

Bi-centenary of the Battle of Arroyomolinos, 28 October 1811

*Bicentenario de la batalla
"La Sorpresa de Arroyomolinos"
(28 de Octubre de 1811)*



*Del 26 al 30
de Octubre*

*Recreaciones
históricas*

- Espectáculos*
- Teatro*
- Rutas*
- Concursos*
- Talleres*
- Exposiciones*
- Conferencias*
- Comidas populares
y mucho más*

¡Ven y Sorpréndete!

www.arroyomolinos.es
www.batallalasantorpesa.blogspot.com
Teléfonos: 927 38 50 02/ 927 38 53 06



Preliminary Notes

The Battle of Arroyomolinos (not 'Arroyodosmolinos': this is apparently based on a Portuguese mistranslation) was hardly the largest battle of the Peninsular War: essentially a divisional-level action, it was decided very quickly by means of a surprise dawn attack and cost less than 100 Allied casualties. French losses were heavy, however, while the battle is notable for its high level of inter-allied co-operation (the British, Portuguese and Spanish forces involved were approximately equal), the very long march which was undertaken by the British and Portuguese troops dispatched to attack the French (c. 150 miles in 5 marches, including two at night and one of 50 miles), the appalling weather conditions in which the campaign was conducted, the aggression and tactical versatility displayed by the attacking troops and the manner in which it effectively freed the modern-day province of Cáceres from further French incursions. On a number of levels, then, it deserves to be remembered.

The Battlefield

Rural Extremadura having in large part been spared modern development, the battlefield is extremely well-preserved. Based on sheep and cattle raising, and the cultivation of figs and olives, the agriculture of the surrounding areas is much as it was in 1811, while there has been only the most limited incursion in terms of modern building. Many of the roads in use at the time of the battle having also survived in more-or-less the same condition as they were at the time of the battle, it is possible to trace the course of the action very successfully, and all the more so as a number of excellent viewpoints are available for the visitor to gain a general over-view. Finally, the town itself has grown very little and preserves its original street plan: it is therefore extremely atmospheric, and I therefore welcome the plans that are currently underway to create a 'Ruta de la Batalla'. That said, until now there has been no monument to the battle.



The Commemorations (1): Programme

Arroyomolinos is a very small municipality with limited resources. In consequence, the effort which it has made to commemorate the bicentenary of the battle which took place there is quite remarkable.

In brief, events included an exhibition and series of public lectures in the local community centre, a special ringing of the parish church's bells, a series of re-enactment activities, and a variety of official ceremonies including the inauguration of two new monuments, of which one is specifically to the 34th Foot. Particularly noteworthy is the effort that was made to involve the children of the community by

means of a *recreación infantil*. In the course of my visit I was able to visit a workshop session in which the children concerned were making flags and other items, and can testify to the great sense of excitement and anticipation which was in evidence. A further point to note is that no effort was made on an official level to ‘hispanise’ the battle: on the contrary, as will be observed, the publicity material featured a British soldier.

For, some press reports, see:

http://www.elperiodicoextremadura.com/noticias/provinciacaceres/mas-de-400-personas-recrean-sorpresa-de-arroyomolinos_615720.html

<http://www.hoy.es/multimedia/fotos/ultimos/87052-recreacion-batalla-sorpresa-arroyomolinos-0.html>

http://www.teinteresa.es/extremadura/caceres/personas-batalla-Sorpresa-Arroyomolinos-Caceres_0_581942098.html

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

The bi-centenary celebrations at Arroyomolinos can in general be said to have been a great success. Held in a spirit of friendship and generosity, they highlighted the contribution of the British army in an appropriate fashion, achieved a high degree of community involvement and were in every way a successful exercise in ‘public history’. The administrative resources devoted to the project, however, appear to have been more limited than was advisable, this being a point to note in respect of future occasions of this nature. Finally, to reiterate, thanks are due to the Ayuntamiento of Arroyomolinos, to Doña Sara Fragoso Delgado and to Mr and Mrs W. Hammond.

Signed: Professor Charles J. Esdaile, FRHistS, University of Liverpool

Date: 13 November 2011