



Multiple Sclerosis Society
Northern Ireland

Cuban Revolution Cycle in aid of Multiple Sclerosis

Special thanks go to Varum who compiled a detailed account of our trip, I have simply added in points relevant to myself.

Day 1/2

Up at 5am to catch the 7.20 flight to London and meet up with the Charity Challenge people and the rest of the participants on the Cuban Revolution Cycle. A few introductions later we settled on the flight to Madrid. A few beers and some small talk followed, before a connecting flight of 11 hours to Havana. An all-inclusive Iberia flight meant more San Miguel's followed before a few hours sleep.

We met our representative at the outdated Havana airport and got our connecting bus to bring us to our hotel in Havana city centre, after exchanged some Cuban Convertible Pesos (1GBP = 1.42 CUC). We saw the floodlit Che Guevara and Fidel Castro facades to the Government buildings and also the "interesting" Ministry of the Interior, where our tour guide told us that no Cuban civilian ever wants to end up in that building! Nuff said!!



Our hotel was pretty basic and we were greeted with complimentary mojitos on arrival. With everyone exhausted from the travelling, we all slept soundly that night.

The next morning was one of the most frightening moments of the trip. We went to eat breakfast and were met with the option of stale bread, a spoonful of something resembling sugar puffs and shortbread-type biscuits. Even the milk for the tea was "lumpy". My first experience of Cuban cuisine was not impressive to say the least and I believed this set the precedent for the rest of the trip. The 2 packets of Cupa-Soups I packed would have to last me 12 days and 350km!

The rest of the morning was filled by our tour guide, Emilio, taking us around Havana and showing us many interesting parts of the city. This was followed by a Cuban lunch in a restaurant where a Salsa band played. The lunch was delicious and my faith in Cuban cuisine took a more positive outlook. The lunch was Chicken and rice with an interesting spicy garnish. Needless to say I cleaned my plate after that horrific breakfast!

We then travelled to the outskirts of Havana, to Playa Jibacoa. We were put up in a traditional Cuban village hotel type of a place called 'Campismo Popular'. It was no best western, but it did have decent sized cottages and a great atmosphere. With the evening to prepare for the cycle tomorrow, the true cyclists that we were, we introduced ourselves to Bucanero, the traditional Cuban cerzeva.



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Day 3

Playa Jibocoa to Matanzas

After another thoroughly disappointing breakfast of what can only be described as a slice of cheese covered in a jam-type substance and more stale bread, myself and Ciaran were late for the team briefing... again due to our inexperience at preparing cycling gear and being seriously overpacked!

Started at exactly 8:47, not sure of the significance was, and proceeded south east towards the coastal city of Matanzas. We had our first break at around the 10km mark, where we diverted from the main road, which was immediately followed by a 20 minute snack break, near a church in a small village.

From there on it was pretty flat terrain until our next stop, at around the 25 km mark. Got welcomed by few local kids who were completely mesmerised by Angela's Cancer research balloons. From here on began the steep climbs, which was topped off by a 2 km uphill that completely (almost) drained us of our energy. From here on it was a 2 km ride to the outskirts of Matanzas, which was our lunch break.

Lunch was provided by our back-up truck driver's wife and it was traditional Cuban food – rice with black beans, et al.

Post lunch it was all down hill – literally. It was a great 10 km ride to the other end of Matanzas, from where we were transferred onto a coach to our hotel for the night – Acuazil hotel.

Statistics for the day:

Total distance – 47 KM (+/- 1 KM, as Varum forgot to switch on the timer on few occasions at the start after each break)

Difficulty factor – 5 on 10

Saddle soreness factor: 3



Day 4 Matanzas to Cienfuegos

On the whole it was much easier ride today in terms of the flatness of the entire terrain, but the distance was a lot further.

Had a great breakfast at our hotel in Veradaro – the best of the trip so far. Started from our hotel and had our bus transfer to our last destination point near Matanzas. Started cycling at around 9:00 am and started cycling south towards Cienfuegos.

Today's route was a much flatter surface and it was quite smooth throughout. Stopped after around 10 km, just to regroup.



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Today, weather-wise, it was glorious day – blue skies above, roughly around 27 degrees Celsius and I presume a humidity factor of around 50%. Perfect conditions for cycling

We then stopped for lunch in a lovely little village - Bolondron, before which we stopped for a quick toilet break enroot at a local's house. It was a nice little, high ceiling, and tiled roofed house. Angela again grabbed the opportunity, and handed the little kids of the house her pink balloons who were mighty thrilled at the prospect of having a toy for their near future.

Lunch was served near the village's local rail station. Was a perfect opportunity to shoot some abandoned railway track shots. Lunch was cooked by our backup truck drivers wife, and as always was perfect.! Salad, banana critters, rice with black beans and some lovely beef and potato.

By this time we had completed 45 km for the day and according to Emilio, we had another 25 odd km to complete before our transfer to the hotel.

