

GR-249

MALAGA PATH

THE GREAT

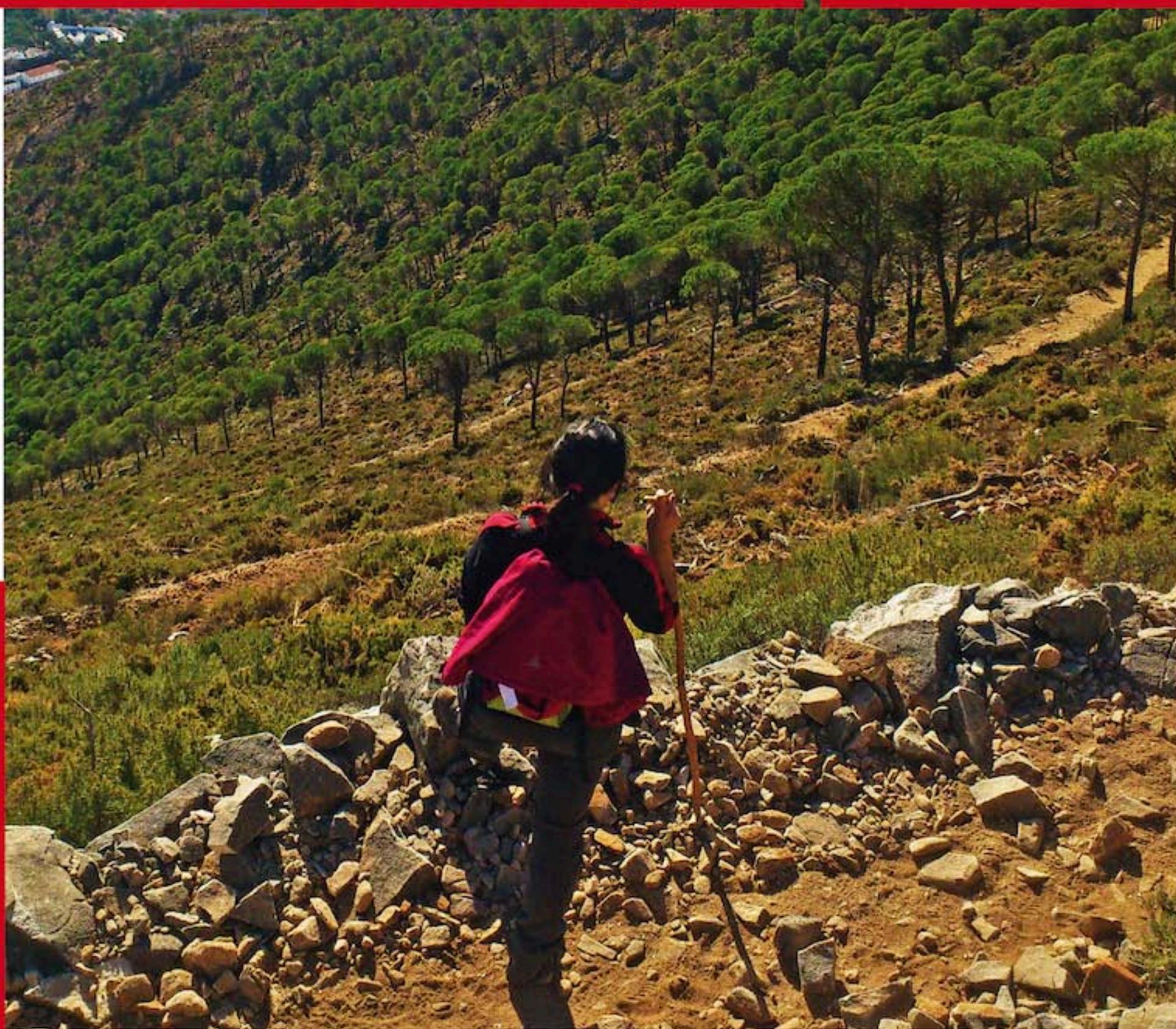


GR-249

THE GREAT MALAGA PATH

La Gran Senda de Málaga

ANDALUCÍA



Unión Europea
Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional
Iniciativa de Cooperación Territorial
Iniciativa de Cooperación Territorial



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Gran Senda de MALAGA

**TOPOGRAPHICAL GUIDE
GR-249**

This guide is one of the end products of the IDARA European Project: it is sponsored by the Diputación de Málaga within the POCTEFEX program financed 75% by FEDER.

© PUBLISHING AND COORDINATION:

DIPUTACIÓN DE MÁLAGA
EQUIPO GRAN SENDA DE MÁLAGA

C/ Pacífico, 54 - Edificio A
29004 MÁLAGA

PUBLISHED BY:

EDITORIAL LA SERRANÍA, SL

C/ Tomilla, 55
29400 Ronda (Málaga)
www.laserrania.org

TEXTS AND COORDINATION:

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PHOTOGRAPHS:

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First Edition: June de 2014

ISBN: 978-00-0000-000-0
Legal Deposit: MA-000-2014

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Printed in Andalucía by:
Imagraf Impresores

The guide at hand is meant to resemble an imaginary conversation held between the author and you, the user of the GR-249 path, during the entire time the book was being written. In the end, this text serves no purpose unless it can answer questions or predict what information might be needed and this has been the greatest focus of the work on the guide.

On the other hand, the guide is also a chronicle of the results of the work performed by a team of people who designed, built, sign-posted and maintained the path. Without their efforts the path would not exist.

We hope to be able to show how this path teaches us certain essentials and we also hope to pass on the deep love and respect we all feel towards our land, the land which in a way is closer to you now as well, thanks to this newly-created footpath.

Welcome and join in the adventure of La Gran Senda de Málaga
- The Great Málaga Path.

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Presentation

“**T**opoguía” is a new term in the Spanish language formed by the Greek words “topos” meaning a place and “guía” meaning guide. This type of guide is not only designed to physically guide you but also to describe the geography, topography and toponymy of places it takes you to. Topography describes the special features of the terrain and toponymy is a study of the origin and meaning of local place names.

The goal of the Topographical Guide of The Gran Senda de Málaga is to describe each of the stages of the path while interpreting the territory through analysis and explanations, treating the path as a sum of many places.

In this sense the present work, additional to being a technical guide to the 35 stages of the itinerary also offers a detailed description of its natural values, pointing out the relevant elements which are interesting from an environmental or a cultural point of view.

The guide has a dynamic and open style and maintains a uniform structure when describing each stage of the itinerary. The contents are accessible to anyone who wants to take on this walking project and explore the most diverse landscapes of the Málaga province. An obvious advantage of this project is the various formats of the guide available to the walker.

Málaga is a province of Mediterranean Andalucía and its location helps explain its special characteristics. Many of its features

have been transformed by human activity and yet manage to maintain a balance between protected areas and areas which have no legal protection but offer certain environmental values. Moreover, agricultural areas and some urban areas are vital to allow an understanding of the use of the land and the layout of the Gran Senda, as is the historical footprint of different times left along the paths, unpaved tracks, drover’s roads and narrow lanes.

The diversity of environmental units and landscapes of the province is reflected in the series of 35 stages proposed in the guide, placing side by side the perception of the physical environment and its cultural aspects in a suggestive mix of questions, emotions and understanding which one experiences when following footpaths and taking in the surroundings: the vegetation, climate and different seasons; walking at dawn, dusk or midday. This kind of interpretation can be found in the careful execution of this guide.

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The delta of Arroyo de la Cala, Stage 30 in Estepona

How to use this guide

» THE TOPOGRAPHICAL GUIDE OF THE GRAN SENDA DE MÁLAGA

This guide has been made available by the Diputación Provincial de Málaga (Málaga Province Council) for the public to use on the GR- 249 Grand Senda de Málaga footpath and has been published using the parameters of the Federación Andaluza de Montaña (Andalucían Mountain Federation) which certifies footpaths in our autonomous region of Spain, Andalucía. The GR (Gran Recorrido, meaning a long distance path) has been granted two names. The part which spans the northern part of the province, inland from Nerja to Casares, in reality should be called E4-GR7-GR 249 whilst the coastal crossing in the south from Casares to Nerja should be referred to as E12-GR92-GR 249. However, for practical purposes we have uniformly used the name GR-249 for easier reading.

The Guide's Approach

The idea of the guide is to bring the territory to the walkers and help them understand the most relevant aspects of the landscape they pass through during each of the 35 stages the project consists of.

In order to achieve this, a global approach has been attempted which focuses on distinguishing features of the landscape as well as

the ones which are conspicuous or have been establishing over time. There will be times when more attention will be paid to the subject of agriculture, urban areas or, for example, the flora, depending on what the particular area dictates. Luckily and preferably, other parts of the book will be able to centre on the balance between human and natural factors, resulting in an integral whole.

In any case, Malaga landscapes are ephemeral in their changes and it is quite possible that once a walker will have completed a part of the footpath, that part will already start changing. This is to say that you cannot walk the same path twice in the same manner: plants flower and wilt, rocks crumble and fall, the sea creates new passage ways or the path ends up being harrowed by rain. The path is different in autumn and in spring. Countless events are transforming it even now, especially taking into the account how extensive the itinerary is. In reading the following description of the path it should be taken as a portrait of it in a certain time and place. The Great Path of Málaga will not be the same for the walker and the team who enjoyed it as they designed, prepared and described it. Its dynamic ability to change should be treated as one of the path's core values.

Structure of the Guide

Each block of the walking stages described further in the guide begins with an introduction which attempts to provide an environmental description of the land, concentrating on the aspects, processes and places you discover thanks to the Gran Senda footpath.

The contents of each stage of the walk have been split into many sections to facilitate finding information and make the text easier to digest.

The text of the 35 chapters cover sport-related aspects of the walk, as one shouldn't forget that walking is a physical activity; the text also stresses the environmental issues and is written with a tourist in mind, as the users of the GR-249, no matter where they will be coming from, will be using the walk's infrastructure as visitors, where they will try to find a connection with the land, where they will eat, sleep and interact with the people and landscapes.

Each stage begins with a brief description accompanied by a few paragraphs describing the highlights of this part of the itinerary to prepare the walker for what's coming and alert them to the selected features. These two sections should allow the visitor to get quite a close idea of what the stage of the walk will be like in general.

The technical information is abundant and diverse, presented as a separate file. This way the information on LONGITUDE, elevations, start and finish points, access and map references can be easily located.

Two charts identify other features of the walk. First deals with the difficulty level and any possible dangers using the MIDE tool, described later on. Then the type of surface has been categorised depending on its hardness or capability to absorb impact underfoot, namely: asphalt/concrete, dirt tracks and paths. Their length is shown in kilometres on the corresponding icons. The fourth icon shows the number of river fords and stream crossings which lack a bridge or where the bridge access may be unreliable.

Another chapter describes links to other walks, either certified or not certified walking paths which can be useful not only as possible "escape routes" but also as alternative ways to add on to the itinerary, and, occasionally, convert it into a circular walk.

The mapping database used belongs to the selection of maps "Mapa Topográfico Nacional de España", scale 1:25 000, Instituto Geográfico Nacional.

Cork oak forest on the Loma de Benajarón, Stage 28 Genalguacil-Casares



A special section talks exclusively about water. Firstly, because we happen to be within the range of the Idara Project, and secondly because Andalucía in general must address more and more seriously the use of its scarce water resources. Furthermore, the watercourses in the summer are places where walkers can rest and freshen up and at the same time these places host fauna and flora communities which require a very special type of conservation. In any event, the fluvial valleys are the backbone of the Málaga region from a geographical point of view, as sources of drinking water and as the water supply for industry.

The description of the route itself, and also the longest chapter of the guide, has been divided into uniform sections to make the reading more pleasant and facilitate the comprehension of the surroundings one passes through. The type of navigation used is mainly focusing on key points without too detailed descriptions of the junctions, considering the fact that the itinerary is waymarked and also there is the possibility of downloading tracks for GPS and mobile phones. As an additional aid to navigating there is a list of waypoints at the end of the description of each stage of

the walk; the points chosen constitute either the most striking landmarks of the terrain or the most relevant elements of the environment and heritage of the area.

About the language used

Except for a few isolated cases, the text is free from an overload of scientific names of plants and animals found along the route; at most the scientific names are quoted a few times in parenthesis and using italics. It is understood that repeating them successively is not necessary. In order to avoid confusion common names accepted in Spain have been used, however these names usually do not correspond with local names.

The idea of this guide is to be useful, and this is why the text may seem quite dense. Briefness of descriptions has been sacrificed in favour of information. Relaxed reading of the entire chapter is recommended before you set off for your day of walking. The same philosophy has been applied to the selection of photographs. Images of animals, rare plants or diverse weather conditions have been traded for landscapes and photos taken from the very path, the intention being that the walker will recognize the area through these images and they will serve as ID photos enabling the walker to put a name to the most significant places of the route.

The coastal stage leads you through the sierras very close to the sea





Tall poplars reach for the sky from one of the many riverside groves of the GR-249

» THE PROVINCE SEEN THROUGH THE GRAN SENDA DE MÁLAGA

Although it comes close, the GR-249 cannot possibly portray the heritage features characteristic for the province 100% accurately, given the fact that the route only circles the province in a long line. The guide does not focus only on the areas protected by “La Red de los Espacios Naturales Protegidos” or The Network of Protected Natural Areas. Covering such protected areas exclusively would offer a perspective biased towards places which have been conserved in the best manner. Instead, La Gran Senda de Málaga leads through the least expected corners which results in a surprising and unprecedented itinerary.

You will see urban, rural and natural Málaga; in mountain, coastal and agricultural environments. The Great Málaga Path offers an amazing range of landscapes, marked by the endeavours of its people and the fertility of nature; the joint result of millennia of history.

The guide shows the province in all respects: those of which Málaga can be proud and those

which could be improved; it does so with almost a clinical detachment. Such detachment could be considered one of the best features of this enormous work that came to light in 2014. Urban planning and construction have not always been successful in the province, neither, at times, has the management of the natural environment and heritage. However this also reflects the people and land of Málaga, which this guide depicts just the way they are.

The route and its stages

The description of the legs or stages of the walk has been established as anticlockwise, which means that the starting point is the capital of the province, Málaga, from km zero, and then you head east towards the eastern part of the Costa del Sol. The total of 35 stages have been divided into 10 blocks to structure the text and each block shows enough identity to be treated as a unified territory, sometimes due to its administrative borders and, more often, merely due to the geographical features.



The tower called Casasola or de Baños, of Moorish origins

The Great Málaga Path heads east during 4 stages (69.6km) along the eastern part of the Costa del Sol, arrives at Nerja to lead away from the coast and turns north-east during the next 4 stages, 83.2 km in total, through Sierra de Tejada, Almjara and Aljama. Next, starting in Periana, there are 47 km in 3 stages which are northbound and cross the Central Limestone Arch ending up in Villanueva del Rosario.

The 83.6 km walking tour of the Northeast Málaga province region is divided into 5 stages, each one starting and finishing in a village, and it takes you west to Alameda. There are 3 routes from Alameda to Campillos amounting

to 57.3 km of the “campiña”, which is a term for cultivated rolling hills, and the lagoons in the north of Málaga province. El Paraje Natural de Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, a natural reserve, has earned 38.5 km and 2 stages, while the next 2 are designed to reach Ronda following the banks of the Turón River and its tributaries for about 47 km.

Continuing the voyage to the southwest, the region of the Serrania de Ronda has been sectioned into 3 stages of 37.8 km along the Guadiaro Valley heading south, and 2 more stages (32.1 km) through the Genal Valley where Benalauria village is the turning point to reach Casares. The western Costa del Sol is described in the last and longest seven stages of 159.9 km, taking you back east again.

» RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WALKING THE GR-249

Clothing and accessories

What clothing the walker will use depends completely on the place, the time of the year and the climate, not to mention physical and mental capabilities or even personal likes and dislikes of each walker.

