

**ZAK VINEY**

Zak is a Cycling UK campaigns officer who's forever dreaming of the next cycling challenge



**B**ecause it's there. George Mallory's reply, when asked why he'd attempt to climb Mount Everest, has passed into legend. He would go on to die on his mountain. Spoiler: I didn't on mine, the Pico de Veleta.

It was meant to be that 'no cycling allowed' holiday, one to get swept up in a place, its food, and its people. Granada is a fascinating city with Moorish architecture, winding streets, and flamenco echoing from hundreds of tapas bars. Surely my compulsion to sit on a saddle could lie dormant for a mere week?

I tried to scratch the itch by hiking, exploring the beautiful Sierra Nevada National Park. First a lazy wander beside the crystal clear waterfalls in Monachil, then a tougher hike from Cogollos to the Peñón de la Mata. But when I looked up I could see the Pico de Veleta, one of the Sierra Nevada's highest peaks (3,398m) and home to the highest paved road in Europe...

**START: NO GEAR, ALL IDEA**

I didn't have a bike but I did have a phone. Google informed me that Bicicletas la Estación could supply me with an aluminium road bike with a compact chainset and a cassette with a 32-tooth sprocket. It was fitted with flat pedals (no bike shoes with me), two bottle cages, and a phone mount.

I filled my small bidon to the brim, topped up my Camelbak, and donned my rented bike helmet. I was ready to take on the climb.

I headed south-east out of Granada, remembering



to cycle on the right hand side. As the road rose and rolled gently, the vista opened up. Farmers were busy across the valley of the Monachil River. Buildings were replaced by fig trees lining the edges of the road. Green olive trees gave way to arid foothills.

The road began to rise further. So did the temperature. At 11am it had already passed 30°C. I'd begun my ascent of the Veleta. Ahead lay 38km and another 2,700m of climbing. El Purche, climbing out of Monachil, was the hottest and hardest part the whole ascent: six kilometres with an average gradient of 9%. I cycled alongside a Spanish climber, encouraging one another as we exchanged positions between the steeper ramps.

In the absence of a refreshing breeze, the views to the south provided inspiration to keep pushing on. Then there was a rolling descent to Carretera de la Sierra, where I joined the smooth tarmac of the A-395. Looking north from the A-395, the magnitude of the Sierra Nevada was imposing.

**MIDDLE: CLIMBING TO 2,000M**

At 1,500m, the Genil River dominated the landscape. Its deep blue waters were reminiscent of the glacial lakes of Canada. Not knowing what to expect ahead, I stopped to top up on fluids.

"Aqua, por favor," I asked in broken Spanish at a restaurant. A delightfully kind lady obliged.

At El Dornajo visitor centre, I turned left up the hairpins of Carretera de Las Sabinas. This section was tree covered, the shade giving some respite from the sun. An estate car in the

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A car in the livery of the BikeExchange pro cycling team passed me, followed shortly by Simon Yates  
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