Post lunch session was another situation of perfect riding conditions, and perfectly summed up the days ride – challenging, yet thorough fun.!

Stopped just before the main highway stretch and loaded our bikes onto the truck. It was then a good hour and fifteen minutes transfer to our next hotel for the following 2 nights - rancho Luna resort, on the outskirts of Cienfuegos, where we would be put up for the next 2 nights. Enroot, Emilio enlightened us about the life in Cuba – “the best part about Cuba is you can get divorced easily!” jokes aside, it was informative and Emilio tried his best to demonstrate the socio economic conditions of Cuba and life of a Cuban, despite the fact I argued the case for socialism, Emilio seemed to be anti-Communist!

The resort seemed massive to Cuban standards, I guess, and even had a fantastic swimming pool. Dinner was fab, and was in for an early night as it looked as if jet lag and exhaustions had finally kicked in.

Total distance: 72 KM

Difficulty factor: 8

Saddle soreness factor: 7

Day 6 & 7 Rancho Luna to Cienfuegos

Another long day riding of our Cuban challenge. Today's ride was supposed to be an easier day to prepare ourselves for the following days of intense cycling. But it turned out to be a bit tougher than expected, perhaps because of the speed at which we did the final ride.

Had another fantastic breakfast at our hotel – Rancho Luna (Club Amigo) and departed at around 8:30 from the hotel and made our way towards the historic and beautiful city of Cienfuegos.

The ride towards the city was an easy 10 mile ride, quite flat and downhill. However the highlight of the ride were a group of young (school perhaps) girls riding the other way, saw us and turned back and joined us. There were obviously quite fit and had proper road bikes and caught up to us in no time. Some of them even fancied a grab or a grope rather of our very own resident Dj's back side,



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who as usual was completely unfazed by what was happening around him, tried to slap their back sides, but stopped at the last moment. But it was indeed a moment to cherish.

Reached Cienfuegos square around mid morning, and spent around an hour visiting the nearby shops and museums.

Proceeded towards bahla de Cienfuegos – a reservoir in the city. Went in for a quick swim before the non stop return journey towards Rancho Luna. Back in time for lunch, and spend the afternoon at the hotel. There was a quick game of pool volleyball between the boys and Mark and his girls – needless to say the boys won with a resounding victory, although the girls did put up a good fight, or rather we let them think that way in any case :P

Emilio cracked up with a 'Sho the Munkhey..' joke – another highlight of the day..

Dinner was followed by a salsa night at Club Amigos. Was intense fun but we were advised to rest well before a tough and intense day the next day.

Stats for the day:

Total distance: 45 KM

Difficulty factor: 6

Saddle soreness factor: 8



Day 8 Cienfuegos to Hanabanilla

Next in our Cuban adventure, and we had sufficient warning that today was going to be a tough nut to crack. We were told that the distance would not be too much but the steep hills would drain us, and drain us it did!

We hit the rollercoaster hills section within 20 minutes of riding. And oh yes, it was difficult. It was a bit overcast, that it help us, but nevertheless the humidity factor was quite high. The team really did very well to keep up the momentum.

Stopped for lunch before a strenuous 8 km hill – the last 8 km of the day. Post lunch, as expected it was an intense climb towards our hotel at Hanabanilla. But it was intense determination and team spirit that took us towards the top of the hill, and what a moment it was. Brilliant team effort.!

Our stay over for the night was at Hotel Hanabanilla. A beautiful little hotel besides a reservoir.

Total distance: 60 KM

Difficulty factor: 10

Saddle soreness factor: 10 (never known pain like it)

Highlight of the day: reaching the top of the final hill.!



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Day 9 Hanabanilla to Trinidad

After yesterdays exploits, everyone assumed today, the last day would be easy, as we started by going down that 8km hill we climbed so desperately the day before. However as Anna came off her bike on the descent and was hurt bad, it dawned on us the dangers of the descent.

As we reached the bottom of the Hanabanilla Mountain (it is NOT a hill) we turned right onto a poor road with many potholes and steep climbs and descents. Everyone was exhausted and not prepared for another 70km to Trinidad. This was gruelling due to the exploits of yesterday, plus maybe a few too many bucaneros the night before.

Eventually we could smell the sea air and Trinidad was near. We stopped at the edge of town and were celebrating, only for Emilio to tell us our hotel was 10-15km away on the other side of town. This again was extremely hard to find the motivation. However we all stayed as a group and made it to the end. Cue celebrations and overwhelming relief. A massive thank you to everyone involved and I couldn't have wished for a nicer set of people to complete this with. A strong sense of comradeship grew throughout the trip and I was glad to meet each and every person I met on the trip.



Viva la revolucion!

Total distance: 60 KM

Difficulty factor: 8

Saddle soreness factor: 10 (could it get any better!)

Highlight of the day: Cycling though the historic and beautiful Trinidad.