



ADVENTURE
EDELWEISS TOURS

ACT PYRENEES UNPAVED!

“ The Pyrenees have long been known to be a paradise for motorcyclists and more than just an alternative to the Alps. ”

www.edelweissbike.com

ACT PYRENEES UNPAVED!

RIDING DAY 1 : CASTELLDEFELS - ROSES

Standard Route (300 km / 186 miles)

To reach the starting point of the "ACT Pyrenees", the Cabo de Creus, we first have to travel along the coast towards France. But what is "to have to" supposed to mean here? Between Barcelona and the Cape, there are fantastic landscapes, crisscrossed by beautiful roads, often isolated and far away from the crowds.

In and around Barcelona we still use expressways, but soon the routes become more and more curvy and interesting. We reach the Montseny Nature Reserve, which seems to be light years away from the multi-million inhabitant city of Barcelona. Here, we make our first acquaintance with Catalan gravel.

South of Figueres, the last big town before the French border, we follow our shadows down to the sea. Cabo de Creus is the easternmost point of the Iberian Peninsula, a wild, often storm-tossed tip of land. One could camp there, but of course, we prefer a cozy hotel, even if it is not directly on the cape.

Highlights:

#1: Parc Natural del Montseny



The Montseny is a mountain range in Catalonia Northeast of Barcelona.

1978 it was declared as a nature park, covering an area of 301 km². The name Montseny has a Latin origin and means:

signal mountain, probably because of the significant shape, which can be seen from many places in Catalonia.

The highest peak is the Turó de l'Home with 1,706 meters in the Vallès Oriental and many more peaks reach more than 1,000 meters. Meanwhile, this mountain range is a popular spot for hikers and nature lovers.

Because of the natural conditions on one hand and the cultural influence, on the other hand, the UNESCO declared the region as a biosphere reserve.

#2: Cadaqués



Cadaqués, in the province of Girona, is situated on a bay in the middle of the Cap de Creus Peninsula and has a special place in art history. The local artist Mei Fren was the first modern artist to live in Cadaqués and gave the town many of his works. Salvador Dalí often visited Cadaqués in his childhood, and later kept a home in Port Lligat, a small village on a bay next to the town. A summer holiday here in

1916, spent with the family of Ramon Pichot, is seen as especially important to Dalí's artistic career. Other notable artists, including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp, Antoni Pitxot, Henri-François Rey, Melina Mercouri, and Maurice Boitel also spent time here.

RIDING DAY 2 : ROSES - SETCASES

Standard Route (215 km / 134 miles)

Our first day on the ACT takes us west and right into the mountains. Traffic becomes more sparse as we put more distance between us and the coast and after a while, we leave the asphalt and get dusty. An exciting side trip from the small town of Maçanet de Cabrenys challenges us to ride up to El Moixer and back down. Although, this is only possible if we have enough time and the weather is nice or at least dry. Of course, if you prefer to sit back and relax, you can stay in the town and enjoy a Cafe con Leche or two.

A little later, we cross the border to France, only to return to Spain across Col d'Arès on a fast, paved road. From the top, the views are, once again, stunning. The first town on the Spanish side is Molló but before we reach it, we turn right and tackle our last gravel for the day, 20 km of pure riding bliss. It ends in Setcases, a quiet, pleasant little town where we find our hotel for the night.

Highlights:

#1: Cabo de Creus (Cap de Creus)



The Cap Creus is the last outlet of the Pyrenees and at the same time the most easterly point of the Iberian Peninsula on the map. That is one of the reasons why the Cap with its lighthouse is a particularly important point in the nautical charts.

This nature reserve is the only one in Spain, which covers sea and land at the same time; it contains the largest uninhabited area in the Spanish Mediterranean.

The rocky coast which is barren and mainly consists of slate is continually broken up by small bays. The Fauna and Flora of the area are quite unique and comprise a variety of very rare species of seabirds in danger of extinction. Winter is domineered by very strong northerly winds which continually hinder fishing and maritime traffic. Therefore the area around the Cap registers a very small environmental pollution and is renowned as an underwater paradise for divers. (www.cbrava.com)

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#2: Col d'Ares (1,513 m)



Col d'Ares, or Coll d'Ares in Catalan, straddles the border between Spain and France and reaches 1,513 m in elevation.

