

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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No serving utensils?? - May 29, 2025

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SUMMARY

The best laid plans... Our plan was to head up into the Picos de Europa National Park for a hike, lunch at a cidreria and a ride up a funicular. While the drive and the Park were beautiful, many, many people had a similar plan and we had to park about 1.8 kilometers from the base of the funicular (8 minutes through a tunnel) from Poncebos to Bulnes. We had to cancel our lunch reservation to make the timing work but had a surprisingly good lunch in the tiny, quaint mountain village at the top of the funicular. If it's possible, the weather forecasters are worse here than in the States! The forecast was for it to be quite chilly but

instead it was temps in the upper 80s, low 90s and we roasted. Looked and looked for the trailhead for the Ruta de Cares, one of the most popular and, according to what you read, beautiful hikes in Spain. In pictures you follow a path along the Cares River in a deep, narrow, shady canyon. We finally gave up and headed back to our cars only to find that we'd actually parked at the trail head. But rather than going down into the canyon it went up, way above the canyon. Did I mention how hot it was? We decided to forego the hike and drove to Cangas de Onis to see their famous 15th century bridge. Had a good fish dinner at a restaurant Mike and Liz liked enough to go back to for the second night in a row. - Karen

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DETAIL

Two of our travel companions this trip, Ron and Nancy were able to get into our same hotel and they have done a breakfast here. It sounds good (and healthy) so we're trying it today. They have limited tables or cooking capacity (for omelettes, etc.) so we're trying have to 'reserve' a table. Last night we told the front desk we wanted breakfast and when. They do a quick manual tally and say no. Not 8:30. 8:00? OK...

Truth be told breakfast is very good and (can be) healthy. At our assigned table for four we order coffee, then I head to the buffet. I spy a small slice of apple tart that looks tasty, but no serving utensil.

I use my fingers (the pieces are far enough apart) and a kindly but concerned grandfatherly figure, also getting his breakfast, clues me into the system. None of the food has any serving utensils! As a part of everyone's place setting is your own set of bamboo tongs! How smart! In this way you're not grabbing the same tongs 30 people also touched earlier this morning.

The buffet included lots of different cheeses, breads, meats, desserts, plus big bowls of freshly cut fruit. I pile the fruit high on my plate. Breakfast is good, but for 18€ pp/day. Hm.

Having eaten we grab our stuff, pile into the cars, and head out. The days plan is to finally get up into the higher Pyrenees! Maybe we'll see snow? A hike or two are planned but our elevation change should be aided by a funicular, yay!

As we drive we notice it's hazy — maybe morning fog? — but we are also struck by the very tall, very steep mountains that are soon all around us. Given the terrain the roads are one lane (in each direction) and very windy. We get behind a truck that looks like it contains liquified cow poop, with an apparatus for spraying same onto the crop fields. Intrigued (and since Ron's driving) I roll down the window to get a better picture. Instantly all in the car are wishing I hadn't done that. Oooh what a stench.

We're going further and further up and I realize I hadn't brought my fleece. I mention it and the consensus is I'm silly and am going to freeze my butt off.
[shrug]

We pass numerous one story square buildings, sitting on square flat rocks which in turn are sitting on tall poles. There are stairs leading up to the door, but not quite all the way. Later we learn these are hórrios, traditional ways of storing grain and other stuff rodents would love to eat.

Close to our destination the road narrows, becomes unpaved and only one car wide. Cars and small campers are parked one after the other as far as we can see. Obviously this is the destination for many others as well.

Out of the car we walk back towards where signs pointed to the funicular. We're confused, we see nothing. Our clues tell us it's a 25 or 45 minute walk, or? Mike walks 10 yards and shouts "Here it is!" The funicular runs inside a tunnel. Walking into the tunnel a non-stop blast of very cool air greets us. Tickets bought we board and soon we're at the top, still in the tunnel. We're met by a blast of hot, dry air, evidently being sucked into the tunnel to replace the (now) chilled air flowing out at the base.

We walk around, marveling at the high, rocky peaks all around us. Day hikers pass us, already knowing on which trail they'll be hiking. We find a promising restaurant beside a clear mountain stream and install ourselves in the shade of the big umbrella. So much for cold or even cool. The map says we're in the village of Bulnes, but if it has more than 10 smallish "buildings" we'd be surprised. We order for ourselves and a few things for the table and they're all scrumptious.

Done eating we head back down the funicular to a couple of promising hikes. The first one is closed due to some dangerous rock slides. The second one seemed to be "not closed" but went up seemingly at 45° and the surrounding air temperature is around 95°. Doing the math we pile back into the car and turn on the A/C.

In the town of Las Arenas just down the mountain the promising cheese place (like the hiking trails) is closed. It may open in 20 minutes but from our experience here, that's a big 'if'. We drive on through Poo (another town) and on to Congas de Onís where we stop for gas. There's an employee who pumps the gas which is great given that we're in a diesel car (pew!).