In general, it is an accepted fact that one must use adequate clothing, especially designed for the outdoors, the main item being sports footwear and walking boots for the mountain sections of the walk. All the clothing must be breathable and thermo-insulated: long trousers will protect you from plants and animals and the trousers should offer flexibility of movement. Various light tops should be worn in layers which you can shed one by one when walking, and you should always finish your layers off with a wind-proof jacket.

Southern Andalucía can be sunny even in winter season and the sun can turn into a formidable adversary for a walker. You must always wear a cloth hat and use sunblock. Light gloves, a neck gaiter or a scarf, collapsible walking poles and extra socks are always recommended in

seasons with difficult weather conditions. Your rucksack should be bought with walking in mind and should be designed for your body type. The rucksack should contain two litres of water as a minimum, food for the day, notes for the stage of the walk, a charged mobile phone with a spare battery (the all-emergencies number in Spain is 112) and a medical kit according to what each walker needs.

Using GPS or Smartphone apps with global positioning system will help you navigate in the natural environment, especially in the mountains, and will be useful to those who are not familiar with the Málaga Province area.

Other recommendations

Málaga is well known as an excellent province for birdwatching and for plant lovers. Any time of the year offers flowering plant species. It is recommended to devote some of your attention to these fundamental natural resources of the walk.

The average length of the GR-249 stage is about 19 kilometres and the altitude gained is above 450 metres in average. Some of the stages are quite hard while others are easy. The

best approach would be to study carefully all the details of each stage and walk accordingly to all the specifications.

You must be able to predict when you should arrive back at your starting point or reach your accommodation at your finish point. This should be calculated and planned well in advance taking into consideration that this GR is new and still hasn't been used often enough to offer facilities with great ease. Obviously, in the mountains and small villages this can get a bit more complicated.

Should you find a dead animal, especially livestock, on your way, it would be a good idea to note down or take a photo of the plastic ID tag which you will normally find on both ears of the animal, plus some description of its location, in case you happen to meet the livestock owner. In case of any issues involving wild animals or plants, it is advisable to report them to SEPRONA (Guardia Civil branch dedicated to environmental problems). In order to report any imperfections or need to improve the walk's infrastructure, contact Agentes de Medio Ambiente (Environmental Agency Employees) or the Gran Senda de Málaga team.

Sierra Crestellina and the forests of Valle de Genal from the Cuesta de las Viñas in Stage 28



» THE GREAT MÁLAGA PATH LEAVES NO TRACE BEHIND

The Málaga Province Council has painstakingly researched and has come to agreement with the people who might possibly be negatively affected when the Gran Senda public paths are used exclusively for walking. However, it should be clear that using the walk's infrastructure only gives you the right to walk and rest. Along both sides of the paths there are private or public properties which should not suffer any consequences of a badly-conceived outdoors activity. You should apply the guideline "don't leave anything and don't take anything", as this way you can avoid misunderstandings.

The orchards, farms and farmland constitute means of an additional (if not sole) income for the locals. The GR-249 user will walk only a few metres away from avocado, orange and olive trees and they all belong to someone. Fortunately, the "malagueños" tend to be very open people and willing to share some fruit. There is always the possibility to buy some farm products at good prices along the way.

One of the most frequent environmentally negative effects produced by uncaring walkers are bits of toilet paper, tissues and wet wipes,

which not only contaminate, but also create an unpleasant visual impact. All rubbish must be disposed of in rubbish bins, especially if it isn't biodegradable. In any case, bodily waste should be buried in a hole in the ground or at least covered up with leaves and rocks. The next walker will be grateful.

All gates, be it post-and-wire openings in fences or any other type of gates, must be closed behind you, especially if there is a notice asking you to do so ("cerrar" or "cierren la puerta"). In some cases a gate could be open temporarily for the livestock; however it is recommended to close such gates after you walk through as well. Gates for domestic animals are especially frequent around the Serranía de Ronda. Livestock has priority. Always, wherever possible, walk around livestock in order to avoid bothering the animals as they graze or rest. At times, frightened livestock might not see any other way of escape other than getting on the same path as the walker which could be potentially dangerous. Normally, if the walker slows down and waits, the animals will find a way to get away in a dignified manner.

The lagoons are the most fragile ecosystems of all the ones you are going to visit, but also they are extremely attractive. The priority here always needs to be the preservation of the fauna and flora. Although they may be locally abundant, lagoon inhabitants have a very restricted and fragmented distribution in Andalucía. If any places deserve extremely careful behaviour, it would be the lagoon habitats where one must interfere in the minimum way possible and spend as little time as possible along the shores, especially the ones which lack protective barriers. Please note that picking plants or bothering animal life is prohibited, especially in nature reserves and protected areas.

A boundless olive grove which forms part of the walk in the north of the province





A flock of seagulls resting on the beach shore

»» ABOUT DATA GATHERING AND PROCESSING

The data found in the header of each walk in the guide containing technical information has been gathered by the same team of people every time, using the same equipment. The model of GPS used was a mid-range product made by a leading manufacturer on the market, with a good price-quality ratio. The intention is not to hamper the possibility of access to the provided accurate data through inability to purchase the equipment. The data was processed using equipment which does not require installation of any programmes in your computer (see useful links chapter page 22). You will only need to insert the GPS data using the website in order to obtain the map database and corresponding statistics.

Data referring to descents and ascents can be particularly conflictive when different programmes are used. In this particular case a different, frequently used tool has been applied. What's important is the fact that the correspondence between the data of different stages is proportional as it has been collected and processed using the same means.

»» AVOIDING POTENTIAL DANGERS

The main tool which summarises the dangers and difficulties of each stage of the walk is the MIDE system (Método de Información de Excursiones). This is a standardised tool which condenses basic information and this way leaves minimum room for doubts and gets close to presenting a realistic view of the itinerary (see useful links chapter, page 23). The MIDE system is presented as numbered icons. There are four icons, and they show the four fundamental parameters of the walks, which sometimes are further sub-divided. The four icons appear in the following order: roughness of the environment, navigation, walking difficulty, effort required.

The scale is 1-5 from least significant to very significant.

In the description of each stage there is a chapter specifically devoted to prevention of accidents or any mishaps. Although it is impossible to foresee each and every potentially dangerous circumstance, it's been attempted to predict the most common eventualities.

Nevertheless, problem sections may be encountered on the walk on occasion, though they could be corrected by public or private means.

In another section it has been attempted to establish the No Return Point, a place where it is advised to push on rather than return, considering the effort or time required to reach the final stage (or a point where you could leave the walk). Also, alternative routes are provided as well as possible “escape routes” leading to roads and populated areas. In any case, the best thing to do is to always listen to your common sense when your alarm bells go off.

Small and big game hunting is an activity which carries a lot of weight in Málaga. Take special care around places where hunts are on and on days when hunting season starts. A walker should be clearly visible and easy to spot in such cases, wearing or carrying reflective items and not leaving the paths and silently entering the forests. It is always a good idea to walk in a group and this way be more visible.

Local fauna which could be potentially dangerous includes a species of a viper which in reality is very difficult to see, however it is somewhat more frequent in the sierras and scrubby mountain slopes.

Other animals which are better avoided are big game such as wild boar as well as some insect species: the particularly dangerous scorpions, scolopendras, and colonial wasps, are all active in the summer. Bees need to be treated with respect. Although they are accustomed to passing humans, they are still wild animals. All bee hive areas are registered and sign-posted as potentially dangerous. You need to take into account the fact that you will walk by several bee colonies along

the GR. Attention: pets should always be kept on a leash, especially if they are not accustomed to livestock and get overexcited. An uncontrollable stampede can cause a car or train accident. Cows get very agitated around dogs and they may attack.

Take care passing through cattle grids, especially on horseback; there usually are side gates adapted for animals and these gates need to be used. When it rains, the metal bars of a cattle grid can get very slippery and cause an accident. The fords across rivers and streams should be approached with the Mediterranean climate in mind: rain falls mainly in autumn and spring and occasionally it becomes torrential, which can result in real danger around rising water levels along the river beds.

Normally the various river crossings are well accounted for and sign-posted but there are many situations which could render the crossings unpredictable. These obstacles are particularly significant in the Serranía de Ronda area which has the highest rainfall in the province and along the coastal section of the walk between Estepona and Marbella.

You shouldn't drink from the fountains and springs which contain non-potable water and tend to be marked as such with a sign. Drinking from spring water is discouraged not due to bad water quality, which is often quite to the contrary, if not the lack of health control and the fact that the walker may be not accustomed to drinking untreated water.

The greatest danger in the Mediterranean environment is posed by forest fires. In the unlikely case of a fire erupting while you are on the walk you need to contact the emergency telephone number 112. It is crucial to be able to describe where you are in order to supply all the necessary details of what you are doing and how you can leave or evacuate. It is totally prohibited to light fires or campfires in the countryside especially from May to October.

Three walk stages cross the land of the lagoons



» SIGN-POSTING

The Málaga Province Council has provided the GR-249 with the necessary information panels with general data at the beginning and end of a stage of the walk, and where sometimes other GR trails meet. The footpaths approved by the Andalucían

Mountain Federation can be identified by the colour-coded signs which are quite easy to interpret. GR colour code is red and white. These signs, complemented by arrows indicating direction, tell you where to continue straight ahead, turn or not to enter a wrong path. 

Signs indicating the GR-249 are complemented by other public path signs with their different colour codes



» SUMMARY OF THE BASIC DATA FOR THE GRAN SENDA

The summary of all the number data of the Gran Senda de Málaga has been prepared using

data processing tools most frequently applied by walkers. The data can vary from the ones obtained by walkers of the Gran Senda due to specifications of the GPS terminals or the applications they happen to have. 

Nº	NAME	L (km)	↑(m)	↓(m)	H max	H min	T	MIDE
1	Málaga – Rincón de la Victoria	15.6	40	35	23	0	3h 20´	1.1.1.3
2	Rincón de la Victoria – Vélez Málaga	24.4	70	50	37	0	5h 25´	1.2.1.3
3	Vélez Málaga – Algarrobo	19.1	180	125	125	0	4h 10´	1.2.1.3
4	Algarrobo – Torrox – Nerja	10.5	300	345	265	28	3h 15´	1.2.2.3
5	Nerja – Frigiliana	14.7	765	600	565	142	5h 5´	3.2.2.3
6	Frigiliana – Cómpeta	26.4	1.065	680	1.180	290	8h 30´	3.2.2.4
7	Cómpeta – Canillas de Aceituno	25.1	1.070	1.040	858	465	8h 30´	2.2.2.4
8	Canillas de Aceituno – Periana	17.0	620	690	640	300	5h 35´	1.2.2.3
9	Periana – Alfarnatejo (Pulgarín Alto)	13.5	415	320	880	590	3h 30´	1.2.1.3
10	Alfarnatejo (Pulgarín Alto) – Alfarnate	18.1	540	360	895	548	4h 35´	1.2.2.3
11	Alfarnate – Villanueva del Rosario	15.4	590	770	1.387	695	5h 15´	3.2.2.3
12	Villanueva del Rosario – Archidona	18.5	365	360	830	630	5h 20´	2.2.2.3
13	Archidona – Villanueva de Tapia	17.1	170	205	750	625	3h 50´	1.2.1.3
14	Villanueva de Tapia – Villanueva de Algaidas	16.7	375	510	895	525	4h 15´	1.2.1.3
15	Villanueva de Algaidas – Cuevas Bajas	10.1	260	460	705	330	2h 45´	1.1.1.2
16	Cuevas Bajas – Alameda	21.2	310	125	500	325	4h 45´	2.1.1.3
17	Alameda – Fuente de Piedra	18.6	60	160	550	415	3h 55´	1.1.1.3

Nº	NAME	L (km)	↑(m)	↓(m)	H max	H min	T	MIDE
18	Fuente de Piedra – Campillos	15.7	125	50	475	390	3h 20´	1.1.1.3
19	Campillos – Campillos (Embalses del Guadalhorce)	23.0	255	360	515	355	5h 15´	2.2.2.3
20	Campillos (Embalses del Guadalhorce) – Álora (Estación de El Chorro)	22.0	680	802	845	225	6h 05´	2.2.2.4
21	Álora (Estación de El Chorro) – Ardales	16.5	635	485	595	220	4h 30´	1.2.2.3
22	Ardales – El Burgo	22.8	570	360	815	348	5h 35´	1.1.1.3
23	El Burgo – Ronda	24.2	720	515	1.160	550	7h 25´	3.2.2.4
24	Ronda – Estación de Benaoján	12.8	225	515	715	420	3h 55´	1.2.2.3
25	Estación de Benaoján – Jimera de Líbar	9.7	190	280	520	390	2h 55´	1.2.2.2
26	Jimera de Líbar – Benalauría	15.3	750	560	1.008	385	4h 30´	2.2.2.3
27	Benalauría – Genalguacil	11.6	370	540	670	195	3h 50´	1.2.2.3
28	Genalguacil – Casares	20.5	770	880	640	128	5h 45´	2.2.2.3
29	Casares – Estepona	32.8	915	1.285	515	10	10h 25´	2.2.2.5
30	Estepona – Marbella	27.1	150	135	15	0	7h 00´	1.1.2.4
31	Marbella – Ojén	17.0	930	645	517	2	5h 55´	2.2.2.3
32	Ojén – Mijas	39.8	1.190	1.020	636	18	10h 15´	2.2.2.5
33	Mijas – Benalmádena	18.0	750	1.000	925	235	6h 15´	2.2.2.4
34	Benalmádena – Alhaurín de la Torre	12.3	440	620	650	125	4h 10´	2.2.2.3
35	Alhaurín de la Torre – Málaga	12.9	0	21	25	0	2h 35´	1.1.1.2
TOTAL		656	16.860	16.908	1.387	0	182h 05´	(*)
AVERAGE		18.7	478	482	(*) Averages of the MIDE system are measured in decimals, thus they must be understood as approximate results. The results are:			

1.5 . 1.8 . 1.6 . 3.2

L: Length • ↑(m): Accumulated ascent metres • ↓(m): Accumulated descent metres • H max/min: Altitude maximum/minimum • T: Time MIDE • MIDE: Numerical parameters in the same order as in the text

» USEFUL ADDRESSES FOR THE GR

This short selection of useful links includes a QR code and a brief description. (*)Translators note: some

of the links are in Spanish only however they may contain easy to follow local information.

<http://www.gransendademalaga.es>

This is the main Gran Senda de Málaga website, updated regularly.



<http://www.malaga.es/es/turismo/>

The website of Diputación Provincial de Málaga, the Málaga Province Council, contains information in four languages about the Province.



<http://www.birdingmalaga.es/>

Diputación Provincial de Málaga website, promoting birdwatching tourism.



<http://www.fedamon.com/>

The website of the Andalucía Mountain Federation, La Federación Andaluza de Montaña contains information on all the legal public footpaths described in the text.



http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/servtc5/ventana/entrar.do?lr=lang_es

Website allowing you to browse through the network of protected nature reserves many of which you walk through as you follow the GR-249.



<http://www.aemet.es/es/portada>

Agencia Estatal de Meteorología is an official weather channel website for Spain.



http://utrack.crempa.net/index_es.php

The tool for GPS data processing used in the text.



<http://www.conocetusfuentes.com/home.php>

Website containing a great database of natural spring locations in Andalucía, many of these springs are located near the walk.



<http://www.floravascular.com/>

Helpful site to identify and learn more about the flora species of Málaga.



<http://www.cilniana.org/>

Excellent and highly recommended website which protects historical heritage of The Costa del Sol.



<http://www.iluana.com/>

Dedicated to a variety of interesting subjects such as history, nature and sports.



