

## Glasgow to Barcelona 1938 and 2008

Ray Cox and Roy Watts were just 22 and 23 when they died fighting for the liberty of the Spanish people. Ray and Roy were ordinary people, regular working guys who weren't seeking glory or adventure in Spain. They liked nothing better after a week's work than to climb of their bikes on a Sunday morning and go for a spin in the countryside, simple pleasures enjoyed in the company of like minded men and women from the Clarion Cycling Club. They would have recognised that the bonds of fellowship extended well beyond the horizons of their local cycling fraternity to include working people across the sea in Spain who were facing adversity of the very worst kind; fascism. They answered the call of the Spanish Popular Front government and, in the words etched on the International Brigade memorial on London's south bank, they went "because their open eyes could see no other way". They paid the ultimate price and we must never forget their commitment, their courage, and the example that they, and others of the International Brigades, set.

This is why the "Clarion Cycling Club 1895", together with the "International Brigades Memorials Trust" and the "Basque Children of '37 Association: UK" got together to organise an event that would raise awareness of the aims and objectives of the three groups, and the importance of historic memory of the civil war and its aftermath. The event chosen was the re-enactment of a 1938 bike ride by two other Clarion Cyclists, Ted Ward and Jeff Jackson who biked from Glasgow to Barcelona through France and over the Pyrenees to raise money for Spanish children who had become victims of the war. They cycled from town to town zig-zagging their way through Britain, France and Republican Spain holding public meetings and collecting money from Trade Union branches and other sympathetic groups. Their target was £70 but they raised close on £400, a significant sum in 1938.

The 2008 re-enactment chose a different route. The riders wanted to pay tribute to the victims of Franco in the Basque country and to visit the battlefields of the Ebro valley. So the ride started at the Glasgow IB memorial and travelled south to Portsmouth visiting memorials and other sites at Bolton, Rotherham, Leicester, Bristol, Southampton and Portsmouth. At Oxford, they were joined by Association member Colin Carritt, whose father and uncle were both International brigade volunteers. The growing band of riders then caught the ferry to Bilbao where Association President Manuel Moreno joined the riders to cycle through Spain. Their route took them to Gernika where the riders were met by a civic reception following which they were guests of the Director of the Gernika Peace Museum for an escorted tour of the exhibition. Needless to say, everyone visited the famous "tree of Gernika". Then it was up and over the mountains and down to Logrono in the Ebro valley, across the wilds of Los Monegros and back into the mountains of the Sierra Pandols. Here the fighting was as intense as anywhere and many Brigaders and Republican fighters lost their lives. Finally, of course, the riders reached their ultimate destination of Barcelona. Seven riders with two support drivers completed the full distance of over 1000 miles but many others rode parts of the route and there were usually at least fifteen riders on the road on any one day.

If the purpose of the event was to raise awareness of the International Brigades and the Basques ninos, then it was spectacularly successful. Thanks, in particular to Maite de Paul Otxotorena, a Basque journalist with amazing connections throughout the

progressive Spanish media, the trip received extensive coverage in regional and national TV, radio and newspapers. President of the Association Manuel Moreno was an excellent (and sometimes amusing) translator, and with Alan Warren, they ensured that the story of the Basques ninos was told at every opportunity. At almost every stop the riders were received by civic dignitaries and small tokens of friendship were exchanged.

Most importantly, the riders visited memorials to International Brigaders and other victims of Franco's repression wherever they could and they paid tribute to those thousands of people who, like Ray Cox and Roy Watts stood up to the fascist bully boys and said, "No Pasaran!".

Colin Carritt - August 2008