

Dalmatia: 23 May-11 June

Early Blog Postings

Monday, May 10, 2010

Starting a New Adventure

Canberra, 10 May 2010

It hardly seems a year ago – in fact, it's longer – that a group of us, entranced by the experience of [Morocco](#), signed up there and then, on the sprawling expanse of *Place Jemaa El Fna* in Marrakech to the just announced [Dalmatia](#) trip in 2010.

It was pretty much the same group that a year previously, overwhelmed by [Turkey](#) and hypnotised by Aya Sophia and the Blue Mosque, had signed up there and then for [Morocco](#) in 2009.

The word contagion comes to mind. But I began to wonder when I discovered my Concise Oxford Dictionary, in each successive meaning of the word, talks about 'disease', 'harmful influence' and 'moral corruption'. I decided contagion fits.

Call it what you will, that [Meanders Abroad](#) time has come around again. And it's accompanied by fodder for another page or two of [Non-Motorcycle Meanders](#).

The end of this week – 15 May 2010 – is the start of a new set of adventures.



First stop will be Rome for four days. I'll resist signing up for the *Da Vinci Code* tour or being waylaid by an enterprising taxi driver wanting to take me around the *Angels and Demons* sites. I'll make my own way around the pinnacles of Rome, ancient, medieval and modern; civil and ecclesiastical.

Then a train to Venice for a three day walk and float around the alleys and canals of this onetime city state. Being at the heart of the Venetian Republic (or, as it was called, the [Most Serene Republic of Venice](#)) becomes a fitting prelude to exploring much of its territory stretching along the Dalmatian coast. But that all came to an end in 1797.

Finally, a bus ride from Venice to Ljubljana, capital of Slovenia, unites our committed group from [Morocco](#) – or was it [Turkey](#)? In fact, I think it was [Rajasthan](#)!

The next three weeks will be spent in and around the cities, mountains, hinterland and coasts of a large part of [The Balkans](#). This is the [Dalmatia Tour](#).

I'll finish the trip by dropping into [Kirtling](#) in Cambridgeshire, UK. Hopefully, there will be a stable government in place by then. Kirtling was the village that my great grandfather, [William Crick](#), hailed from; and his [father and grandfather before](#) him. Census data from the 1800s pinpoints where they lived.

I intend to keep up a blog on this page as the trip unfolds. It might be brief and intermittent. I hope you keep checking and travel with me.

- Robert Crick. 1:34 PM

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Beware the Bora

Canberra, 12 May 2010

I was recently warned of the Bora by one of our cycle group. David is one of those inveterate long-distance cyclists. Last Northern Hemisphere summer he conquered the Passo di Stelvio on his cycle – ahead of us on motorbikes. He's also ridden the Dalmatian coast, where he encountered first-hand the force and dread of the Bora. So much so that he had to shelter or walk, pushing his bike against its nor'easterly might.



Katabatic occurs frequently in references to the Bora. I'd thought *katabatic* was reserved for the howling fury that sweeps down the Antarctic mountains across the snow plains of the icy continent. But, no. It gets used also to describe the Bora.

Definitions of the Bora alternately describe it a fierce, ferocious, katabatic, mongrel wind that charges with ever-changing speed and power across the Croatian mountains onto the Dalmatian coast and Adriatic. Okay, I didn't actually come across 'mongrel' but if an Aussie site had defined the Bora, I surely would have.

According to Wikipedia:

The area where some of the strongest Bora winds occur is the Velebit mountain range in Croatia. This seaside mountain chain, spanning 145 kilometres, represents a huge weather and climatic divide between the sharp continental climate of the interior, characterized by significant day/night temperature differences throughout the year, and the Adriatic coast, with a Mediterranean climate. Bora occurs because these two divided masses tend to equalize.

Sailing can be extremely dangerous for an inexperienced navigator in the Velebit channel because the wind can start suddenly on a clear and calm day and result in major problems, frequently also affecting road traffic. Near the towns of Senj, Stara Novalja, Karlobag and the southern portal of the Sv. Rok Tunnel in Croatia, it can reach speeds of up to 220 kilometres per hour. On 15 March 2006 the speed of a gust on the Pag Bridge was measured at 235 kilometres per hour."

That's where we'll be!

After we're lulled into a peaceful malaise of mountains, caves and grand cities, we begin the enticing run up the Dalmatian coast...as if to meet head-on the much anticipated Bora.



Just to ensure we have full potential exposure to its mystery and mischief, we venture off-shore across the **Pag Bridge** and along Pag Island. Then by ferry across the **Velebit channel** to the coastal road running along the bottom of the **Velebit mountain range**.

The deep caverns of the Skocjan Caves might be a welcome retreat for that night.

- Robert Crick. 12:43 PM

Monday, May 24, 2010

Ljubljana at Last

Ljubljana (Slovenia), 23 May 2010

Today I crossed from Italy into its Eastern neighbour of Slovenia. Not that you would have easily noticed. The only indicator was the scattered clump of old

border buildings of a look that was reminiscent of the former Soviet-style world. But there was no stopping. Just straight through on the motorway. The terrain didn't change. The towns from a distance looked the same. The only obvious difference were the snow capped mountains that came into view as we pushed further into Slovenia.

Slovenia had never been a comfortable fit in the old Yugoslavia, although you might say that about most of its former component parts. Its culture and history had been closer to Austria, so it would feel that it had regained its heritage by being part of the European Union rather than the old Soviet bloc. Lots to discover about it in coming days.

Getting here had its moments. First, I encountered a boat stoppage in Venice for a period. However, I had allowed myself ample time so it wasn't a problem. It was fortunate that I chose to wait the 35 minutes in the queue until the first boat as the queue kept growing over the 35 minutes and only a few of us at the top of the queue managed to get on. That got me to the bus station on the tip of the island at the



causeway. Then a bus into Venice's other station, Mestre (on the mainland) from where I would catch my Ljubljana 'bus' (more a people mover). I hadn't counted on the Tour of Italy cycling through town, right past the railway station. There was no vehicular access to anywhere close to the station so I got dropped out in the Mestre suburbs. I had no idea where I was. No signs. No buses. No taxis. And road blocks. Time seemed to race by as I tried to investigate options, such as a local train, but only expresses seem to be going through the tiny station I found. With about ten minutes to departure time, I resorted to flagging down cars. Nobody was stopping. I had one prospect as a captive at the closed railway crossing but he wasn't obliging. Then a 4x4 stopped. Once he discovered I was Australian, he couldn't be more helpful. He tried a few routes towards Mestre to see if there was a way around the road blocks. Finally, having got as close as he could, he talked his way through a police block with much gesturing and obviously emotional references to my sorry plight. It worked. He delivered me right to the station at 11.30 – right on departure time. Not that anything was leaving for a while. I had to walk only twenty metres to spot the greatly relieving scene of the small people mover with the insignia DRD on the side, the tell-tale sign that this was my 'bus'. Then, almost as a consolation for my stress, the peloton came seeping down the street and around the corner where I was admiring the DRD bus. Its passing took only a fraction of the time it took for the following entourage to pass by. At least, I can add seeing the Tour of Italy to my souvenirs.

Thanks to my Italian 4x4 enthusiast, whose name I didn't even get. There would have been no way of making the bus without his help. I hope you might be reading this. If so, make sure you send me an email.



I arrived in Ljubljana mid afternoon and took a taxi to the hotel. Some of the group were already there. Others arrived later.

- Robert Crick. 3:49 PM