



# The Motorcycle Diaries



## Trainee Housing Coordinator, Cathy Birchall, describes her motorcycle odyssey...

A visually impaired person rarely gets the opportunity to travel 2,500 miles on a motorcycle through England, Ireland, Spain and France. Almost four months later, my experience seems somewhat surreal! Meanwhile, the rider of the BMW motorcycle which I travelled on the back of, still wonders how he ended up with a blind passenger and a disabled parking permit on his windshield.

The initial stage of our trip was a fleeting journey to visit family in Ireland. This short trip made me excited about what was to come, as we headed back to England before our 21 hour crossing to Spain. However, by the time we got off the bike at Plymouth, I was no longer excited. Following our 350-mile ride, 50,000 needles seemed to be stabbing my backside as the circulation returned! My sympathetic driver stifled his laughter at my wobbly first steps as I mumbled, "where's the cabin? I think I need to lie down."

As we climbed the Pyrenees and the Alps of Provence to 8,900 feet on mountain roads, while the clouds scudded past below us, the sense of isolation and space was overwhelming. Using an intercom, my companion described the scenes to me as we criss-crossed through Spain and France.

I can still hear and feel the sound and vibration of the engine as we accelerated around bends which made my world tilt and shift. The echoes, as we blasted through Alpine tunnels, reverberated in my head and the cold air from the rocks wrapped around me...before I was magically warm again as we reappeared into the sun.



Cathy Birchall, at 8,900 feet in the Provence Alps

**I have always believed that being blind is about seeing the world in a different way. That's all. I have seen a part of the world that many people do not get to experience. I have painted pictures in my head and I am happy.**

I have survived ending up in a ditch in the Alps with the bike on top of me and the memory is still a good one!

However, my enduring image is of my companion unloading my mountain of clothes (which I will now admit that I didn't need!) from the bike. After he had done so, he wandered off scratching his head and muttering something under his breath... I only caught the word 'women' as he rode off.

**I am currently planning a round-the-world trip by motorcycle, to explore visual impairment in other countries and cultures. If you are interested in learning more about this trip, please email me at either [Cathy@ladywood144.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:Cathy@ladywood144.freeserve.co.uk) or [berniesmith@btinternet.com](mailto:berniesmith@btinternet.com).**