<http://www.pasoslargos.com/>

Pasos Largos is one of the most senior organisations dedicated to walking in Andalucía with many active members and a variety of walks to choose from.



<http://www.montanasegura.com/>

Information on the standardised system used to describe walk parameters: Método de Información de Excursiones (MIDE), and applications used to calculate it.



<http://www.cuevadenerja.es/>

Superb website about the cave, its location, and its surroundings.



<http://www.complejohumo.org/>

The first two stages of the walk are close to this cave system, which is essential for understanding Málaga's prehistoric times.



<http://www.cuevadeardales.com/>

The walk stops only a few metres away from this cave in Guadalteba area, where guided walks are organised and where there is a museum.



<http://www.cuevadelapileta.org/>

A few kilometres from Benaoján, there is the Pileta cave boasting spectacular cave paintings.



There are seven of "Los Grupos de Desarrollo Rural" or Groups for the Rural Development in Málaga Province which, together with the local community councils "Mancomunidades de Municipios", take care of the area's interests

and focus on such local subjects as footpaths, natural environment issues and often supply information on their website which could be interesting to the GR -249 users. Here are their websites:

<http://www.cederaxarquia.org>

Centro de Desarrollo Rural de la Comarca de la Axarquía.



<http://www.cederserraniaderonda.com>

Centro de Desarrollo Rural de la Serranía de Ronda.



<http://www.guadalteba.com>

Grupo de Desarrollo Rural de la Comarca del Guadalteba.



<http://www.antequera.com/gadlcant.html>

Homepage of Grupo de Desarrollo Rural de Antequera.



<http://www.valledelguadalhorce.com>

Issues of rural development of the Valle del Guadalhorce.



<http://www.mancomunidad.org/es/inicio>

Local information of Mancomunidad de Municipios de la Costa del Sol Occidental (western Costa del Sol).



<http://www.sierranieves.com/>

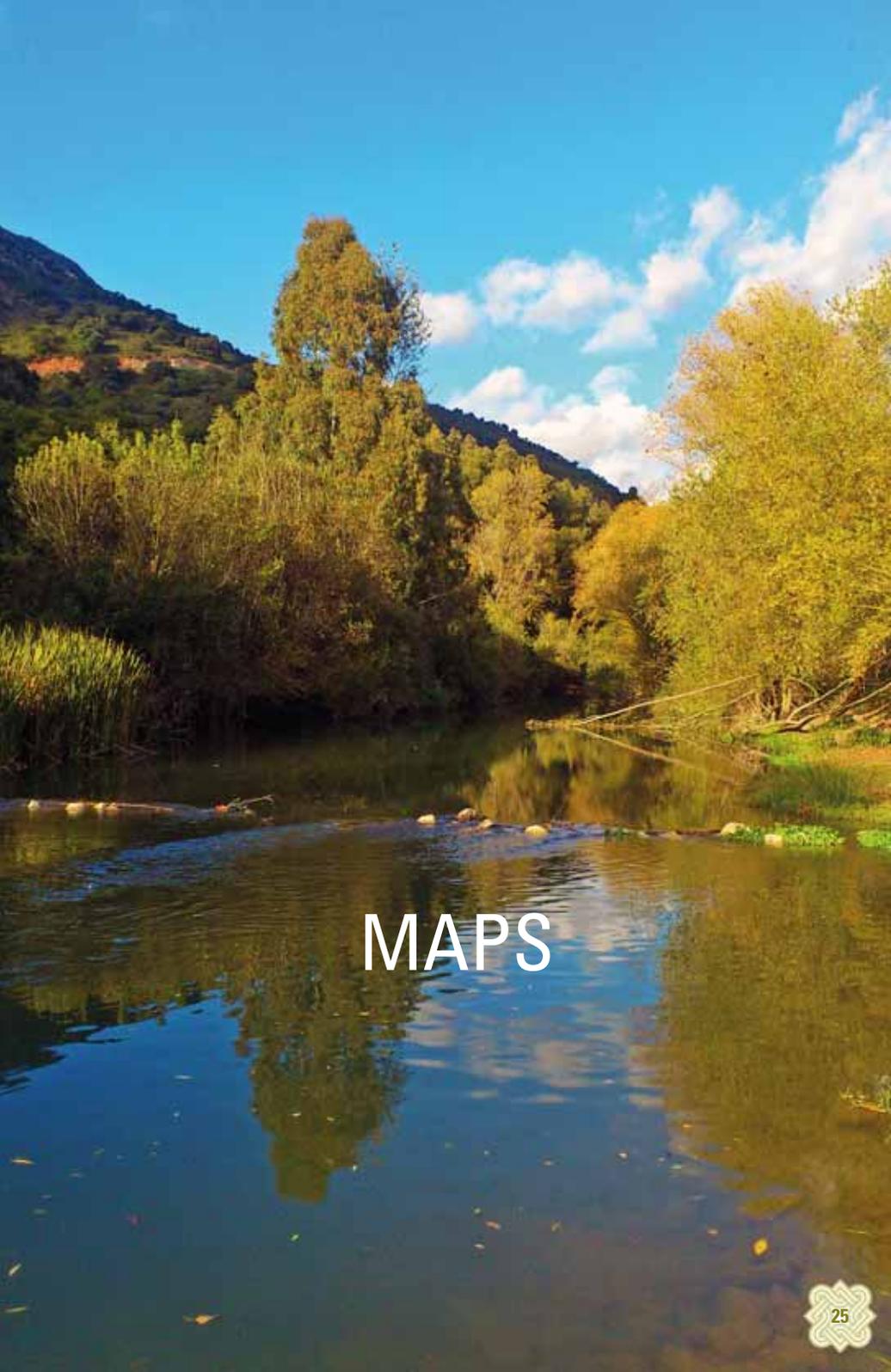
Grupo De Desarrollo Rural de la Sierra de las Nieves.



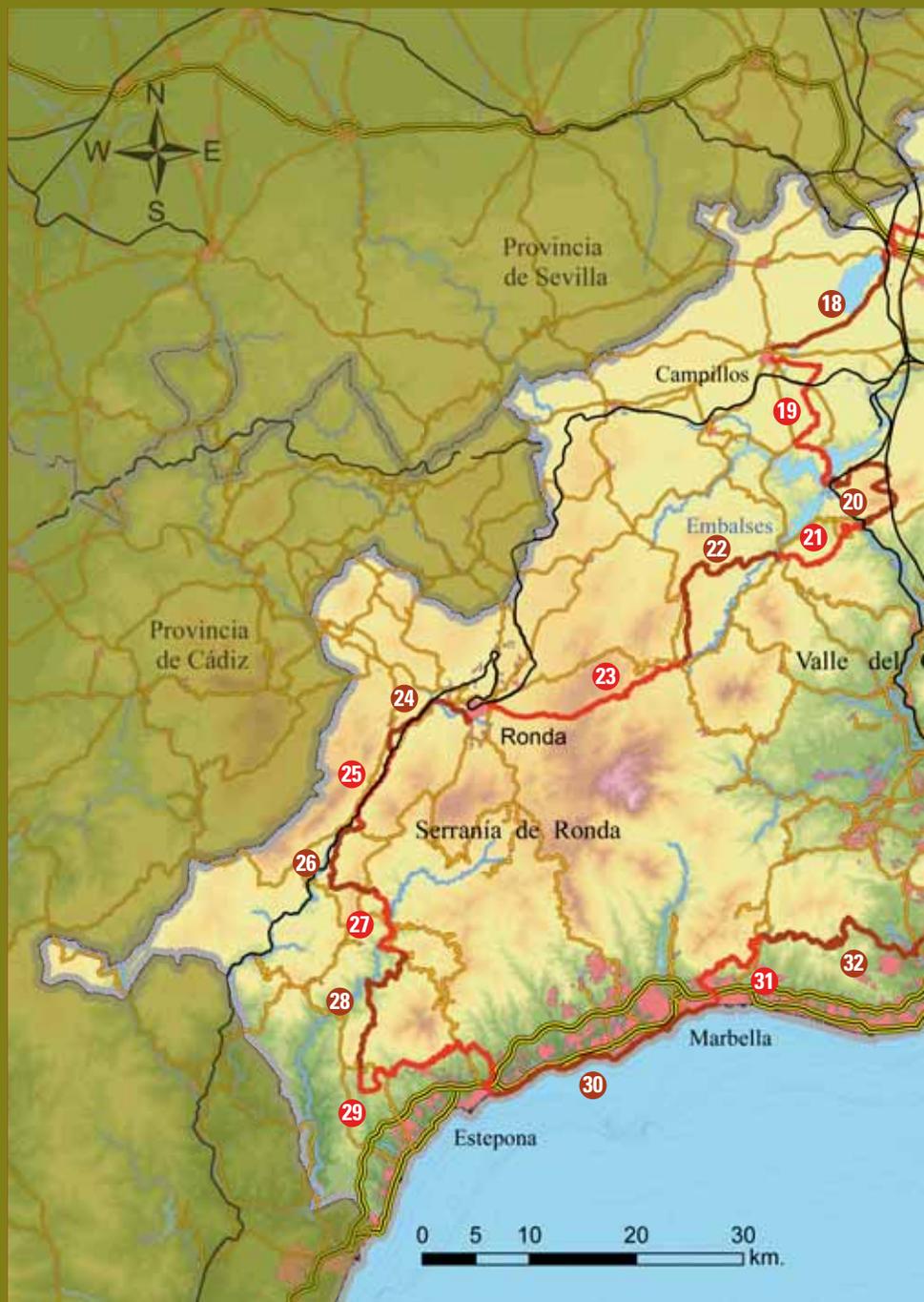
<http://www.nororma.com/>

Information on the north-west of Malaga Province.