In 1691, during the Nine Years' War, the Spanish passed over the Col d'Ares and tried to occupy Prats-de-Mollo, the first town on the French side, but without success. Today it is an excellent motorcycle road with a great view of the Mediterranean from the top.

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RIDING DAY 3 : SETCASES - ANDORRA LA VELLA

Standard Route (250 km / 155 miles)

A long and challenging but also very beautiful ride lies ahead of us today. Narrow, twisty mountain roads keep us busy from the start but we won't be too far away from civilization. Ribes de Freser, Puigcerdà, and of course La Seu d'Urgell are three relatively large towns and the latter is also a very pretty one, with a charming old town and an impressive cathedral. A great place to take a break before the grand finale, the old smuggler's path across the border to Andorra, across a nameless pass of more than 2,000 meters. This trail is beautiful in good conditions but in the wet, you may want to think about taking the main road. It will get you from Seu to Andorra in 35 minutes while the old trail will take you 2 to 3 hours.

Highlights:

#1: La Seu d'Urgell



The beginnings of the town just 10 km south of Andorra are shrouded in the mist of history. It is known that the Romans were there and, after them, the Moors. Seu's history really started in the 9th century, when the Franks evicted the Muslims from this area and turned the town into a bishopric and the regional capital.

The Romanesque Cathedral de Santa Maria was built in the 12th century and is one of the oldest ones in Catalonia. It is well worth a visit, just like all the old town with its narrow alleyways and arcades. There are many good restaurants to choose from if you are hungry.

#2: Andorra la Vella



Covering only 170 square miles, Andorra is one of the smallest countries in Europe. From 1279 onwards, it was reigned by two rulers, the Spanish Bishop of Seu d'Urgell and the French Duke of Foix - later the French President. Even though Andorra became independent in 1993, both are formally still principals of this state. Being a tax free area, Andorra today looks like an oversized shopping mall.

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RIDING DAY 4 : ANDORRA LA VELLA - EL PONT DE SUERT

Standard Route (230 km / 143 miles)

If there was an editor's choice among the riding days on this tour, this one would be it. It features very interesting off-road sections through outstanding scenery, with the best part probably being the descent from Port du Cabús down to the village of Tor and continuing towards Llavorsí. The pass named Port de Cabús, by the way, is the highest point we reach on this tour.

We approach the highest part of the Pyrenees and later on, when we head south in order to find our hotel in El Pont de Suert, we pass by this range's tallest mountain, Pico Aneto, at 3,404 meters (11,168 feet). What a spectacular, stunning day!

Highlights:

#1: Port de Cabús (2.302 m)



At 2,302 m above sea level, Port de Cabús is one of the highest passes in the Pyrenees. It connects Andorra to Spain, officially an external border of the EU, but there is no border checkpoint on the pass. While the Andorran side is paved, the Spanish side is a 6 km-long dirt track that offers breathtaking sights. In wet conditions, the narrow road is a real challenge. Also for the mind as it features no guard rails...

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RIDING DAY 5 : EL PONT DE SUERT - PANTICOSA

Standard Route (195 km / 121 miles)

Welcome to another long and rewarding riding day in the Pyrenees. The ride is a little more relaxed today, but don't worry, it's far from being boring. We're constantly changing from tarmac to gravel roads and back and while we are never too far away from civilization, we feel like being the only riders in the whole wide world. We get close to two national parks, both home to abundant wildlife including wolves, bears, and eagles.

Our destination is Panticosa, a picturesque mountain village at the northern end of a man-made lake.

Highlights:

#1: Benasque National Park



Benasque National Park is located in the heart of the Pyrenees and is one of the larger parks with some of the highest peaks. But it is less developed than others - there is only one little ski resort and no connection to neighboring France. On the other hand, there is plenty of unspoiled nature for hiking and hardly any traffic.

#2: Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park



To the north of Huesca, in the Aragonese Pyrenees, aficionados of high mountains will enjoy a unique national park in Spain: Ordesa and Monte Perdido. Consisting of four valleys (Añisclo, Escueta, Ordesa and Picuaín) and one peak, Monte Perdido, it unfolds like a scene from a film, where different ecosystems flourish together. A natural paradise where you can explore meadows, enormous forests, incredible gorges, glaciers, experience perpetual snow, and admire the unique karstic landscape, formed over thousands of years.(www.spain.info)

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RIDING DAY 6 : PANTICOSA - URDAZUBI/URDAX

Standard Route (285 km / 177 miles)

Our penultimate riding day brings us close to the coast of the Gulf of Biscay which is part of the Atlantic Ocean, of course. We reach the Basque-speaking region today and you will immediately notice the funny-looking words and names on the road signs. Of which there are more than what we saw during the last two or three days as the land is more populated, there are more villages and fences and more "regular" roads. But that doesn't diminish our riding fun at all!

