

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | MONDAY, 3 JUNE 2013

Misty Day

Today was all about ice cream, mountain villages, beautiful views, strange rocky terrain and risk management.

The tortuous road from Ajaccio to Porto is considered to be one of Corsica's highlights, and its most dangerous road.

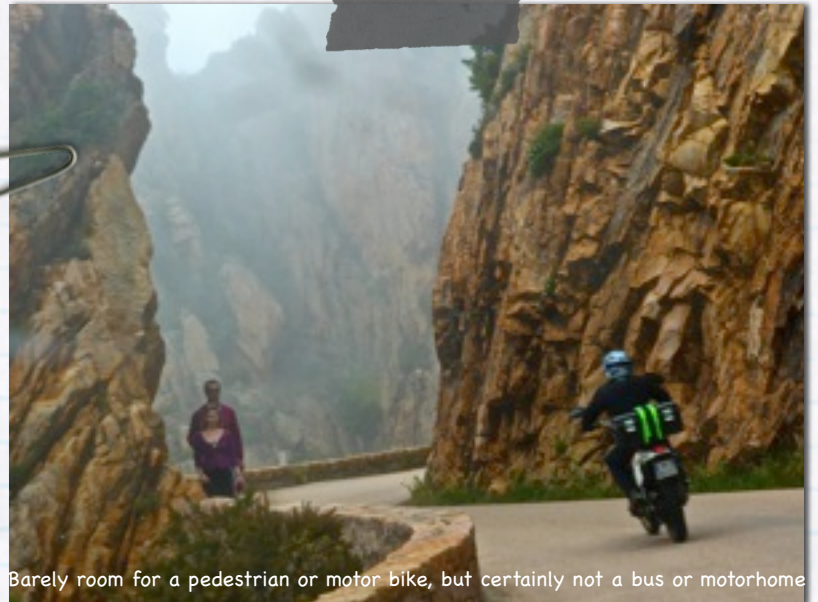
As we left the densely populated Ajaccio and began to climb up the mountains, the road seemed fine but the weather deteriorated and mist started to set in. I assured Heather that I felt confident enough that we would get through any narrow roads unscathed if we took it slow and easy. In short, I was a little cocky and willing to tackle anything Corsica would throw at us.

Our first destination was Sagone. This nondescript town has only one claim to fame - its maitre glacier (master ice cream chef). What an amazing range of ice creams to choose from! Heather picked one by its colour (lavender) while I played safe and chose pistachio. We vowed to do some walking and riding to use up the added calories.

Further on we desperately attempted to stop at the seaside town of Cargese but try as we may we could not find anywhere to park.



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Barely room for a pedestrian or motor bike, but certainly not a bus or motorhome

Navigating

I have been largely responsible for the navigating on this trip. I have been aided greatly by an iPad app recommended to me by George, our Dutch house swap host. It is called "CityMaps2Go". The great advantage is that you can see where you are located on the map.

As you move along the road, your little blue blip moves too. It's great because you can see where you are in relation to where you want

to go. The iPad obviously communicates with a satellite, like a GPS.

Today for example, I could warn Sig when the parking places were coming up and when to expect a particularly crazy switchback in the road. I know that you can see some of this on a GPS, but this little app is much better.

Do note though that maps available are limited.



ROAD TRIP? A bus takes you and your bike to the top of the mountain. You rug up and jump on the bike for the ride of your life. No peddling required, just brakes. You party at the bottom and do it somewhere else the next day.



WINDY? Noticed a number of trees on the horizon. Deduced that this part of the country gets some serious breezes. How strong must the trunk be?



ROAD TRIP? Met this guy a number of times on our drive up the mountain today. He passed us every time we stopped for a break or a look at the scenery. While taking in the view he just smiled and kept peddling.

Porto's red rocks are truly astonishing

The road started to get narrower as we kept going up and up. The worse thing about narrow roads is that no matter which side you are on there are potential problems - on the outside there are sheer drops down to the abyss below. The inside may seem safe until you see the spiked rocky outcrops waiting quietly to slice into the top and side of your van. Either way Heather kept swearing. This helped a lot!

It was when we met a bus coming the other way that things got really interesting. There was no way we could pass each other and I was not prepared to back up or give ground because "I got there first". The bus driver must have seen me gnash my teeth because he did back up slowly which allowed me to squeeze into a bypass on the wrong side of the road. My thought was that skill and determination will always get you through.

We passed through Piana because we again could not find a park. About half a kilometer away we found a safe parking spot and then rode back down to the town on our bikes. It was a great place to while away an hour. It looked great in the mist. Lots of bikies in town.

The best was yet to come. The 10 kms from Piana to Porto was through majestic wild rock formations. Mainly red in colour, they have weathered into crazy shapes and evidently shine when the late afternoon sun hits them.