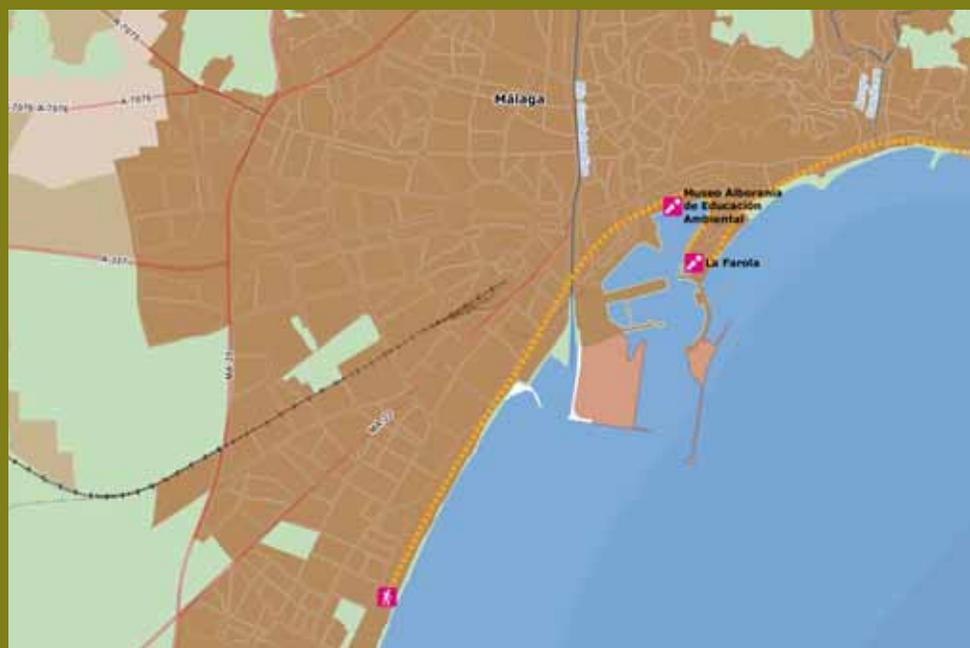




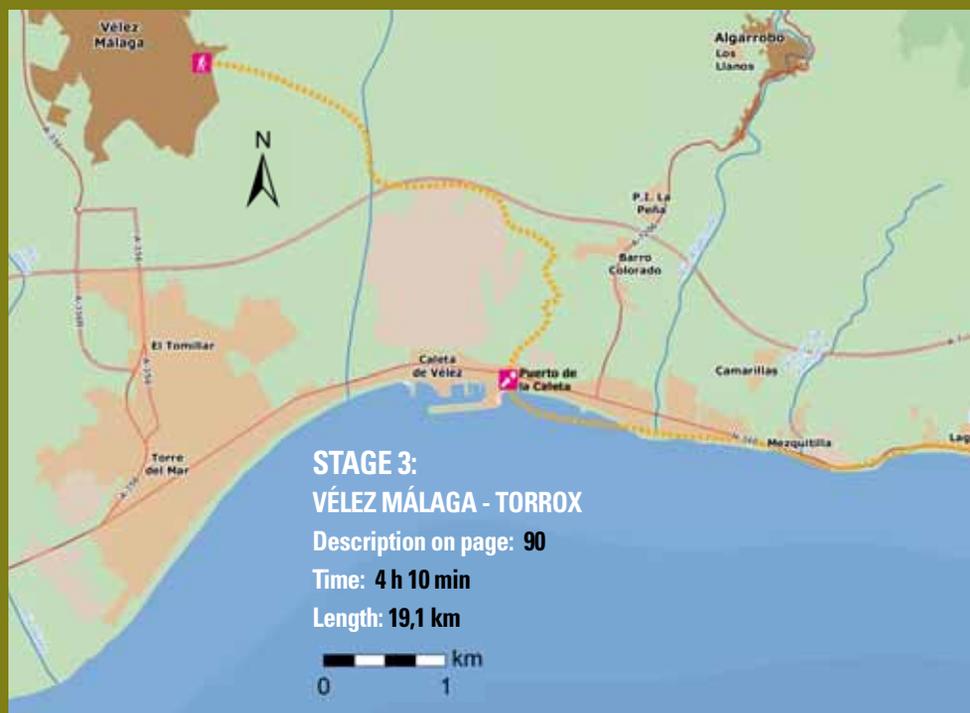
MAPS

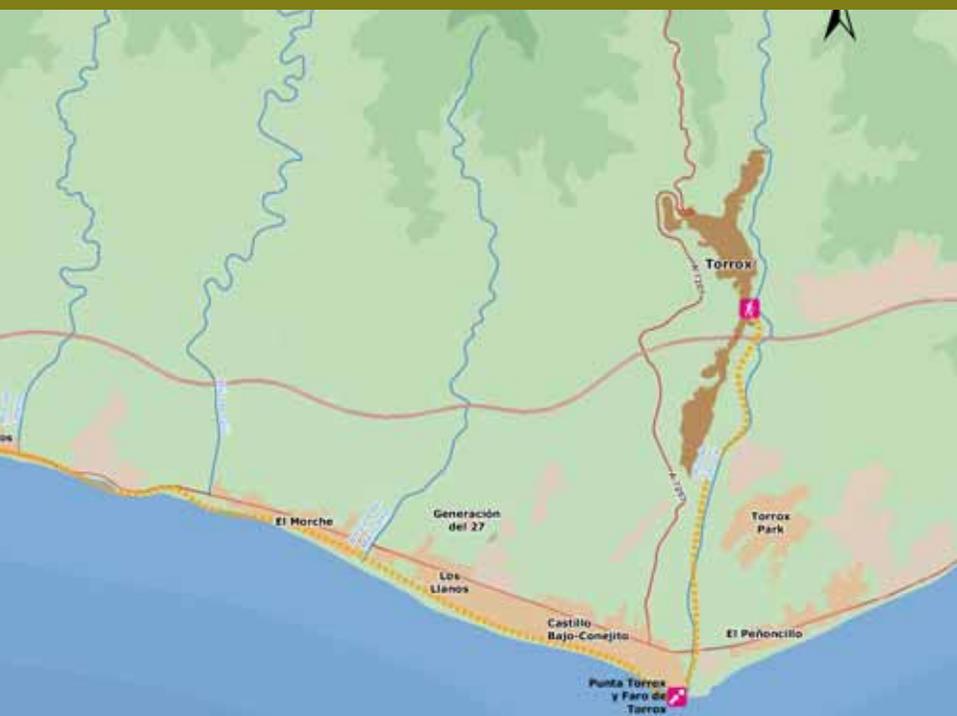




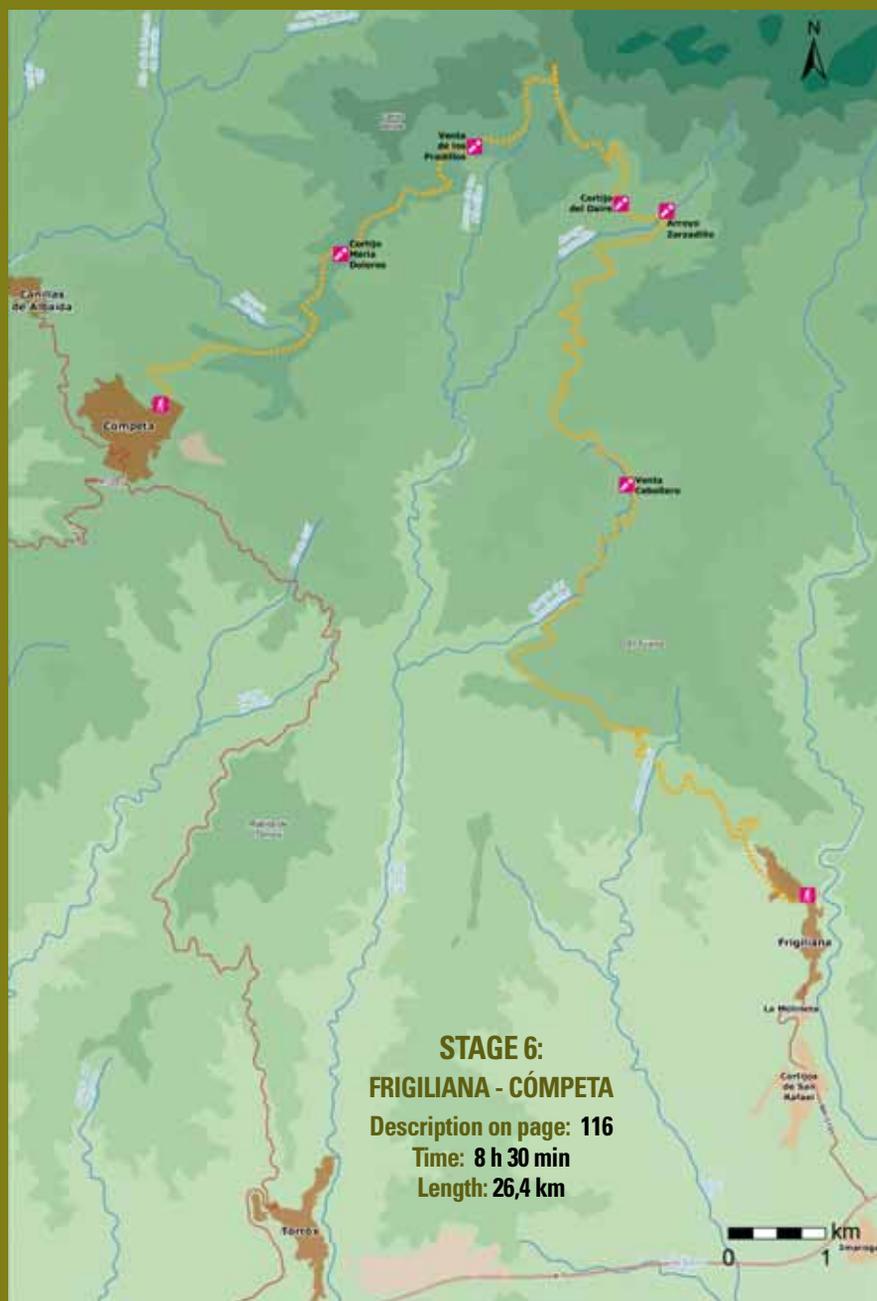


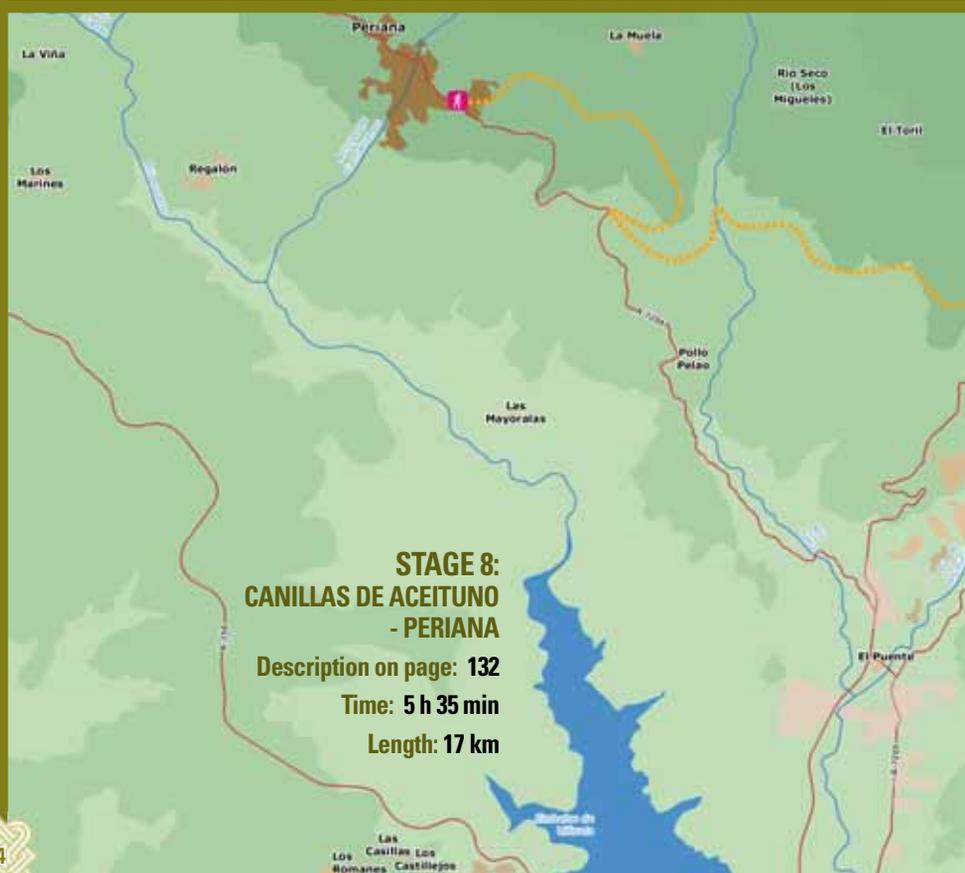


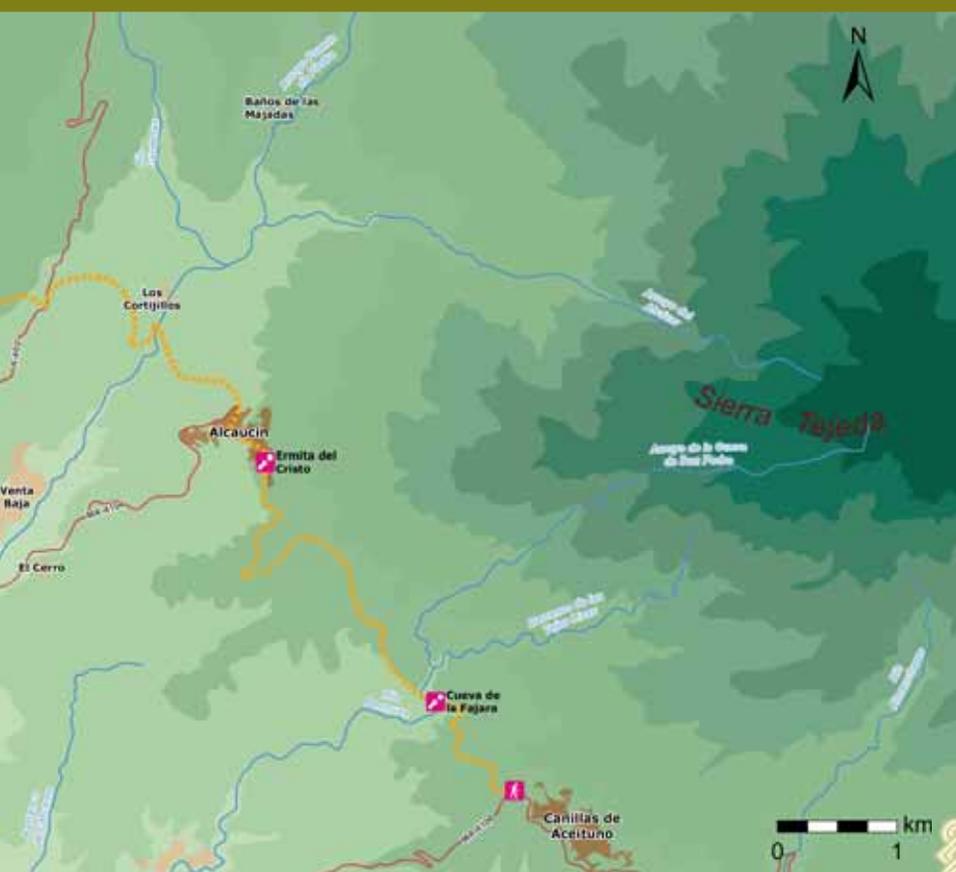
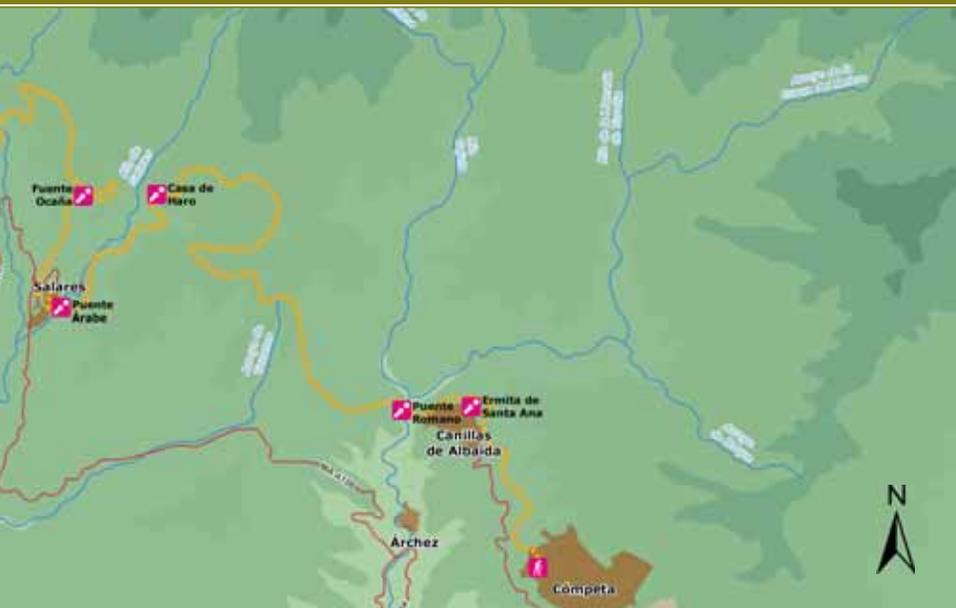












