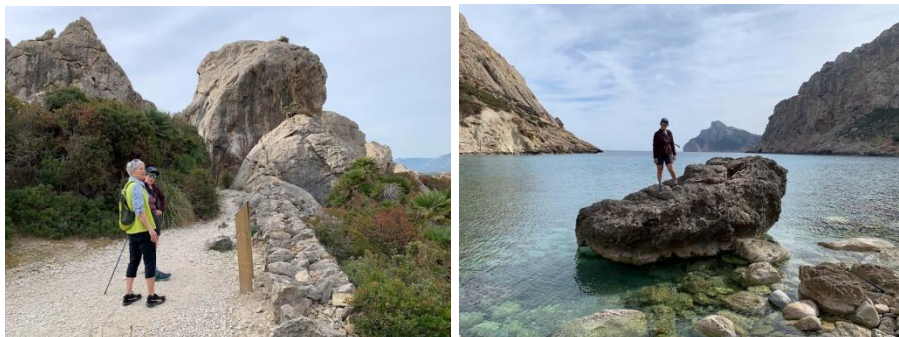


Day 6 “Same town, three ways”



On day 6 we had 3 options, Lluç monastery loop as planned, a shortened cycling route or a hike to Cala Boquer (8.4 km).

Three chose the hike to Cala Boquer but only one was brave enough to take a quick dip at the beach. The water temperature was reported to be a bit cold.



The climb through the Serra de Tramuntana and up the Coll de sa Batalla is a very popular route and has been reported to be one of the most uploaded rides on STRAVA. On the ascent crews were clearing trees and debris that had fallen during a record severe snow storm earlier this year. At the top of the climb was the Heavenly Cyclist Cafe, one of the most famous cafes in Mallorca, which was packed with cyclists of every nationality and had a very “party-like” atmosphere. The descent down the Coll de Femenia is one of the best on the island with fabulous scenery and very little vehicle traffic. One cyclist (me) was unable to change gears (chain kept jamming) after the final climb but managed to coast down the final descent in “granny gear” all the way into Port de Pollenca.



The group on the shorter cycling option somehow managed to get disoriented and visited the town of Campanet three times from three different directions. The story is that they stopped to ask directions from a local who didn’t know the street names but gave directions that must have somehow got “lost in translation”.

Day 7 “The Big Climb”



This was another moving day with three ride options to our destination of Port de Soller. The longest ride option included an out and back to Sa Calobra (85 km/climbing 2,203 m). Another option was to ride down to the ferry terminal in Sa Calobra and take a boat service to Port de Soller (50 km/climbing 1090 m) (no one ended up taking this option) or skip Sa Calobra and go straight to Port de Soller (61 km/1350m)



About half the group decided to take the challenge and cycle down to Sa Calobra which has been described as one of the toughest cycling climbs on the island. On our long descent the views were incredible but a few (me again) were too focused on the steep descent and hairpin turns to look much beyond the road. Our overheated brakes were squealing by the time we reached Sa Calobra. We took a quick break at the restaurant/cafe at the bottom, which was filled with other cyclists, before starting the climb back up which was described by group members as being “relentless”, “a killer” and “extraordinary”. The encouragement from other riders on the climb was helpful and seeing our reliable host, Helena, at the top with refreshments was like a lifeline. After topping up our water and eating a few treats we had a short descent before continuing another shorter climb which was not near as steep but for some reason seemed to be more difficult. (We must have been tired.) Following our major climb, one rider ran out of battery power on his e-bike and “Turbo Tim” became “Motorless Musclow” Although he lost his “features” he was still able to coast down the 14 km into the Soller Valley.

Several of us neglected to note our destination hotel and wandered up and down the street by the beach until we finally saw a familiar face who could tell us where to go.

Day 8 “Wine Tasting”



Although our cycling distance was not very long, we had several climbs up and over the Coll de Soller, and the Coll d’Honor into the Orient Valley. We tried to get away early to spend time shopping at the “Cycling Planet” cafe in Alaro but were delayed about 30 minutes at the base of our first climb by a major cycling event (we heard about 2,000 cyclists). It was breathtaking to watch the controlled descent of an enormous peloton of cyclists and it was amazing to see how they could ride so close together and not crash. However, there was an ambulance following at the end of the ride.



Some of us were really feeling our legs from the previous day's ride and the climbs seemed a bit tougher than anticipated. Unfortunately we had to cut our time short at the Cycling Cafe since we still had a short ride to Ribas Winery for a lunch and wine tasting.