In town we hike (trying to stay in the shade) to its famous Roman bridge, er, Roman-style bridge. Apparently the design is Romanesque but it's much newer. If it brings the tourists, who cares, eh?

In town we also engage in shopping for dried beans for the oh-so-delicious-and-tender Asturian Fabada bean dish (we don't buy) and gelato (we do).

As we continue our drive back to Gijón, on the Atlantic, the outside temperature drops from 95° down to 75° (yay!) and in our room the A/C decided to be on (also yay!)

The six of us walk to dinner at a sidreria (one of very many in town) where Mike and Liz had a great meal last night. The open ridiculously early (7:30) and we have a reservation right around then. We enjoy seafood, salad, cider (poured from way above the glass), wine, and a delicious whiskey cake for dessert. Our long walk home, though refreshing, probably only burned off a few of the many calories from dinner.

The four of us staying in the Parador just head to bed. Mike and Liz, after discovering a massive ant infestation in their room earlier, were heading 'home' to change rooms. Hopefully to one with fewer ants!

Photos



Cool dining room at our Parador for breakfast (and dinner, though we didn't eat any dinners there)



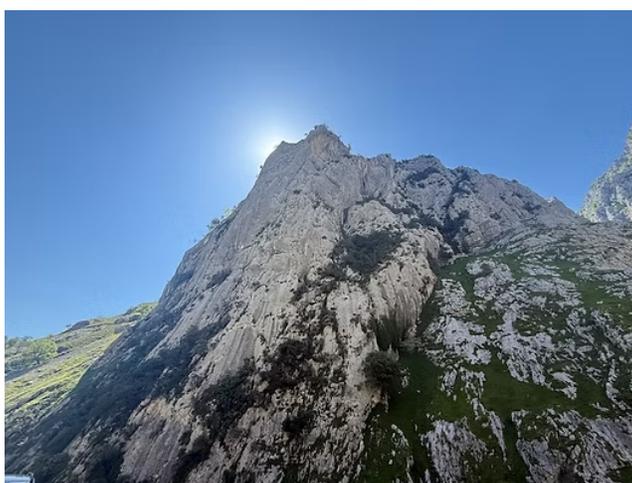
Off into the mountains. Drove for a bit behind a cow poop sprayer truck. Not spraying at the time but oh so odiferous.



The views of the tall mountains were stunning.



We parked (with tons of other cars) and hiked down towards the funicular.



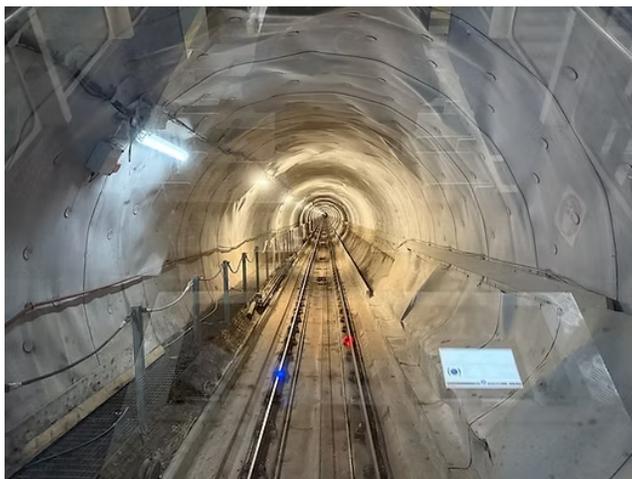
The pictures do not do justice to how vertical these mountains are.



And the mountain streams are full and crystal clear. (and cold, I bet.)



Entering or leaving the tunnel the temperature differential was amazing. So cold at the bottom, very hot at the top.



The tunnel was cool.



Found a good spot for lunch, by another babbling, clear mountain stream.



Some of our amazing lunch. Too much food here. Stop!



Full.



Local pot heads.



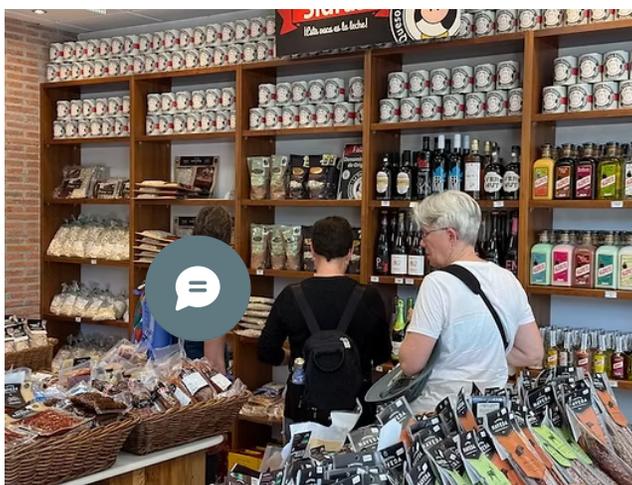
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Back to the funicular and down.



On to a Roman (design) bridge.



And shopping for beans.



And finally more food. Dinner. Groan. But good.

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