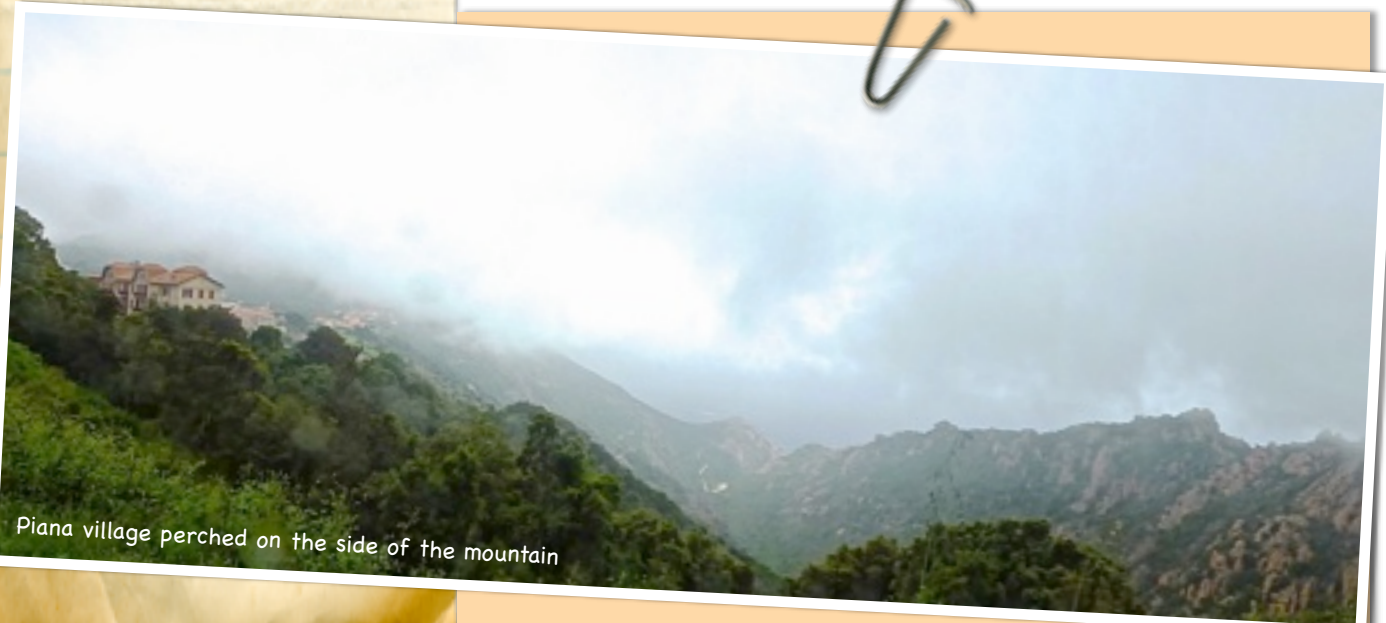
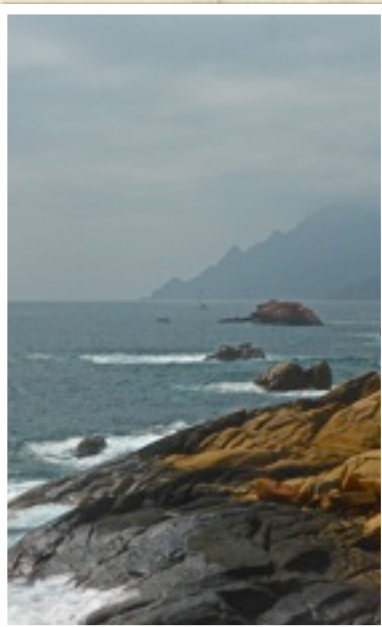
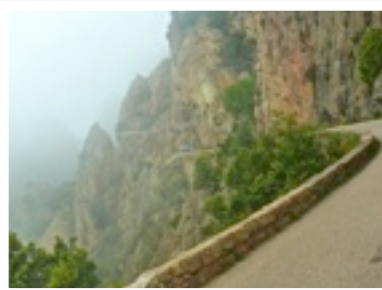
It was early afternoon but the thick mist made it impossible to see far. We alighted from our van, after again having to drive past the car park which had height barriers, and eventually stopped about 1 km down the hill. We walked the steep, rocky path that promised beautiful vistas, but alas, the weather had the final say. Sadly, apart from the terrain we were walking through, we saw little except fog.

Switchback, after switchback, after switchback followed, some with buses honking loudly to herald their coming. I got into the act too - beep, beep here comes our van. Get out of the way!!

The crowning glory of our fascinating drive was seeing Porto from on-high and then entering the sprawling town as we rapidly dropped down on to the coast. There were even some very large eucalyptus trees lining the road.

We found the caravan park and then it was time for more exercise. The ride down to the port area itself was very pleasant because the sun had finally come out. We rounded the corner and were taken aback. The guide book says it best - "no amount of hyperbole can capture the astonishing beauty of Les Calanques De Piana - sculptured cliffs that teeter above the Golfe De Porto and rear up from the sea in staggering scarlet pillars." Wow, and wow again.

Tomorrow more narrow roads.



Piana village perched on the side of the mountain



PHOTOS



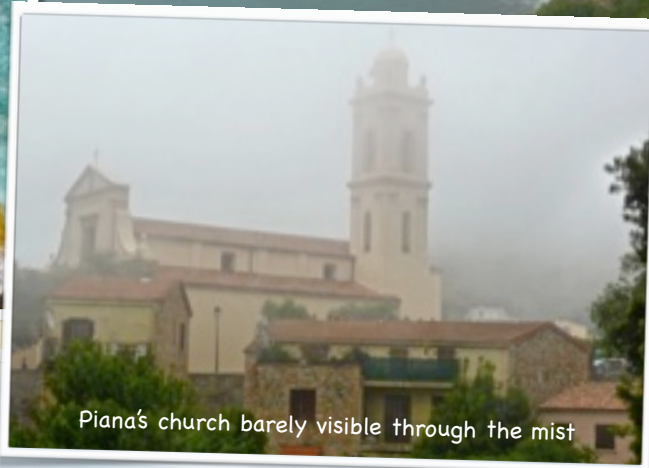
Mountainous red rock scenery approaching Porto



View from Porto inlet



View down to Porto



Piana's church barely visible through the mist



Porto