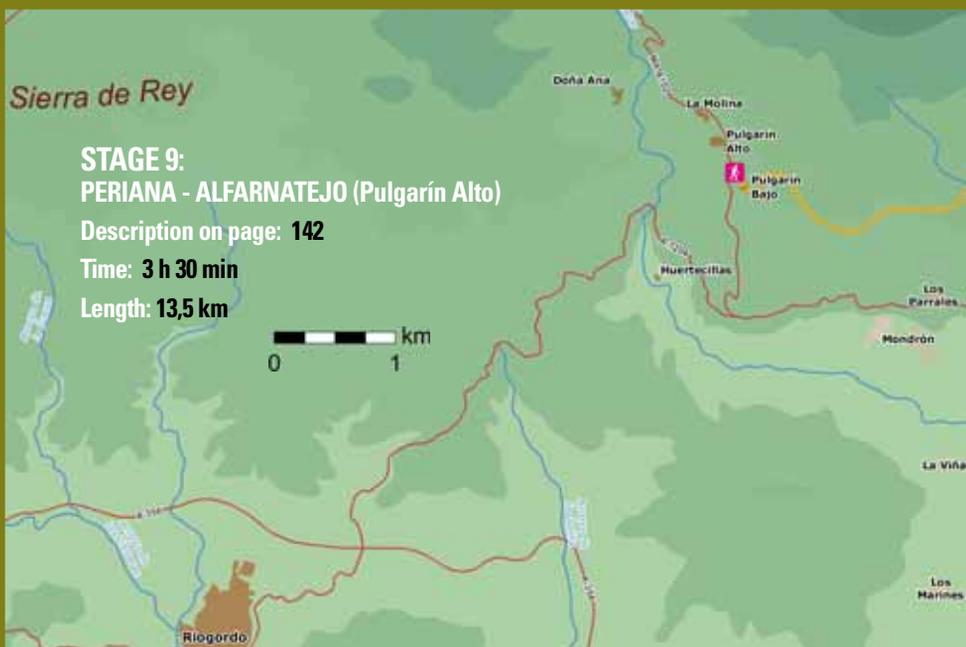
Sierra de Rey

**STAGE 9:
PERIANA - ALFARNATEJO (Pulgarín Alto)**

Description on page: 142

Time: 3 h 30 min

Length: 13,5 km



**STAGE 11:
ALFARNATE - VILLANUEVA DEL ROSARIO**

Description on page: 154

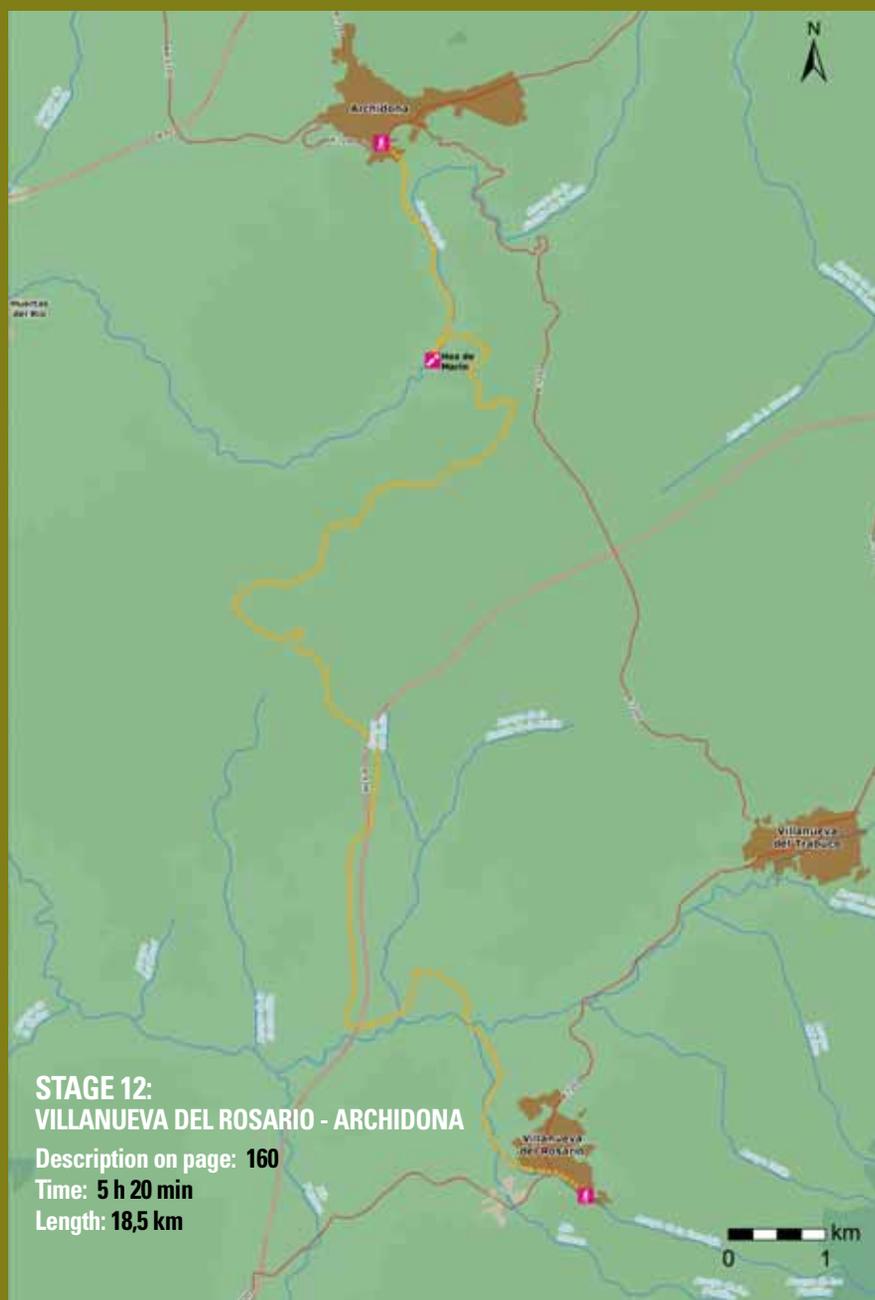
Time: 5 h 15 min

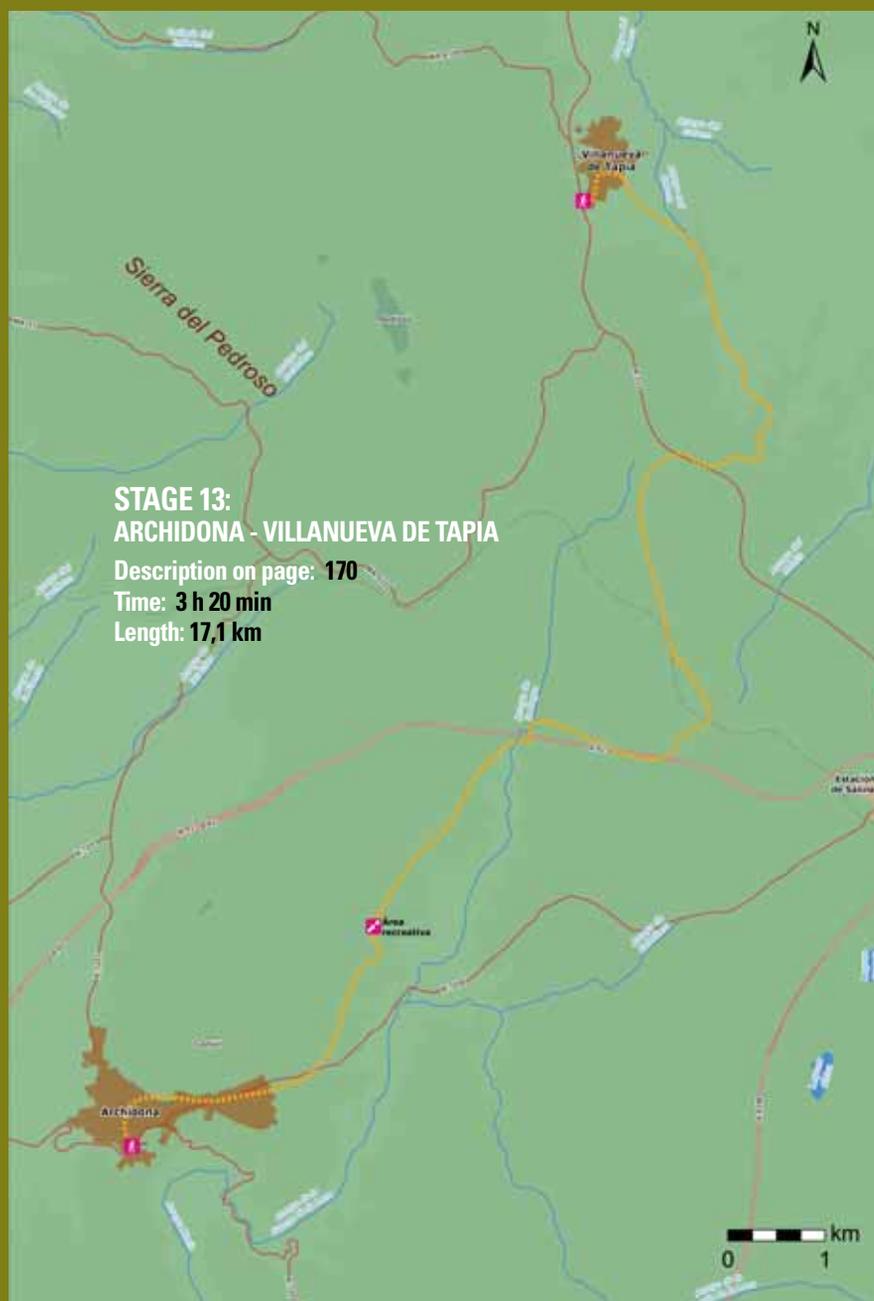
Length: 15,4 km











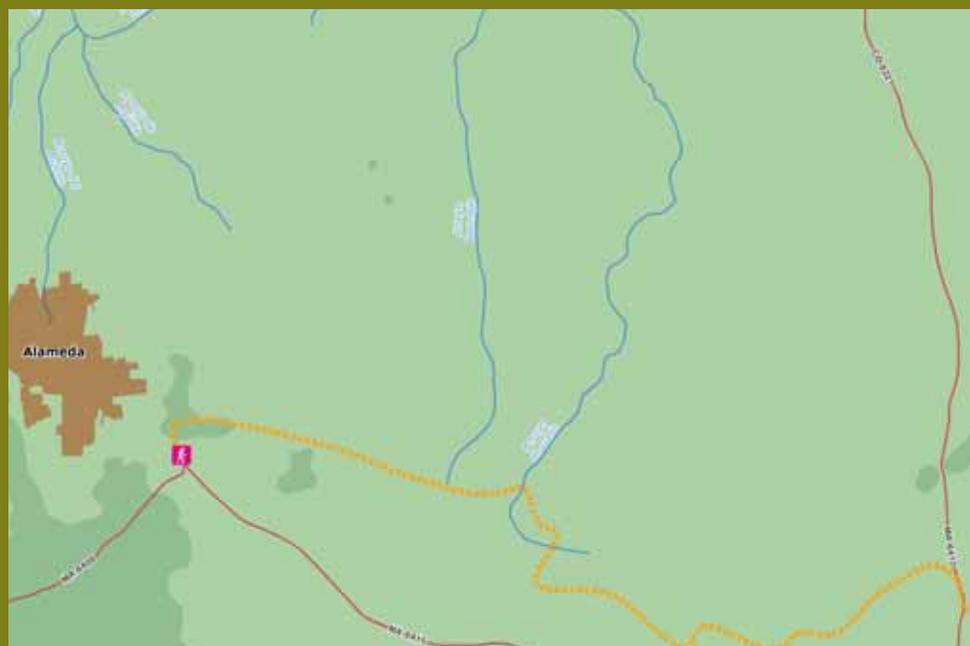
STAGE 15: VILLANUEVA DE ALGAIIDAS - CUEVAS BAJAS

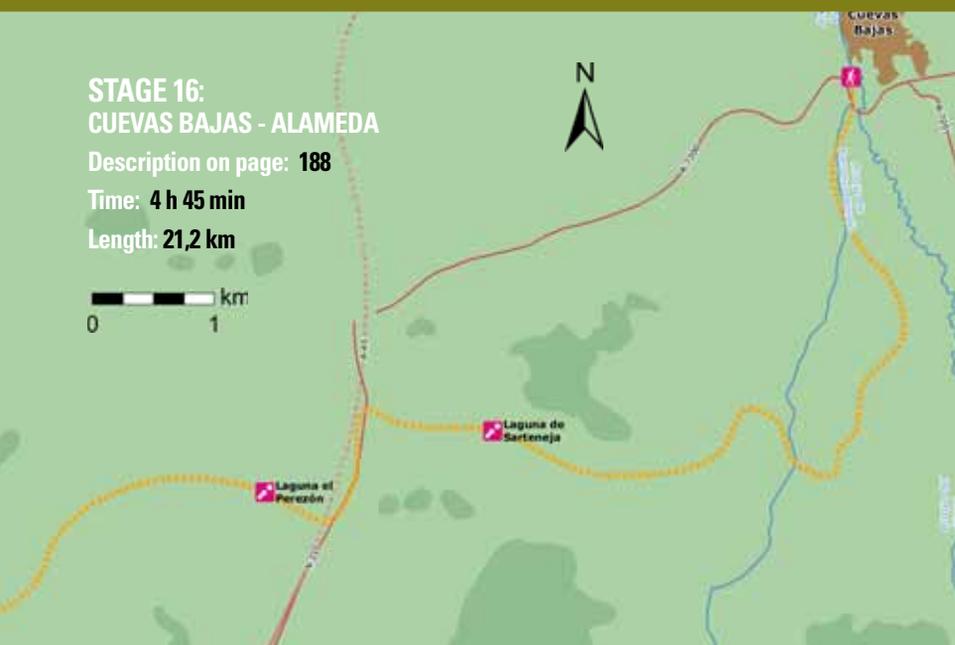
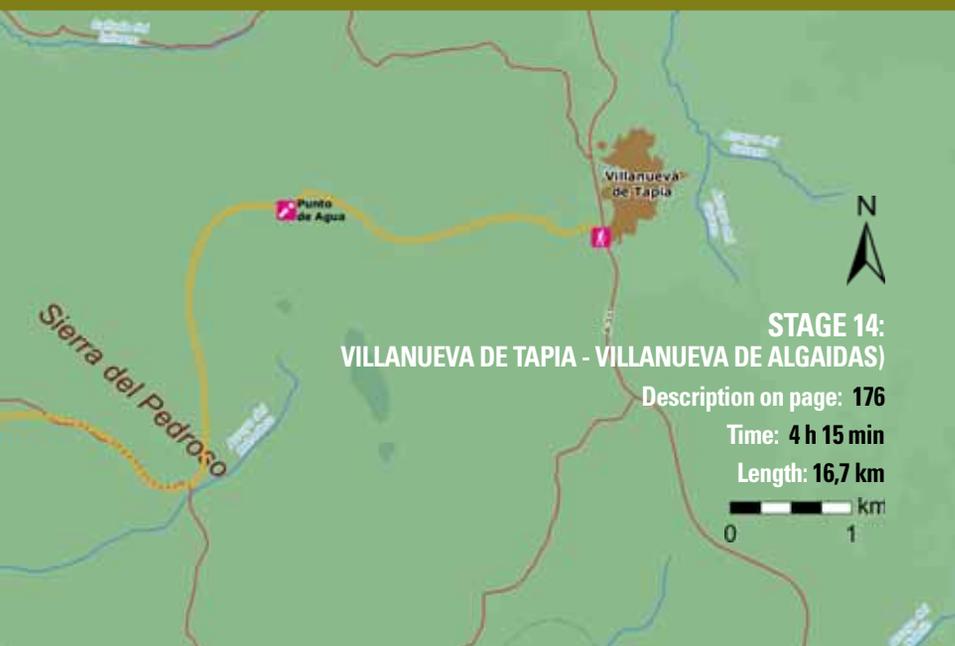
Description on page: 182

Time: 2 h 45 min

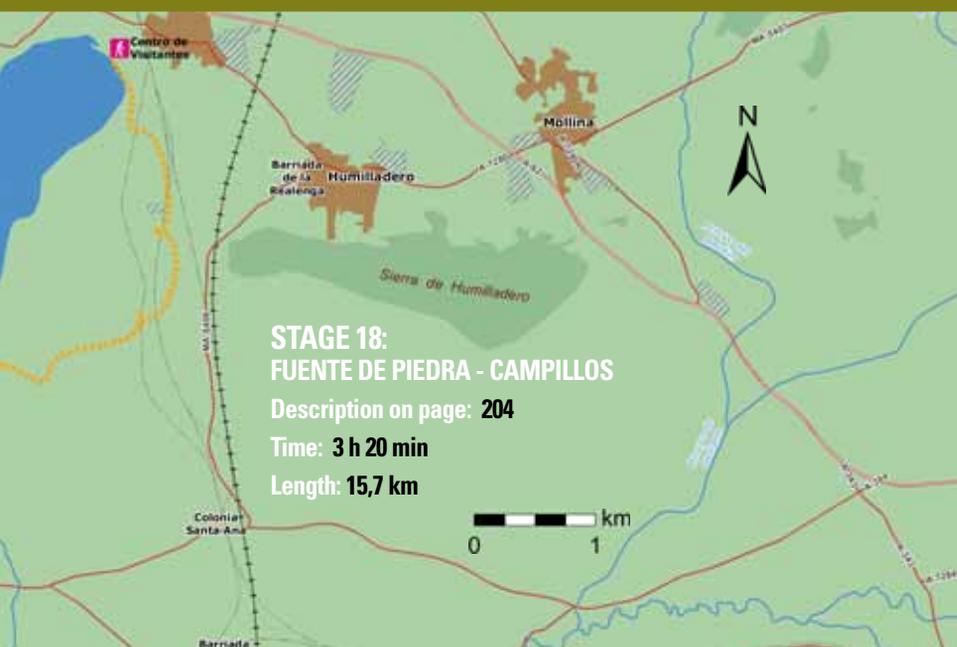
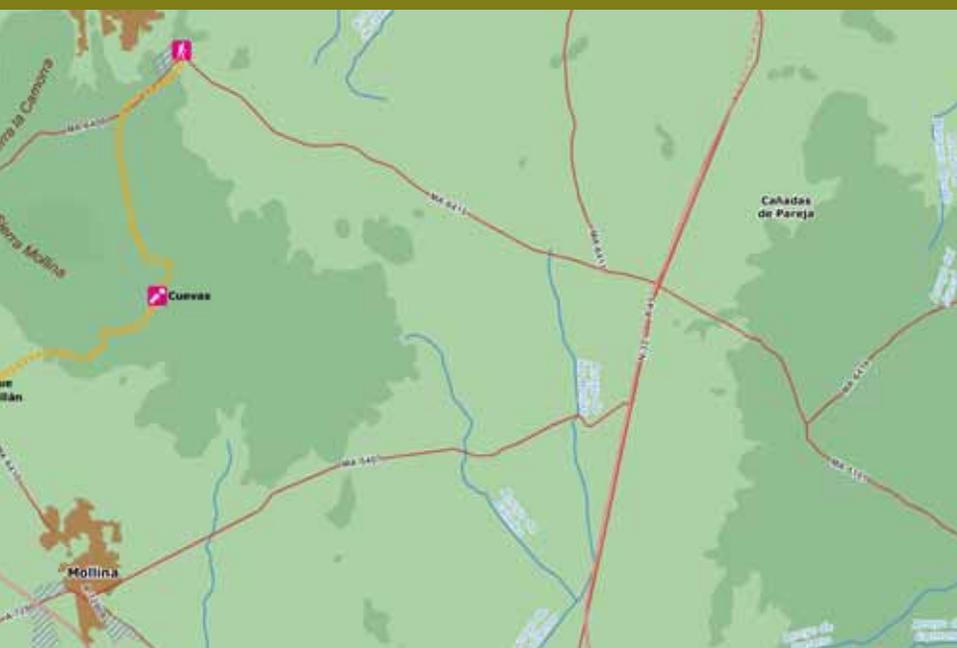
Length: 10,1 km





