

Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 11

We got an early start in the fog, but still ran into a lot of traffic as we worked our way out of Granada. We all felt that with the tremendous influx of tourists, Granada should work on sprucing itself up a bit; it has a grimy look. In addition, there are a bunch of shady characters who hang around Nueva Plaza and detract from the enjoyment of the area. Granada has very interesting architecture and could be a real showcase. That said, we enjoyed our experience in Granada, but mainly from the Alhambra and the beautiful scenery around the city.

The four travelers have each had an important role to play in the trip. Cathy has been the great strategic planner who laid out the route and took care of all of the details of transportation and hotels. Her day-to-day role has been to be cheerful and cooperative in spite of her aching arms and shoulders. Tom has been our navigator. He has been using a variety of maps, sourcebooks, and the GPS to provide us with our minute-to-minute information about the streets and roads we should travel on. Katie has been our site tour guide. She has organized our itinerary within each town and has read explanatory material to us at each location that we've visited. Bill has done what he does best – take orders. He has been the driver, but only with complete guidance on which turns to take. A secondary role for Bill has been to chronicle the trip in these notes.

We drove toward Ronda on increasingly smaller roads and ended up on back country roads winding through the beautiful mountains containing the “Pueblos Blancos”. The fog had lifted and the sun shone brightly making the trip interesting visually. Tom took us on a quick tour of one tiny white village where we ascended a very steep cobblestone lane to the dead-end at the top to the amusement of the villagers who watched us drive up there. We saw another white village in the distance, nestled in the notch between two mountains. It has some castle ruins at its height and was a beautiful vista as we drove by. Finally, we reached Ronda. The way that we drove in was the least dramatic approach. With Tom's guidance, we wove our way through the town to our Parador Hotel. Long ago, Cathy had arranged for us to get special deals at this luxury hotel. Tom and Katie got the “Jovenes” discount, and Cathy and Bill got the “Mayores” discount. The hotel manager wasn't pleased to be giving us great rooms at a low price, but he had no choice. We quickly settled in and then went out to explore. We concentrated our activities around the gorge divided the old Moor quarter from the newer part of town. We descended the gorge in three places, climbing stairs, dirt paths, and cobblestone streets. We crossed the three bridges (Old, New, and Arab) and thoughtfully enjoyed this beautiful, clean town. Unlike Granada, Ronda has a wonderful image and puts its best face forward.

We ate dinner in the Parador dining room and enjoyed our most expensive meal on the trip (so far). We all managed to find some decent clothes in our luggage so we could dress up sufficiently for the meal.

Bill and Cathy