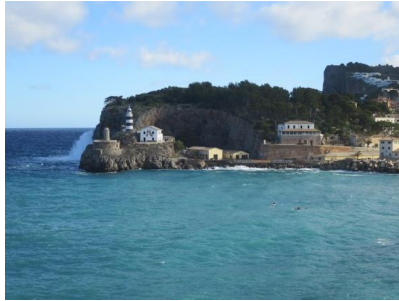
Ribas winery dates back to 1711 and has been in the same family for 10 generations. A number of the original buildings are still standing and in use. We enjoyed a light lunch and sampled 4 different wines (white, rose and 2 reds) on the outside patio by the original family home. Fortunately we had a bus ride to our hotel and didn't have to cycle back over the mountains.



Day 9 "Hiking Day"



There was no cycling route planned for this day and most of us participated on the hike from Port de Soller up to the lighthouse and on to Cal Deia for lunch at a fish restaurant in the Cove. The slower pace gave us an opportunity to take our time to admire the spectacular views along the coast, marvel at the terraced mountain slopes and get up close and personal with some of the farm animals. Along the way we stopped at a cafe (very civilized hiking) for coffee and their popular lemon pie. (The pie was similar to our lemon meringue pie but a bit tart and not as sweet.)



There was a lineup for the restaurant and we discovered we did not have a reservation. One of our ingenious group members managed to cut the line and secure 2 tables for the group. We enjoyed our shrimp and goat cheese salads while watching huge waves crash on the rocks below us.

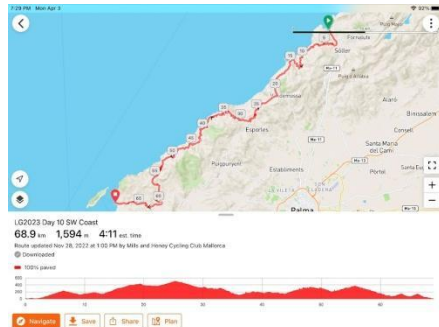


One couple decided to hike into Soller instead of hiking with the group and another decided to take the trolley which she described as "very cute".

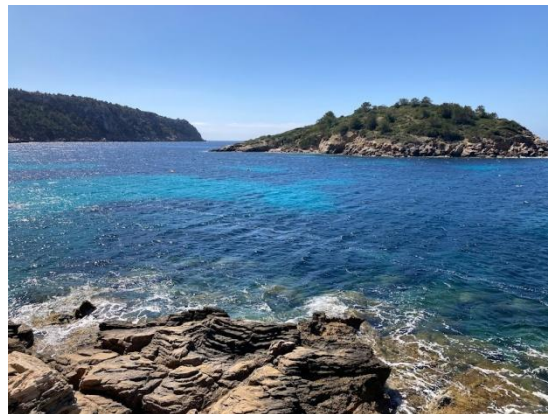
The meter long pizzas at a beachside pizza restaurant were popular with most of the group in the evening.



Day 10 "Grand Finale"



Most of us will agree that the best was saved for last. Our final ride took us along the south west coast with spectacular views. Compared with some of our earlier rides the climbs seemed a bit easier (maybe due to finally getting our cycling legs) and most of the longer, steeper climbs were during the first half of the route. A number of us stopped in the quaint village of Valldemossa, a showcase of early Spanish culture, and a quick visit to Royal Charterhouse. It was at the Charterhouse where Frederic Chopin spent over a year with his lover, George Sand (French novelist).



Not only did we have to watch out for vehicles and other cyclists along the way but a few of us had close encounters with goats on the road. One rider narrowly missed hitting a mom and baby goat that decided to step out in front of him on a downhill. We also witnessed a goat on its hind legs eating olives out of a tree. (Unfortunately, we were not quick enough to catch it on camera.) Although we could see

dark clouds and rain over the mountains, we were very fortunate to avoid any rain, not only for our final ride but for the entire trip.



Thanks to Mills & Honey for having someone guide us through a quick right turn, following a downhill, on one of the roundabouts into Andratx. A few of us still managed to temporarily lose our way as we neglected or chose not to believe the directions on our Garmin/GPS. Everyone managed to straggle into Sant Elm for our final end of ride, seaside lunch and birthday cake (60th birthday celebration).

After our van ride back to Palma we had one last evening together to say goodbye and for birthday drinks.



Summary and Goodbyes

Most took advantage of our last few hours in Palma for last minute shopping at the cycling stores and final goodbyes to the group.

Thank you to Mills & Honey for the incredible cycling experience and fantastic ride support. Also, a big thanks to our group leader and organizer, Linda Graupner.



“Safe Travels”