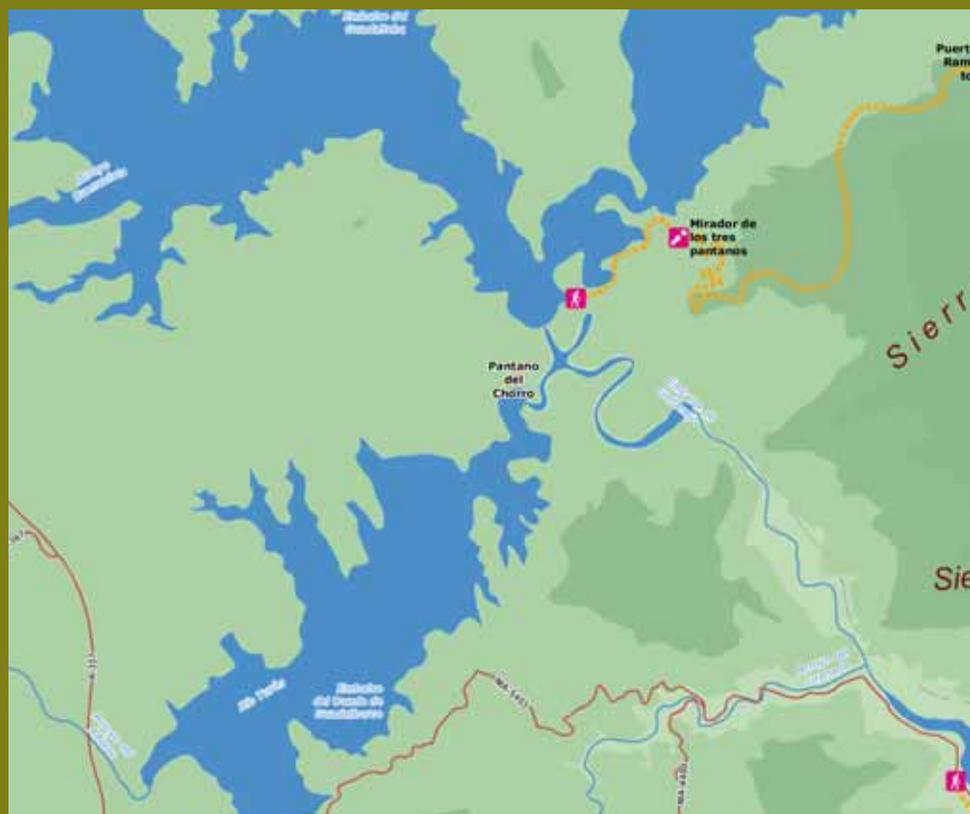












STAGE 21:
ÁLORA (Estación de El Chorro)
- ARDALES

Description on page: **228**

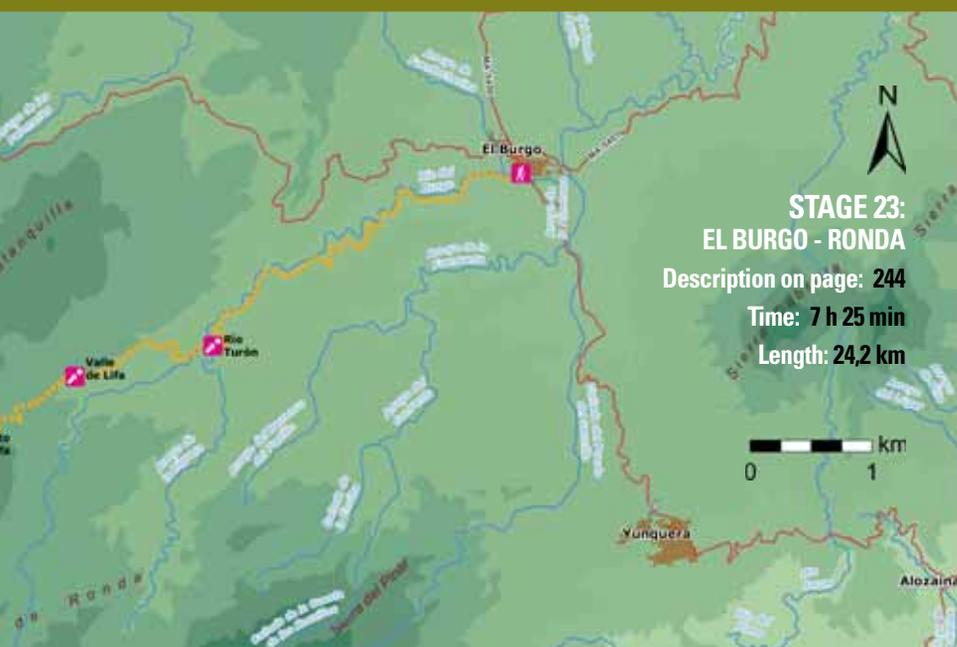
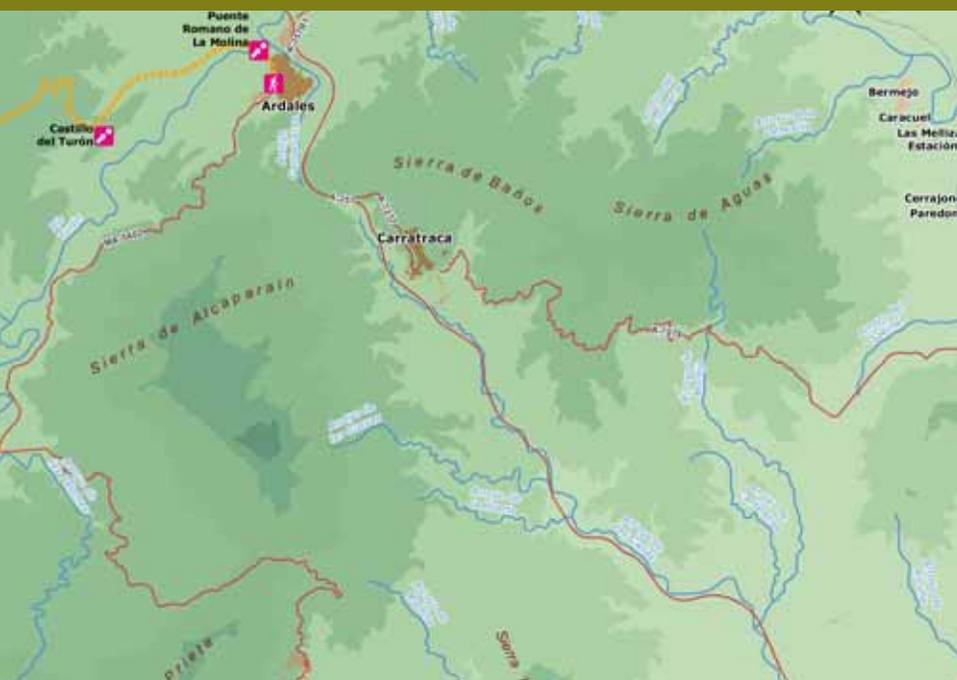
Time: **4 h 30 min**

