

Andalucian Cycling Experience

Passionate about pedalling, Bonkers about bikes, Mad about mountains

Cortes Naturaleza Xtreme 2011

Saturday 21st April was an early start for me as I set off to Cortes to take part in the Cortes Naturaleza Xtreme 2011 mountain bike sportive, 60km off road with 1950m of climbing.

The start was delayed for approximately 30 minutes as the 500 or so mountain bikers squeezed onto the local football pitch for the start of the event. As expected the start of the race was a bit of a bottle neck as 500 mtb'ers all tried to set off at the same time. A few kilometres on road drew the field out a little as we made our way into the Alconorcales Natural Park.

We all filed down the first vehicle width descent before turning off straight into a rather tight technical climb. Needless to say with 500 riders, the ride didn't really start to flow until well after the first 15km. Every climb was a bottle neck as people dismounted to walk and stayed in the middle of the track with their bikes or the riders up front were riding slower than those behind and passing was particularly difficult.

One rider fell off immediately in front of me and with a quick change of direction, an adjustment on the pedal stroke and I managed to keep on climbing whilst missing his head with my left foot/pedal/crank. A quick exchange of apologies and some rather rude Spanish swearing (aimed at himself by himself) and he was back on his feet and following me up the hill.

Now the climbing itself was very tricky in places, purely due to the volume of riders, the descents were equally as tricky with slower, less technically gifted riders two abreast on the track, some faster riders on the limits locking their brakes up coming down behind, you had to be well aware of everything around you whilst picking your own line and trying to pass others.

On one steep climb I decided to make my first pit stop of the day and settling down on a rock in the shade I got my sandwiches out and had a well earned scoff, much to the bemusement of the Spanish riders. Some might say I wasn't taking the race too seriously.....and they would be right!!

20k in and there was a water/feeding station which only caused a lot of riders to re group. Fresh from my picnic I rode straight on through which turned out to be a great decision as the trail emptied out and finally I was able to put in a decent stint at speed and really started to cover the kilometres quickly.

30 ish km in and another pit stop, more sandwiches some fruit and I was off again into what had to be the most gruelling climb of the day. No shade, mid day heat, rutted rocky track and a whole lot of energy used up to get to the top. My legs and lungs were burning as the climb just went on, and on, and on not relenting in gradient for about 8km. Knackered would be an understatement as I crested the top and welcomed the shade of the forest and the long flowing high speed descent that followed.



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We then came to another water/feeding station where I stopped to indulge in everything that was on offer. I needed food and I needed water! A new pair of legs would have been quite nice too....but you can't have everything. At this point you had to decide if you wanted to do an extra 15km! That was probably the quickest and easiest decision I made in a very long time. NO THANKS!!

Back on the bike and the trail continued to descend deep into the next valley. Over the years whilst guiding, many clients have commented on enjoying the descent but also realising that there was going to be some payback with another big climb. I never really thought about it like that until this last big descent of the day. 15-20 minutes of descending on fantastic trails was pretty awesome. That was a given. The 40-50 minutes to climbing back up, hurt like hell! That was also to be expected.

So back at the finish line, 60km done, 1950m of climbing done, 4hours 51minutes done and last but not least Ashley Higgins well and truly **done in!!**

I was a great day with mountain bikers of all abilities taking part and very well organised, so a big thank you to the Mountain bike club in Cortes.

Observations. Lots of riders had punctures. I had one too, but tubeless slimed tyres meant I just kept on riding. No need to stop and repair! Go Tubeless!!

