

MANUEL LORA (1905-1988)

Manuel Lora López, born 19th February 1905 and died 27th March 1988, remains a walker largely unknown outside his native Spain but his story is indeed an interesting one. ¹

An athlete from Valencia whose speciality was walking, he became a national hero as a result of his many long distance walks and his loyalty to the Spanish Republican cause.

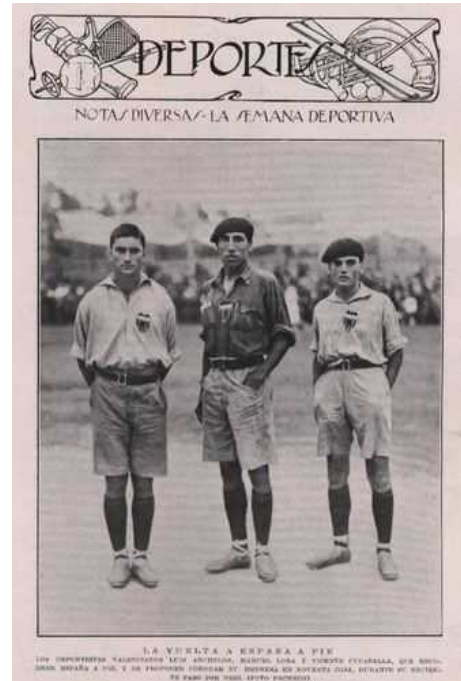
I start with an aside.

Valencia Club de Fútbol, commonly referred to as Valencia CF or simply Valencia, is a very successful Spanish professional football club that plays in La Liga. Valencia were founded in 1919 and have played their home games at the 55,000-seater Mestalla since 1923.

The growing popularity of athletics led Valencia CF to found an athletic section on May 11, 1924. ² In addition, the club played a key role in the creation of the Valencian Athletics Federation, born on December 19, 1924. The new athletics club soon garnered success, with a number of outstanding athletes. The club's most famous athlete of the modern era has to be **Jesús Ángel García Bragado**, but there is another walking connection that goes back to its very early days.

Lora had joined Valencia CF at the age of 17, presumably with aspirations of a football career, but when the athletic club was formed, he was amongst the first to join, along with fellow CF members **Luis Archelós** and **Vicente Cucarella**.

These three young athletes were a special group indeed, given their 1926 "Vuelta a España" feat. Between 3rd June and 10th October 1926 (a period of 84 days), they walked a full lap of Spain, averaging 40km per day for a total of 3,353 km. This set records for the fastest times around both Spain and around the Iberian Peninsula.



Two pics from the 1926 "Vuelta a España" feat

1 See more at <http://manuelloralopez.blogspot.com/>

2 See <https://plazadeportiva.valenciaplaza.com/valencia-club-datletisme>

In 1930, Lora and Archelós, the latter on a bicycle, covered the more than 1,600 km from Paris to Valencia in 16 stages over 21 days. This set a new Across France-Spain Record.



Lora walking and Archelós on the bike during their 1930 walk from Paris to Valencia

Following the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic, Lora, this time with **José Morant**, walked, in June 1931, from Valencia to the French city of Menton to lay a republican flag on the grave of exiled Spanish politician Vicente Blasco Ibañez.³



Lora and Morant, bearing the republican flag of the Valencia City Council, on their arrival at the tomb of Vicente Basco Ibanez in Menton

³ Vicente Blasco Ibañez (1867-1928) was a Spanish writer and politician, as well as a staunch Spanish Republican, and perhaps the greatest of all Valencians. Because of his opposition to the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, he voluntarily exiled himself in 1923 and settled in the French Riviera city of Menton. When he died in 1928, he was buried in Menton, with a final wish that his body should not be returned to Spain until it was a Republic. In 1933, his ashes were finally transferred back to Spain, at the time of the proclamation of the Republic in his native country.

These are but three of Lora's best known walking feats but by no means the only ones. Others included *la Jean Bouin de Barcelona* and *la Vuelta a Levante*.

His many feats have ensured that Lora's name is indelibly written into Spanish history. He was feted by His Majesty Alfonso XIII, who personally praised the courageous athlete. He was received by Primo de Rivera, the Count of Varellano, the Duke of Miranda, and many other authorities of the time who did not want to pass up the opportunity to congratulate him and bask in the reflected glory.

In spite of their feats, Lora and his confederates were forced to operate outside the jurisdiction of the Spanish Federation of Athletics, as they were considered professionals. Their acceptance of financial aid to help them complete these long distance feats meant they had to forfeit their amateur status.

Like many other idealistic young Spaniards, Lora's sporting career was cut short when, after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, he defended the colours of the republican flag as a member of the Spanish Republican Army. At the end of the bloody four years war, the Republicans lost to General Francisco Franco's Nationalists and Lora became a prisoner of Franco's dictatorship, spending many years behind bars.

Once freed, he returned to Valencia, living out his remaining years in his beloved neighborhood of Olivereta, where he died in 1988, aged 83.

Lora used a small diary to document his walk from Paris to Valencia and it is now an invaluable piece of history, capturing the signatures, caricatures and comments of the civil and military authorities of the time, as he and Archelós passed through the different towns along their route. ⁴



Two entries from the walk diary that documents Lora's 1930 walk from Paris to Valencia

One of the entries in the diary reads "Body of bronze and legs of steel", a fitting obituary to a wonderful walker whose feats should be remembered. ⁵

Tim Erickson
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4 See <http://manuelloraleopez.blogspot.com/2008/09/libro-de-ruta-atleta-manuel-lora.html>

5 See <https://www.wr-nw.com/manuel-lora.html>