



In the fifth article of **Alice Griffin's** series following a young family's European road trip, Milla and her family put down some roots - just for the winter...

Alice Griffin is a freelance writer, dedicated dog lover and willing victim of wanderlust. These things combined, along with the addition of an equally willing husband, led to the birth of a dream to pack her family up and travel Europe in search of a new and unknown destiny. During the last month 'Family Smudge' have been experiencing life as locals in a rural Andalusian village. Here they will stay until February next year before they embark on their road trip back to France and on to their search for a rural dream. You can follow their travels at: www.familysmudge.com

Milla's away from home...

When we set out on our travels back in May, we were in search of freedom. We wanted to forget about the practicalities of life for a while, see some of Europe through unhurried eyes, and to soak up as much knowledge as we could from the people we were lucky enough to meet and the experiences we'd encounter - all with Milla by our side.

Looking back over these months, we feel we have achieved a great deal and to now find ourselves being accepted within a rural Spanish community is testament to our belief that if you let life lead you, where you end up can often take you by surprise.

Daily life in the village is peaceful and revolves around small, seemingly insignificant tasks that we have come to enjoy in all their small-town glory. We all head to the panadería (bakery) each morning and greet the locals who sit in the square. From there we walk out of the village and stop to say hello to the horses before

we walk on past Enrique's farm, where we usually get handed a cucumber or an armful of chard by someone working their land. Then we head up to the top of the nearest hill where Milla likes to run across the slopes, foraging in the undergrowth.

Eventually we stop at the old ruin to take in the breathtaking views of the surrounding Lucar mountains and to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be experiencing this way of life that is so tiny and insignificant to the greater world, yet of such huge significance to our journey.

To Milla's delight our daily walks are now becoming longer as the weather begins to cool and we drift at a steady pace towards autumn. The winter stretches out ahead of us, filled with the prospect of long mountain walks and time to talk about our plans without interruption, and we enjoy the fact that where we are is so different to where we have been.

Other than these regular outings, we occasionally opt to do

something a little special, and, a couple of weeks ago, we went on a beach trip to Aguillas. We were on the beach by 7.30am to see the sun rise above the glittering water and to let Milla splash around to her heart's content before the heat sapped her energy.

After a lazy day reading books under the shade of our tent, we headed back down to the beach to cook dinner. We went armed with our burner, frying pan and ingredients for sausages with omelette, and sat in a rocky cave where we cooked and watched the waves crash in and the sun set behind the mountains. We had a wonderful time - and no one more than Milla, because we have come to realise that ensuring you make the most of the early and late hours of the day are imperative if you bring a dog to this part of the world in the height of summer.

The main difference we

have found in Spain is that the dog-owning culture is very unlike what we are used to, and it seems strange to some that Milla is such a huge and involved part of our family. Here, dogs mostly guard property and rarely get to roam free or have a cuddle, and the number of stray dogs wandering around the streets can be heartbreaking for dog lovers like us.

To do our bit we recently introduced ourselves at a nearby kennels that also take in a number of stray dogs, and we are now volunteering twice a week and take some of them out for a walk. We go for around three hours a time and walk two to three dogs at a time, but sadly you still can't get round them all. It's hard to see such an array of



beautiful dogs without homes, but we know that they are well cared for by the staff and we feel that, by walking them, we are giving them something to look forward to.

Of course, we already have our favourites and sometimes hearing some of the sad background stories only makes you love them more. For me, it's Billy, a little black dog with the most timid of temperaments. If I were settled here, I would find it hard not to offer him the home and affection he so needs to rebuild his trust.

So here we find ourselves, immersed in the most spectacular mountain scenery with new friends and a routine of sorts. Winter will be a time to plan for the next stage of our life, and although accepting that the travelling has stopped for a while has taken some adjustment, the chance to stand still allows us to reflect and realise that our journey towards the rural family life we are now sure we want has only just begun. ::



Facing page: Milla and Alice at the ruin. Above: Milla takes an early morning dip. Milla and Alice with Billy and Louise from the dog rescue home.

Alice will now be blogging about the next part of their journey at: www.livingtheruraldream.com