Length: **16,5 km**

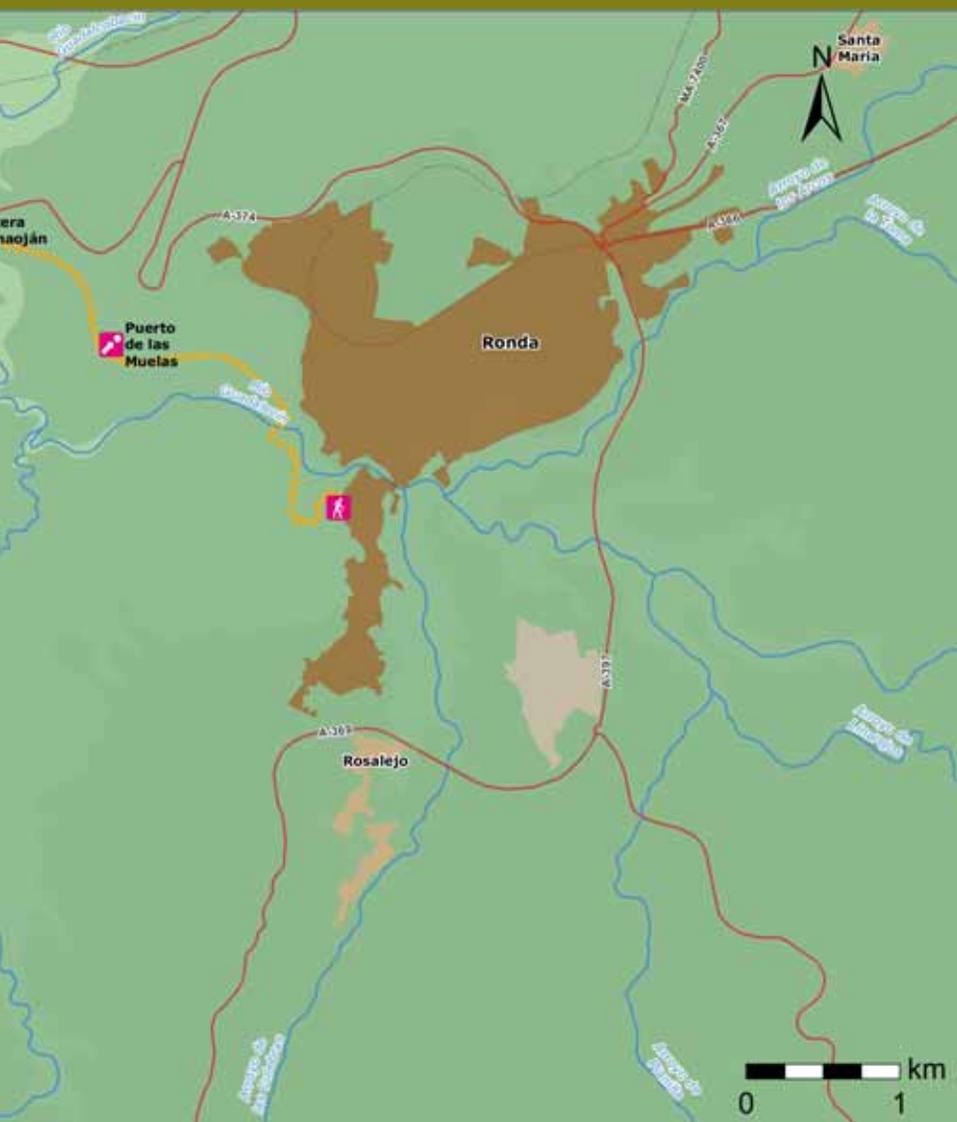
0 1 km







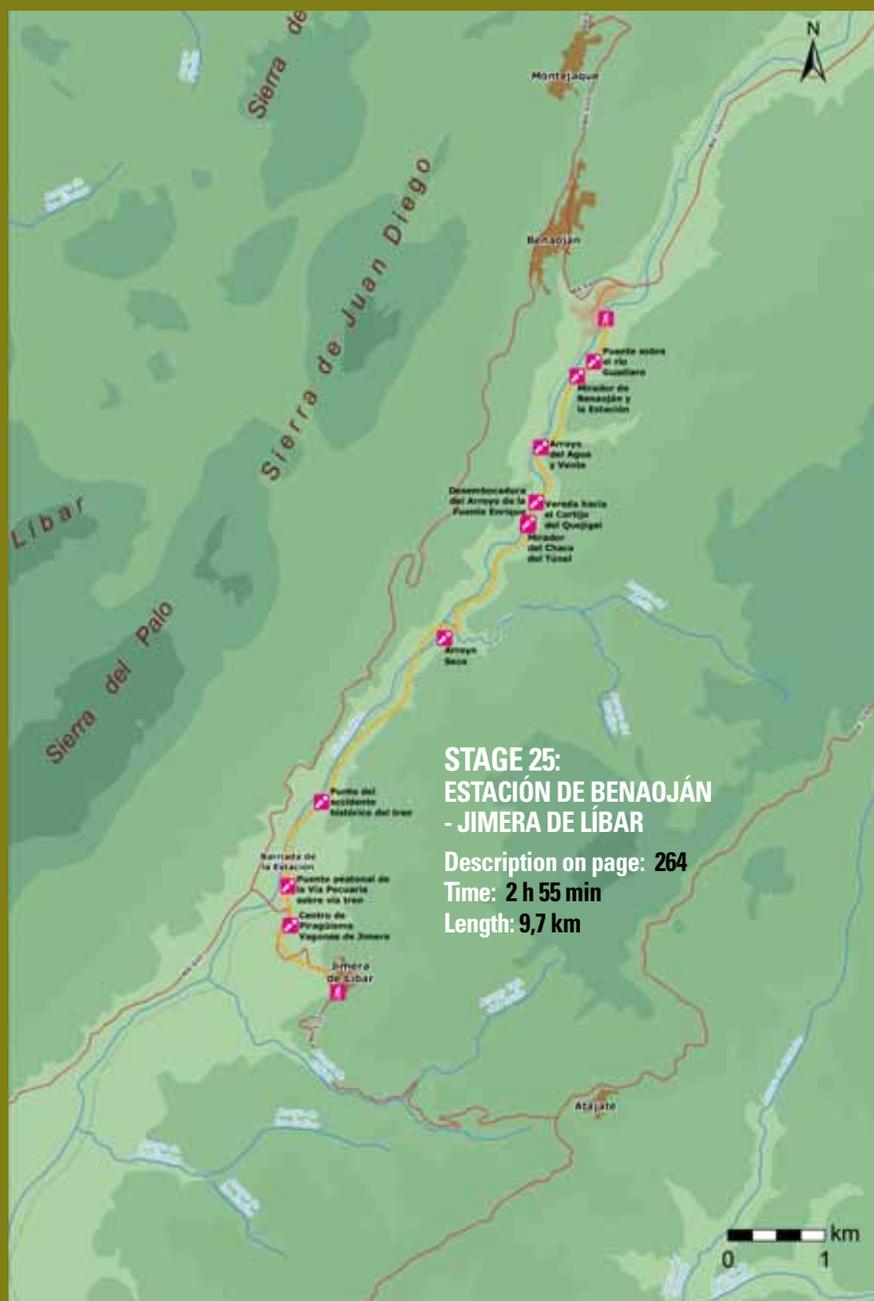




STAGE 24: RONDA - ESTACIÓN DE BENAJOÁN

Description on page: 256

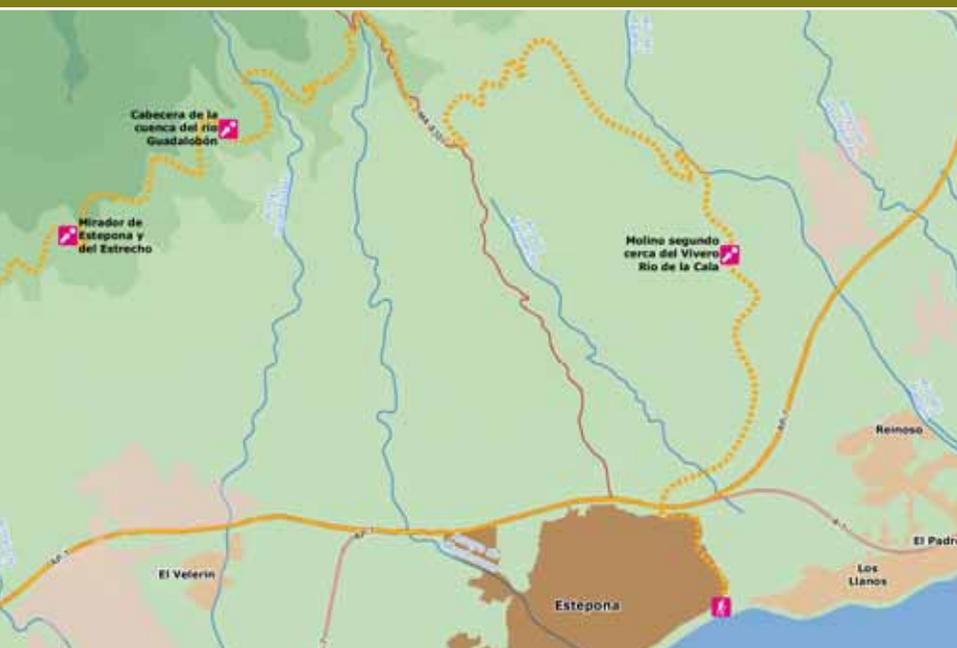
Time: 3 h 55 min • Length: 12,8 km











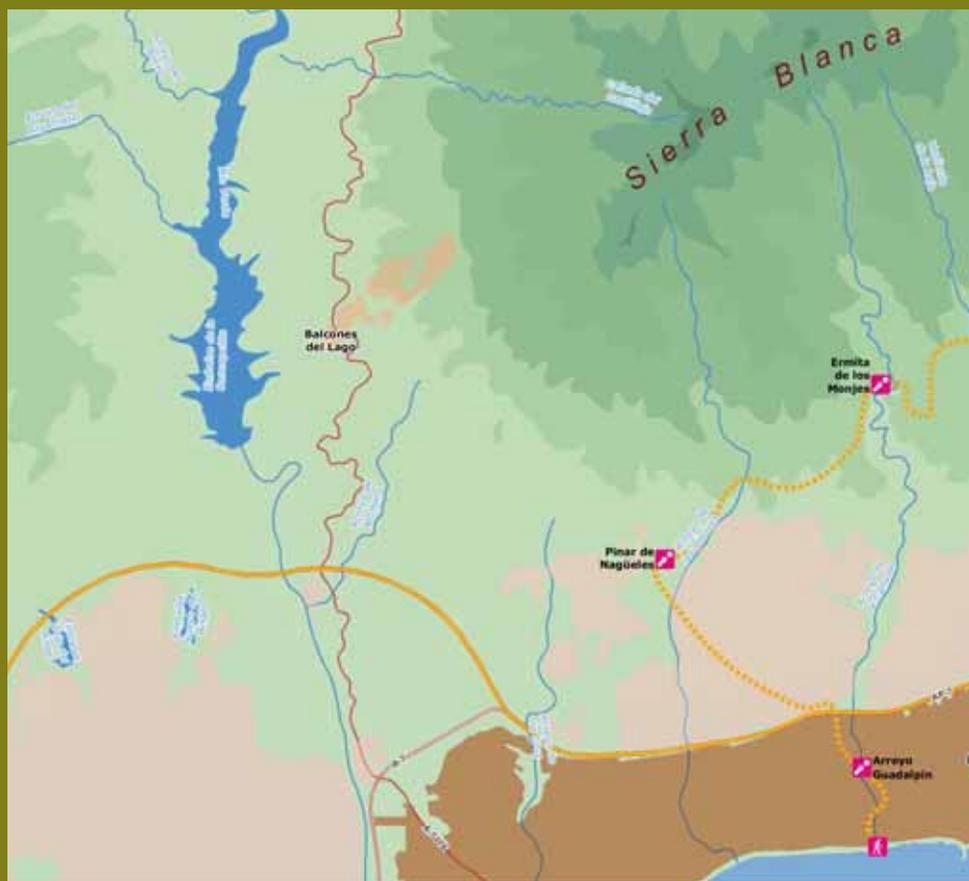
STAGE 30: ESTEPONA - MARBELLA

Description on page: 316

Time: 7 h

Length: 27,1 km





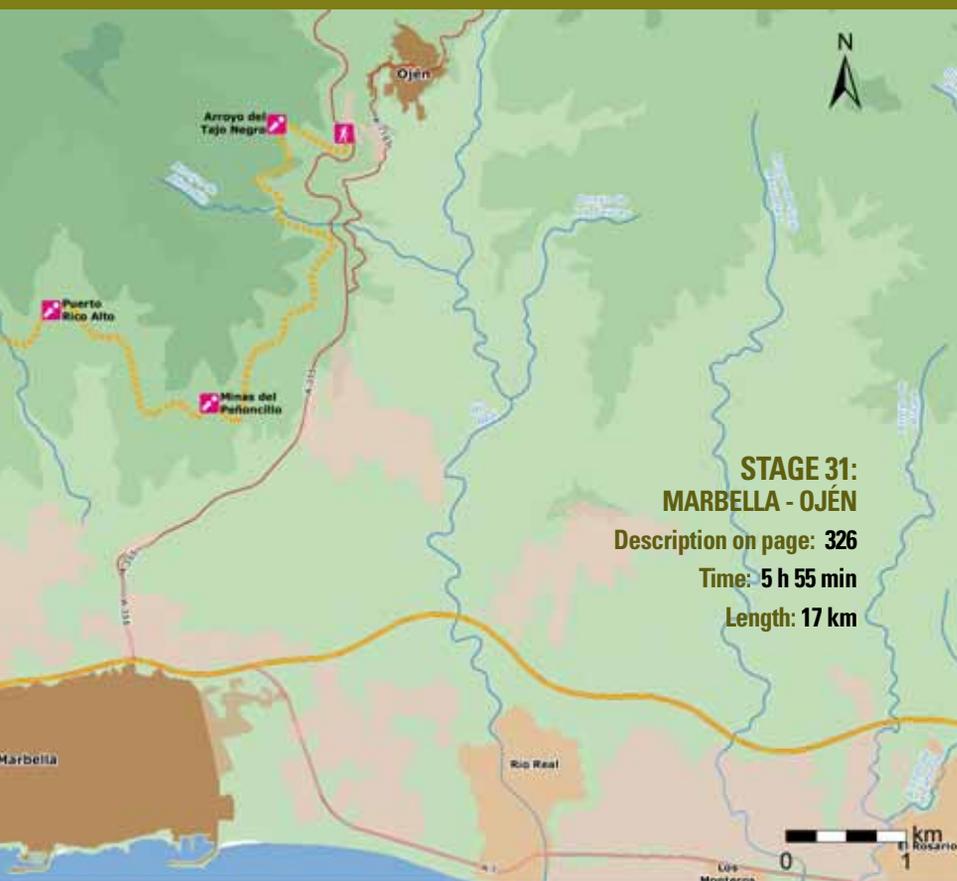
STAGE 32:

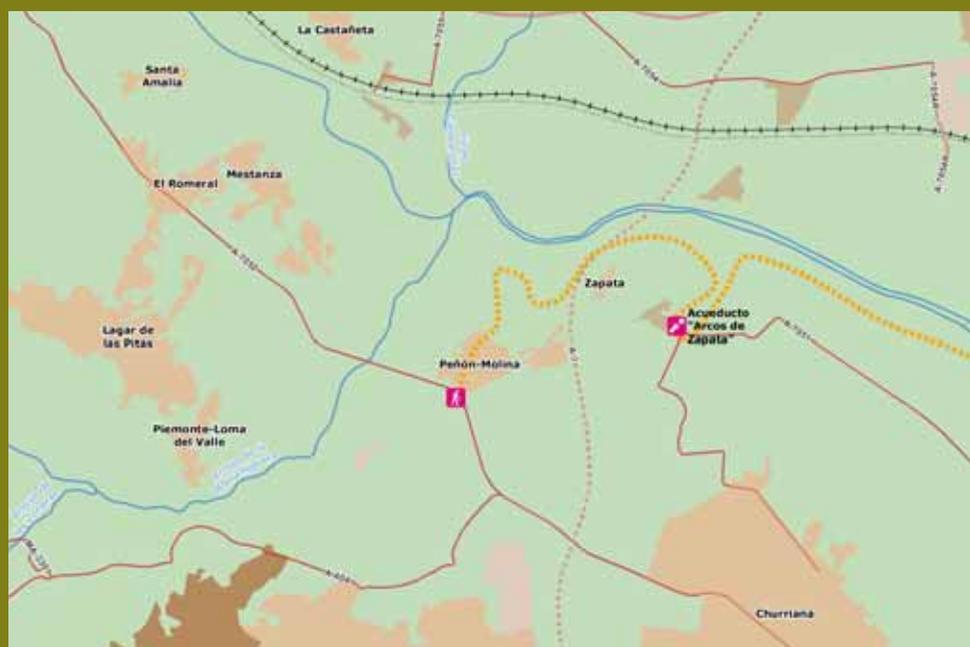
OJÉN - MIJAS

Description on page: 334

Time: 10 h 15 min

Length: 39,8 km











Traditional ploughing in the fertile plains of the Vélez River using a yoke of locally bred Payuna oxen

La Gran Senda de Málaga on the eastern Costa del Sol

The Costa del Sol to the east of the capital of the province is a long coastal sector of about 160 kilometres. The Gran Senda includes the city limits of Málaga (from the delta of The Guadalhorce River), Rincón de la Victoria, Vélez Málaga, Algarrobo, Torrox and Nerja. The itinerary cuts through each of these city limits completely and usually not far from the coast. The recent history of Málaga's east coast can be summarized in terms of a conflict between the interests of agriculture and its derivatives, metropolitan urbanising and tourism. It seems that all the planning, based on analysis of these overlapping sectors, has been carried out

according to what the circumstances allowed, if one takes into account the results. On the other hand, the Málaga territory is characteristically mountainous and this particular feature is present almost all the way down the sea shore. In fact, you will discover the Acanuilados del Cantal cliffs, and the change from coastal and mountain stages of the walk happens very close to the famous Acanuilados de Maro and Cerro Gordo cliffs. This shows the complicated geography which defines the coastal fringe of the Axarquía area.

This closeness of mountains and sea meant that the land management had to involve channelling the infrastructure through a narrow

corridor to keep the costs down. The first roads, serving the commercial traffic and people between the “vegas” of Vélez, Nerja and the capital, were laid out along the beach itself. The road known as Carretera Nacional 340 and the no longer existing Ferrocarril Suburbano railway occupied the prime locations linking the small fishing communities, squeezing around the dune systems and breaking through the rocks with ditches and tunnels.

The fertile plains along major rivers, called “vegas”, once navigable inlets, used to be covered with traditional crops such as sugar cane at the beginning of last century. Sugar cane generated a flourishing sugar business and changed completely the landscape of Axarquía. However, the phenomenon of tourism

was about to happen, having a buffering effect on that region which was altered by the almost centrifugal force of the western Costa del Sol and copied its tourist industry model. Although there are a few token golf courses in the Axarquía area, the hotels and service industry buildings have been erected very close to the sand and water to appeal to the visitors. At the turn of the century this resulted in a construction boom. As there were no more flat areas, housing estates with their road networks were distributed along the foot of mountain slopes, creating bedroom communities and commuting, a form of residential tourism.

This increasing human presence required a consistent quality water supply which was mainly addressed by creating the La Viñuela reservoir in the valley of Río Vélez, which you will be able to see from Periana while walking the GR-249. The problems of a collapsed traffic system due to traffic jams along the already extensive roads required several roundabouts in the capital city and the Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway, a huge project, which due to the geography of the area, was carried out using a system of bridges and tunnels cutting through the middle of rocky slopes. Then the lack of an adequate waste management system, for solid, and above all, liquid waste, needed addressing. This was a serious logistical problem as there were no suitable sites for water treatment plants. In the end, the “vegas” along the river housed the waste treatment facilities. Another problem constituted directing the waste towards those facilities, which required a pipe system at the foot of the beaches, and pump stations.

Former rest stop of the closed Suburban train line, now adapted to new purposes



The last protagonists in shaping the landscape to enter the stage, were the cultivated subtropical trees which had been conquering the land up the mountain slopes until they made Axarquía relevant on the international scale in this type of agricultural production. Each and every of these aspect you will be able to see along the four initial stages of the Gran Senda de Málaga; through this highly urbanised land where there are, like small islands, superb quality environmental and heritage elements.

The visitor enters a region in which they will soon come across caves and natural shelters marking the way. Given the mild climate, the shelters and caves have been inhabited and used for social and cultural activities practically without a break from the Palaeolithic era. Some of these spaces have been adapted to be used by visitors; however these places also harbour sanctuaries, which are closed to the public, containing animal life, archaeological sites and cave art. The most famous is the Cueva de Nerja, but there is also the Cantal Cave which opened recently and others such as Complejo del Humo where science and education are the main focus.

There are various archaeological sites the walk gets close to along its itinerary, from the Phoenician riverside settlements and necropolis to Roman sites, passing through castles and buildings indicating the past Muslim rule. The colossal network of coastal defensive structures deserves a special mention. Between the 16th and 18th century the network was meant to discourage raids of corsairs and pirates from North Africa and north-western Europe through numerous watchtowers and fortifications.

The geological resources of the eastern Costa del Sol are some of the values that the GR-249 will attempt to show the walkers by repeatedly taking them to sceneries displaying diversity of substrates of different age and chemical composition; shale, limestone and post-orogenic materials which have suffered from the rising and falling of sea levels in past geological eras.

Primeval nature spots are mostly confined to cliffs, dunes, beaches, fluvial valleys and estuaries. The first two types of environment harbour striking botanical species, in some cases exclusively found in this section of the coast. These plants

La Cala de Moral beach, first plan shows the breakwater where beach cliffs begin





Limonium malacitanum, a beautiful endemic in one of its favourite spots in el Cantal

fight against the dryness, instability of the beaches, and salinity of the coastal area, using ingenious biological tactics. The coastline, with a perfect layout west to east, is defined by three large coves: the Málaga cove, the Vélez cove and the Nerja cove, separated from one another by stretches of cliffs and the tops of the Torre del Mar and Torrox lighthouses.

Rivers are the great landscape designers of Axarquía. The Guadalmedina, Jaboneros, Totalán, Vélez, Algarrobo, Torrox and Chillar Rivers originate in the Central Limestone Arch and in the Sierras de Tejeda y Almijara; they outline their valleys from north to south independently from one another, and drain directly into the Mar de Alborán. The rivers, be as it may, arrive depleted of great amounts of water, but they bring sediment

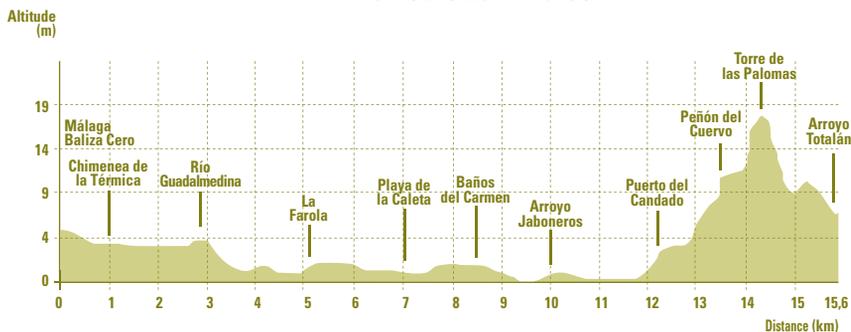
and sand with them, the main resource sought by the tourists; the beaches. The fauna and flora harboured in particular by the Vélez River also claim a growingly respectful approach from the locals and the visitors, especially such unique species as the chameleon (the area is one of its main European strongholds). Birds are a tourist attraction on their own, as well as being an educational and scientific resource.

