

Spanish Diary - November 2010

Mr A Ryan

The Comenius trip to Andalucia, Spain, was a wonderful opportunity for cross-cultural pollination for both teachers and students alike. And in that spirit I had every intention of throwing myself into it wholeheartedly, meeting lots of new people and broadening my horizons.

The 6 travellers, myself, Miss Graham, Sarah, Emma, Sam and Sam met at the Terminal 2 of Manchester Airport, with the exception of Sam and Sam, who had decided to meet at Terminal 1. A brief panic was negated when I found them and all was well to board the plane.

The most notable thing about the arrival in Spain was that we had taken the Manchester weather with us. The rain was brutal and had left all of our suitcases sodden, not to mention the 3 hour drive from Malaga to Palma del Rio treacherous. However, the drive was also notable for our driver being devastated about the loss of Fernando Alonso, which had cost him the World Championship. Safe to say, that I revelled in the opportunity to get in a few cheap shots, despite the limitations of my pidgin Spanish.

In Palma del Rio, the children were greeted by their families at the school, while we teachers were whisked off to meet our fellow teachers from Greece, Norway and the host countries and to enjoy an introductory meal and cerveza.

The first day was spent at our host school, where we were given a guided tour and a sample of some of the lessons from 4 years to 18 years. Lunch was spent at the local nature reserve, where everyone was treated to a festival of meat, whilst I was hastily knocked up a paella dish. The food was superb, but a mere taste of things to come as 3-course meals became the normality in a twice-daily ritual. The food was a credit to our hosts and the traditions of Spain, but it is hard to understand how they have managed to remain so healthy, with such delicacies on offer.

We had taken with us a sample of surveys, outlining the energy usage and recycling habits of Failsworth pupils. The second morning was spent a brief tour of some of the local religious buildings, while the afternoon was spent collating data from our surveys and making a presentation about the findings. I was "nominated" to make the presentation by Miss Graham and it worked out pretty well, but other presentations were also well put together. I particularly enjoyed the sections put together by the pupils of other countries, which spoke about their schools and homelands. The common theme that emerged was that all schools have begun to take environmental action, but a lot more needs to be done while getting the community involved is also essential.

A sample of culture was the order of Wednesday, with an early start and a long drive to the beautiful city of Cordoba. We were given a guided tour of the stunning mesquite, built across two time periods alongside several of Cordoba's other main attractions. Given that we were in Spain, much time was once again afforded to collectively enjoy some of the region's finest cuisine.

Sevilla was next on the agenda, which for me was the highlight of the trip. A city which can seamlessly amalgamate the old and the new is something to behold indeed. And so it was that we were given guided tours of a Moorish palace by the name of Alcazar and la Catedral de Santa Maria, the latter being home to spectacular views across the urban scenery.

The late afternoon was given over to the thankless task of organising the next visit to Poland

in 2011. The responsibility to chair the meeting was handed to me after previous meetings had exceeded their time-limits. Sadly, this was a result of our southern European neighbours conforming to their stereotypes, whilst northern European terseness caused a great deal of consternation. The meeting adjourned and we could begin to enjoy each other's company once again, in the only manner imaginable. With a drink in one hand, of course!

The evening's entertainment was stunning. Our host school laid on a performance by pupils, whilst host families had made a buffet for everyone to enjoy, while pupils said farewell to their families. The evening continued for teachers, with delectations, such as tapas, flamenco dancing and rioja.

It is hard to say who gained the most from our visit, teachers or pupils. For pupils, it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to live with a family from another country, whilst being welcomed into their culture and their way of life. Whilst for teachers, it was an opportunity to share good practice, bemoan bureaucracy, eat wonderful food, take part in local traditions and sample life in another country. It is a moot point as the experience was beneficial to everyone involved.