On 13th December 2016, 9 rowers, 2 coxes and 1 coach made their way to the inaugural PCBC Tour to Seville. The off-the-cuff idea thrown about before the start of term had finally come to fruition, and it had been the topic of conversation for the last few weeks of term.

We arrived at the place of accommodation late in the day, linking up with Justin Sutherland, our coach, who had trailered boats to Seville merely hours before, then headed off to bed for a week of hard training.

The following morning, we took stock of what we had arrived to. The Sporting Residence La Cartuja is a hotel close to several local rowing clubs and right next to the River Guadalquivir. The rowable part of the river is 7km long, with a 2km straight where the European Rowing Championships were hosted in 2013. This was certainly a different experience to being on the twisty, narrow River Isis, and we were all incredibly excited to row on it.
On the first full day, we rowed twice in the eight, coxed by both Conor Hamilton and Ben Donaghue. It certainly had been a long time since we’d been able to have a good period in the eight for a lot of us! Huge gains were made, despite some slightly cold weather, and Willem de Bruijn finally got his wish to be at stroke seat. Some of us also took the opportunity to wander around the streets of Seville and to explore the brilliant architecture (and bars) the city had to offer. Following dinner, we took the opportunity to show off our silky skills on the football pitch in a 5 vs 5 ½ match. Full of dirty tackles, wild shots and dodgy defending, it proved to be a highlight of the tour.
The second day, the weather improved significantly - again, it was so different from the usually choppy conditions on the River Isis that all of us seemed giddy with excitement at the prospect of a) sun b) no wind c) an open river and d) the ability to go in a straight line. We started off with some smaller boats: Justin stroked a coxless four and Conor coxed the other four, before going back in the eight in the afternoon, after which a few of us decided to go out in the single scull as well. After all, why turn down the opportunity?
Friday was race preparation day, which saw all participating clubs in the Andalusian Open arrive for a few practice runs on the River Guadalquivir. Likewise, having entered a single scull, a coxless four and an eight, we took the opportunity to do some race pieces and some side by side racing against each other. The dream team of Alex Oldroyd and Charlie Buchanan got a run out in the pair and raced the coxless four. The weather was fantastic once again, and some of us said it was the best rowing we have ever done. That night, we had a squad meal in a local restaurant, which offered fantastic Spanish cuisine.

The weekend arrived, and so did race day. On the Saturday, Eddie Rolls announced himself to the international world of rowing with a very strong race in the single scull. He came 43rd out of a possible 77 with a time of 08:01.88 into a headwind and a rather questionable racing shell, cheered on by one Pembroke contingent running alongside and another Pembroke contingent at the finish line. That night, a few of us made the trip to Sevilla FC’s football stadium, the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium, to watch Sevilla trounce Malaga 4-1.
Grinning after a fantastic match (Seville 4-1 Malaga) at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium – Photo: Carl Gergs
The Sunday saw the coxless four of Carl Gergs, Tom Christie, Khalid Mohsen and Adam Rebick. Having only rowed together as a crew since the day before, the grit and determination that Pembroke is renowned for was on full show; they produced a strong result of 07:45.28, again in difficult conditions. Finally, it was time for the eight to make its arrival. For some, it was the Henley Boat Races Round Two, as the college we beat in March at Henley, Caius College Cambridge, were also in Seville. Having lost people to illness, the Caius coaches kindly subbed into our scratch crew. With the rowers in the coxless four rowing another hard 2k just an hour after their previous one, we achieved a top 10 finish and beat Caius by over 3 lengths, coxed by Ben Donaghue, ensuring that the Tabs were once again shoed. A final squad meal, flamenco dancing, and the customary exploration of Seville’s bars were in order.

The following morning was a period to nurse the headaches and the sore muscles, and enjoy one final time on the water. Khalid and Chris both learned how to scull (without capsizing, despite the wishes of those watching), others enjoyed more time in the single, and the rest had a laugh on the launch.
Chris Liang in a single scull – Photo: Adam Rebick and Tom Christie

Khalid Mohsen in a single scull – Photo: Carl Gergs
Alas, the time had come to depart on Monday, but not without some incredible memories of PCBC’s first ever tour. We were thoroughly exhausted, but made huge progress on the water, strengthened the bond between us and got momentum going for Torpids next term. We have Justin Sutherland to thank for giving us the opportunity to do this and to create history for PCBC - his contribution to our cause is invaluable and we thoroughly enjoy working with him. Thanks to everyone who made the trip: Willem de Bruijn, Eddie Rolls, Carl Gergs, Alex Oldroyd, Charlie Buchanan, Adam Rebick, Khalid Mohsen, Tom Christie, Chris Liang, Ben Donaghue and Conor Hamilton. The success of our trip means that we look strong to maintain and improve upon our positions at Torpids – come the end of March 4th, we are in pole position to retain Headship and 2 Boats Division 1. We’ll see you on Boathouse Island. Yeah Pembroke.

Written by Chris Liang – PCBC Men’s Captain 2016/17

Check out @pcbcoxford on Instagram for more photos of our trip!