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Edith Obenchain, el jueves, 16 de junio de 2011

Ok, I am NOT in Spain, I am kicking myself for not writing a long note about this trip when I was there because I have forgotten almost everything I learned about the area we went to!!! In January, while in Spain, we went on a trip to Almeria where we spent the day taking a guided tour of the area -- and I mean the day! We left the house at 7:30 to meet our guide at 10 a.m. and he dropped us off at our car at 6 p.m.!!! plus a 2+ hour drive to get there each way! It was an AMAZING DAY! One of the best days and best tours we had our whole time there. He spent the day driving us ALL OVER the area told us about the history, customs, landscape--everything. He was so knowledgeable. We covered miles and miles. We went through Cabo de Gata Natural park and saw deserts, beaches, wetlands, foothills, mountains, gold mines, castles and so much more! He had a special permit to take us places we never could have gone on our own, and places we could never have gone with our a 4 wheel vehicle and nerves of steel!!!!

Cabo de Gata Natural Park is the largest coastal protected area in Andalucia and has limited access and is quite isolated (at least when we were there). The beaches here are where scenes from Raiders of the Lost Ark (where Sean Connery scares the birds into the plane) and Lawrence of Arabia were filmed. The beach area has a salt water lagoon which is highly protected because of the many birds that nest and breed there. We saw a beautiful rare Wood Duck -- which I haven't forgotten even now-- it was so beautiful! The area is a magnet for bird watchers. The Romans and Arabs mined the mountains for gold and made the area a target for pirates. There are watch towers dotting the coast.

We started our trip through the desert which was not what I expected--much more plants than one would think, not the mountains of sand dunes you see in the movies. We got to go off road and had a permit for special access through our guide so our trip was something the average person does not see. He had telescopic lenses so we could see the distant birds up close. A cool experience for the kids!

Next we headed along the coast to a small mostly abandoned town by the salt pans where they extract salt. Salt has been extracted from here since Phoenician times. There is a magnificent abandoned church which gives an idea to the importance of the area at one time. It is interesting traveling through this area of Spain. The natural park is not that old so there were houses and towns here first. In some areas, there is no more building allowed and the people that own homes may pass them on to family members but may not sell them.

After following the coast as far as the road would go, we doubled back to the small town for a quick lunch. Then we headed up into the foothills, a harsh landscape where folks have been eeking out an existence for centuries. In 1997 only about 3500 people lived within the boundaries of this area which tells you about the harsh conditions. (today an average of 500,000 tourists visit every year!). The area requires hard work in that the landscape is not exactly hospitable, though the day we were there it seemed lovely! Also nestled in the here is

where a bunch of the old westerns starring Clint Eastwood were filmed! We were heading to the area of Rodalquilar, a former gold mining center which is now an abandon ghost town. The town has been stripped clean and all that is left is the skeletons of the buildings. But in the background is the headquarters for the park which has spawned a small town. The mountains around are littered with abandon gold mines making one wonder what they could find, but most of the mines entrances have been blasted closed, but there are still open ones which can be quite dangerous. We stopped to examine a couple of the old mines and eli was so upset in that he expected to find chunks of gold just laying around for the picking! The mines have been operated since ancient times and were finally closed down in the 1960s. The whole area here sits in the center of an ancient volcano and when standing high up you can see it perfectly!

As we headed down into the valley toward the sea, we came to an ancient fort. The walls had to be like 5 feet thick or more. It was small, but was most likely used in ancient times because the foot hills around it were mined for gold even back then.

We next headed toward the coast past ancient castles and towers to the most beautiful little cove and beach where we climb on the rocks which lead to a castles that is now privately own and lived in! Someone rehabbed it and I was dying to see the inside! The rock cliffs were like sandstone in a way and carved out into smooth shapes by the elements over time. This was truly one of the most beautiful places we had been in Spain. We climbed on the cliffs and marveled at the view. There were two German shepherds running around the top of the castle walls and it was such a strange sight to see!

Now it was time to start heading back. The sun was getting low and a few quick stops to watch as the sun started setting before our journey was done. Our tour lasted 8 hours and I still had a 2 + hour drive home on windy dark cliff roads. Our guide was AMAZING! HE took us so many different places and told us some many interesting facts and tales. I wish I had time to go back and take a mountain tour with him. Jax said it was the best day he'd had in Spain. The funny thing is, is that no one in all the time I was in Spain ever mentioned that we should go to Almeria and it turns out it was one of the most interesting areas there! Of course it made all the difference to have a great guide! Thanks Jesus for the great day!

Edith