For one last time, we dip into France and visit the town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, a popular starting point for the famous pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. It's great to sit back and watch the pilgrims walk off on their 850 km-quest.

And after one last mountain pass, we reach our hotel in Urdazubi, or Urdax in Basque, a small town just south of the border.

Highlights:

#1: Jaca



Jaca, a ford on the Aragón River at the crossing of two great early medieval routes, was the fortified city out of which the County and Kingdom of Aragon developed: Jaca was the capital of Aragon until 1097 and also the capital of Jacetania. The main attractions in Jaca are the medieval walls and towers surrounding an 11th century Romanesque cathedral and the citadel, a fortification dating to the late

16th century.

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#2: Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port



For many centuries the small town of St-Jean Pied de Port (meaning “St-Jean at the Foot of the Pass”) was the last stop in France for pilgrims heading south over the Spanish border and on to Santiago de Compostela. Today it is the starting point for hikers attempting the most popular part of St. James’s Way, the Camino Frances. You will see many of them walking down rue de la Citadelle, the cobbled main

street. From here the 850 km walk to Santiago takes about 6 to 8 weeks to complete; more than 50,000 pilgrims embark on this journey every year.

The walled town itself is beautifully preserved, complete with ramparts and crowned by a sturdy citadel. The unique atmosphere makes it a great place for a little break.

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RIDING DAY 7 : URDAZUBI/URDAX - BILBAO

Standard Route (244 km / 152 miles)

On the last day of the tour, we finally reach the beautiful Costa Verde ("green coast") and follow it westward. To get in the mood, we can climb up to a "Mirador", a lookout, where the ACT Pyrenees officially end. Our tour doesn't end here, though, we continue, of course. Later, between Ondarroa and Lekeitio, the road is especially spectacular, with numerous curves and many great views.

At the mouth of the river Oka we have to turn inland and reach Gernika, better known as Guernica, where we can admire a reproduction of one of the most famous paintings in the world. However, we must not forget the terrible occasion that led Pablo Picasso to create this painting.

Bilbao, the capital of the Basques, used to be a dreary, gray industrial city. The Guggenheim Museum, built in 1997, has fundamentally changed this. The architecture of the building is unique and even those who are not into modern art should not miss this sight. So we recommend an early arrival in Bilbao or - even better - an extra day there.

Highlights:

#1: Guernica mosaic wall



In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, Franco's Nationalist forces were trying to push past Gernika, a small town in the Basque Country, and the spiritual capital of the Basque people. Franco asked his allies in Nazi Germany and Italy for help, and on April 26 it arrived. The Nazis had sent the Condor Legion, the Italians the Legionary Air Force, 24 airplanes altogether, and they dropped app. 40 tons of bombs on the town, destroying it completely and killing as

many as 1600 – mostly civilian – people.

Pablo Picasso created his world-famous painting, "Guernica", in response to this attack in order to "express my abhorrence of the military caste which has sunk Spain in an ocean of pain and death" (Picasso). It is on display in Madrid, but here in Gernika, you can see a life-size wall mosaic copy. Look at it. This is the most moving and powerful anti-war painting ever made.


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#2: Bilbao Guggenheim Museum



Greater Bilbao, home to more than a million people, is the economic and social centre of the Bay of Biscay and the Basque Autonomous Region. Numerous architectural and infrastructural projects attracted the world's attention in recent years, but no project generated as much interest as the Guggenheim Museum, built between 1993 and 1997.

There is a lot of important pieces of modern art inside, but the main attraction is the building itself. It was designed by Frank O. Gehry and greatly enhanced Bilbao's reputation and degree of fame, hereby coining the phrase "Bilbao-Effect". Other highlights of the city include the Puente Colgante ("hanging bridge") and the stations of the subway system, all designed by Sir Norman Foster. Yes, this is a very unconventional city!



We wish you a wonderful tour.

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