Throughout the following four stages of the walk, the team of Gran Senda will lead the walker into the gradual discovery of this complex area, full of history and environmental value, while enjoying the 70 kilometres of earthen tracks, paths and seaside boardwalks. Let the adventure of discovering Málaga Province begin. ◉

1 MÁLAGA • RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA

The ramble begins

 ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 20 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	15.6	Accumulated ascent	40	Final altitude	7
Ascent km	2.0	Accumulated descent	35	Maximum altitude	23
Descent km	2.4	Maximum difference	23	Minimum altitude	0
Flat km	11.2	Altitude at starting point	6	Average altitude	4

» Summary of this Stage «

The first stage of the Great Path of Málaga is eastbound along the coastline towards the region of Axarquía. This is a very accessible part of the itinerary, especially because of its shortness but also because of the very few ups and downs. In order to connect western Málaga and La Cala del Moral in the Rincón de la Victoria, one must follow a gentle arch to the north and east along the borders of the Ensenada de Málaga and, of course, all through Málaga city, walking mainly along the beach boardwalks. Gradually you will start walking through the different coastal districts of Málaga, from the centre to El Palo with the traditional “chiringuitos” (beach bars) and beach restaurants with the traditional “espeteros” (long sticks full of fish or squid placed vertically close to the fire for grilling). The Almería road marks the end of this coastal landscape as Puerto de Candado port comes into view, so does the overwhelming cement factory called Cementera de la Araña, together with a few cliffs.

The road enters one of the remaining cliffs through a tunnel. In the final section the beautiful sea coves return, including the one named Peñón del Cuervo (Raven’s Rock), however the highest point here is the Las Palomas watchtower at 23 meters high. The walk continues alongside the 340 Carretera Nacional road on its right shoulder and stops next to the limestone cliffs of the Cala de Moral at the small bridge which takes you safely to the other side of the Arroyo Totalán stream which constitutes the border between city limits of Málaga and Rincón de la Victoria.

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
1	1	1	2	10.3	4.4	0.9	x 0

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

At the very beginning Gr-249 offers the possibility of exploring practically the entire coastal fringe of the capital. After a long period of being forgotten, Málaga of the 21st century welcomed the new millennium by opening up towards the Mediterranean Sea, the sea which has always lent Málaga its status of an important city. Various projects show this new focus on the port area, sparking many controversies at the same time; the walk subsequently takes you through these new areas. Meanwhile, the Guadalmedina River has been waiting its turn to claim its importance from an environmental and public use point of view, which it fully deserves as one of the great backbones of the city.

The planning model of this part of the western Málaga coast has been modified over many years and in this way Málaga's identity of a fishing centre has been preserved, the identity which has given the city a way to exist whilst adapting to a new reality. The walker has a chance to see such iconic places as the port and the lighthouse, the beaches of La Calera, Pedregalejo and El Palo, and the numerous "chiringuitos", traditional beach bars which are also trying to find their place and a new look at the beginning of this century.

The last part of the itinerary of Stage 1 holds a few surprises of a different nature, from unspoilt wildlife sites harbouring exclusive botanical species to the perfectly preserved medieval beacon towers, through industrial buildings at the foot of the beach or enchanting secluded beach coves.

- **Starting point:** Kilometre Zero at the Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas in Málaga.
- **Access to starting point:** Málaga can be reached by the Autovía Del Mediterráneo, the Mediterranean motorway following direction east-southeast. There are motorways leading from the north towards the Antequera region and the rest of the capitals of the Andalusian provinces: the A-45 and AP-46, passing through the Puerto de las Pedrizas. Coming from the Guadalteba and Serranía de Ronda regions, take the A-357 direction west.
- **Finish point:** Bridge over the stream in La Cala del Moral, a town in Rincón de la Victoria.
- **Access to finish point:** Rincón de la Victoria is located between the N-340 coastal motorway and the A-7S ring road. Here the MA-24 branches off in the direction of Rincón de la Victoria or La Cala del Moral, the latter marking the end of Stage 1.
- **Possible "escape routes":** At all times it is possible to abandon the itinerary and head straight down towards the N-340 using any of beach access roads. The N-340 is a coastal road which offers intercity bus stops and other city services.
- **No return point:** You are close to being halfway through Stage 1 in Los Baños del Carmen. Considering the many possible "escape routes" before you reach Los Baños del Carmen, it is reasonable to keep walking from this point rather than trying to return.
- **Maps:** The first part of the stage is covered by map **1053-III** (Málaga). At the kilometre 11.2 you must change maps to the **1053-IV** (Rincón de la Victoria).
- **District boundaries:** The whole of Stage 1 leads through Málaga city limits, up to El Arroyo Totalán at the finish point (km 15.6) where you enter the city limits of Rincón de la Victoria.



Close to Km Zero, a sculpture spelling *La Misericordia*

• Enjoy the walk safely

The first stage poses very few potential dangers. All stream crossings are done using bridges; pedestrians have the right of way on the various “Paseos Marítimos”, the beach promenades. Normally you should not have any problems getting drinking water; there are some public drinking fountains available on the way. As you leave the El Palo beaches behind, you are walking along the shoulder of the N-340, which is narrow especially if you encounter a cyclist, which is a possibility.

Finally, the cultural landmark, Las Palomas watchtower at the Acantilados del Cantal cliffs, has no protective railings (at the time of writing this guide). There is a steep drop on the southern side of the tower. Take extreme caution while taking pictures.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-92 or E-12 (Senda del Mediterráneo) runs in stages through the Province of Málaga, and one of those stages, about 167 kilometres long, leads through this area. The part which coincides with the GR-249 starts at El Arroyo Totalán and ends at the famous Málaga lighthouse. Logically, the waymarking of the Malaga province GR takes you in the opposite direction to the GR-249.

The capital offers a couple of useful Pequeño Recorrido (PR, short distance) footpaths which give you a good idea of the hilly countryside around you. One of them is the PR A-114 Ciudad

Jardín Puerto de la Torre, 17 kilometres long, one way. The path was adapted in 2012 and it starts in the city. The start and finish points are connected by the city bus network and both points connect with the GR-249. The PR’s attractions include unusual views of the city and the Agujero and Limonero Reservoirs.

At km 4.3 of the main itinerary, at the level of the Málaga Port, there is another public walk, the A-119 PR Sendero del Mirador. It begins at the Ayuntamiento (City Hall) and

is somewhat longer, about 26 kilometres, also it is a bit more demanding than the previously mentioned PR as it leads up to Montes de Málaga. This walk is appealing because of the sea views over the Mar de Alborán, the opportunity of walking up to the Parque Natural de los Montes de Málaga and the descent amongst the old mills through the valley of the Arroyo de Jaboneros. After 10 kilometres of walking, in the delta of the Jaboneros Stream, the PR and the GR connect again.

There are a couple of important historical references which should be mentioned. There used to be two ways to travel east out of Málaga which faced many construction difficulties due to the mountainous nature of the east coast. One was the Carretera de Almería, a scene of bloody historical events in the past, as referred to by a quite vague information panel found between El Puerto del Candado and El Peñon del Cuervo. The other was the Tren Litoral, coastal train which led out of Málaga, ran along the coast through tunnels and across bridges and then climbed to Vélez Málaga up to Boquete de Zafarraya to continue to Granada Province. The train line was built by the Suburban Railway Company of Málaga at the beginning of the last century. The old station of origin was an eclectic two-toned building at the entrance to Málaga port from the Plaza de la Marina.

The GR-249 passes this historical building which nowadays houses the Instituto de Estudios Portuarios, and this isn’t the last time the walk will follow the now non-existent train lines.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER



The Málaga Cathedral and the new boardwalk as seen from the port

The main watercourse of Stage 1 is the Guadalmedina River, which crosses the walk at the very start of the journey. Originally the river was known as the Río de la Ciudad, the City River, and indeed Málaga has been built on both sides of it. The river reaches the sea in the western part of the port, practically in the city centre. Málaga and its river have shared a difficult past and despite recent efforts, there is still no solution of how to integrate the river into the modern city combining conservation and exploitation. The Guadalmedina has its source in the Sierra de Camarolos in Central Limestone Arch, El Arco Calizo Central, and flows south along the Natural Park of the Montes de Málaga on its left side. This Natural Protected Area was created when pine trees were planted as part of a reforestation and water conservation plan, which also included construction of dams and two reservoirs: El Agujero and El Limonero.

The plan was triggered by the violent flooding in September 23, 1907, which resulted in many deaths and extensive property damage. This was just one of the last in the series of events caused by deforestation. An additional problem was the necessity to abandon the hillside plots dedicated to vine

growing due to the epidemic of phylloxera. Growing vines was the main force behind the nineteenth century Málaga's economy, with additional profits coming from marketing as well as selling the main product. Today the whole length of Guadalmedina is channelled as it crosses Málaga and the river harbours small numbers of fish where it is deep enough. This does not always happen as the river climbs for nearly 50 kilometres. The river runs through fragments of galleried woods, remnants of what the river banks should look like. From the bridge across the access motorway to the port, between Puente del Carmen and the railroad, it is easy to find large mullet fish browsing around in the still waters of the delta as well as some sea birds seemingly not bothered by the traffic noise.

Other watercourses which cross the Gran Senda de Málaga at this stage are smaller, however they form an integral part of the city's fabric.

El Arroyo Toquero flows into the sea at La Caleta and it is barely perceptible to the walker. Next you will pass by the Arroyo Jaboneros,

A fisherman at Los Baños del Carmen and the Malagueta beaches in the background



which comes from Los Montes de Málaga. The riverbed is quite wide; however there has still been some flooding, especially during torrential rains. From the bridge across the stream you can make out in the distance El Monte San Antón, a limestone outcrop which is quite iconic to the “malagueños”. There are a few reed beds and small clumps of tamarisk here and there; little more can be sustained in the stream delta due to its entirely urban character. The bank of the watercourse is used as a footpath, the PRA-119 and a place to stroll or walk your dog.

El Arroyo de Gálica, its waters significantly reduced during the summer season, flows into the sea at the El Palo beaches, while the Judío stream ends at the Peñon del Cuervo. Both streams trickle off the shale slopes that the Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway cuts through; this gives the names of the streams some exposure, as the high road bridges have been named after them.

El Arroyo Totalán marks the end of Stage 1 of the walk and the start of the city limits of Rincón de la Victoria. It is quite a long watercourse which comes from the Totalán village (named after the stream) in the Axarquía region and then flows through the district of the Málaga

Los Baños del Carmen



province area called Olías. The vegetation along the stream delta consists of thick cane and of some tree copses upstream. On the right bank of the delta, bordered by the N-340 road, there are a few reddish limestone outcrops whose origins partially stem from cliffs shaped by marine environment and gullies carved out by flowing water. The outcrops have been used by a rock-climbing school.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the Gran Senda de Málaga passes over, from time to time, waste water channels leading from Málaga city. The proximity of houses to the coast calls for the use of 26 pump stations to carry the waste water up to the two main water treatment facilities situated on the left bank of the Guadalhorce (quite close to the start of Stage 1) and at the Peñon del Cuervo (km 13.3) about a kilometre inland along the Arroyo del Judío valley. Drinking water management in Málaga is completed at the main stations for drinking water Estaciones Potabilizadores El Atabal, Limoneros y Pilones, which store drinking water mainly from the three El Chorro reservoirs, from La Viñuela in La Axarquía and the Concepcion one in Marbella.

Arroyo Jaboneros and Monte de San Antón



WALK DESCRIPTION

» The urban coast

Kilometre Zero is at the Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas, in the vicinity of Diputación Provincial de Málaga, the sundial and the sign for La Misericordia beach, named after the nearby hospice, Casa de la Misericordia, Asilo Provincial y Hospicio. An institution which dates back at this location to the beginnings of the 21st century, which also served as a hospital during the Moroccan war and as the Málaga Provincial Council job training centre for the children from the working class project in Huelin district.

This above mentioned district stretches to the east and it owes its name to a British descendant Eduardo Huelin Reissig who built a village to house the workers of his sugar cane factory. However, the factory chimneys at this point are evidence of the past existence of La Ferrería de Constancia, an ingenious manufacture related to the steel and iron industry, supplied with iron ore from the Sierra Blanca in Marbella. One of these chimneys is visible at the beginning of the walk and it is the tallest one of the Málaga coast at a height of 104 metres and known as Chimenea del Plomo (Lead Chimney) named after the lead smelting factory "Los Guindos" which was located below, or the Mónica chimney, named after a painting and a lovely story left on the chimney by a love struck man in 1993.

The Huelin neighbourhood and its beaches witnessed the industrial eruption in Málaga when textile, flour, tobacco and railroad factories were opened. Nowadays this is just another residential area and its main feature is the park El Parque del Oeste. The beach is famous for a fun event which is enjoyed both by locals and visitors: the so-called Melillero Wave, a surprising phenomenon for the normally calm

sea, caused by the passing ferry headed for Melilla or Ceuta.

The Paseo Marítimo promenade, named after Málaga's celebrity Antonio Banderas, continues under the name of Antonio Molina who came from the Huelin district. Then a recently opened path to the right, between the two chimneys, leads to Monumento al Espetero, a monument dedicated to the Costa del Sol's traditional work of grilling sea food on long sticks. Next, along the Paseo de Antonio Machado, having crossed the train line which comes into the port, cross the somewhat neglected Guadalmedina river (km 2.9), pass by the monuments to Torrijos and Cenachero and Estación Suburbana de Autobuses at the Muelle Heredia and arrive at the symbol of Málaga's new image, el Palmeral de las Sorpresas. The port, having been opened to the city, has lent the place a new kind of sense of space and clarity, as proved by the hundreds of passersby strolling underneath the awning and along the two piers Muelle Uno and Muelle Dos.



Sierra de Mijas from El Palo beach



Kilometre mark on the N-340

In the Palmeral de las Sorpresas on Muelle 2 there is the Aula del Mar, opened in 1989 in a space provided by the Guild of Fishermen. It has become an institution on the Andalusian coast thanks to the activities related to environmental education, conservation of coastal ecosystems and the recovery of marine species, especially turtles and cetaceans. They currently manage the Alborania Museum, which is highly recommended.

It is worth a detour to see the only lighthouse in Spain with a feminine name: La Farola instead of the usual masculine El Faro; abandon the northeast direction and head south to the Espigón del Puerto which cuts into the Alborán Sea. This is a good spot to gaze at the most popular Málaga view: the oblong shape of the Alcazaba, La Coracha and the Castillo de Gibralfaro leaning against the Cathedral, popularly known as “La Manquita”.

At the Paseo Marítimo de la Farola a sign indicates the beginning of the GR-92 E-12 while our GR takes you along the pavements and the different levels of the Paseo Marítimo leading you along close to the sand. From the Playa de la Malagueta continue to La Caleta beach (where you follow the road

as it veers eastward). At the Pedregalejo beach, you can visit another historical place; its restoration project is currently generating intense discussions amongst politicians and citizens alike; Los Baños del Carmen. This Marine Spa with its exceptional location in an extensive wooded area can be found at km 8.6 and it takes you almost immediately to another local symbol, the Nereo shipyard.

Just before the start of the Paseo Marítimo del Pedregal (the walk swerves to get to the beach and passes it on the right) are the old dry docks, centuries-old workshops, a museum and an Escuela Taller (a training workshop). In 2008 the Ministry of Culture declared the carpentry of the beaches of Ribera de las Playas de Pedregalejo as part of Andalusian historical heritage. One of the craft's star achievements are the jábega boats, traditional fishing boats whose shape and decoration suggest Phoenician origins and which can still be seen navigating the eastern coasts of Málaga.

The embankment of the old railway line reveals the geological composition of the cliff





Walkway adopted by the GR-249 to skirt the first sea cliffs

» Nature haven in an archaeological sanctuary

El Arroyo Jaboneros marks the dividing line between the beaches of Pedregalejo and El Palo while Arroyo de Gálica gives way to the beach Playa del Dedo on the Paseo de la Generación del 27. As it leads further away from the big city, the walk regains the atmosphere of ancient rural fishing communities of the two Málaga neighbourhoods, which today have been devoted to leisure, restaurants and tourism. And then the landscape changes, leaving behind the port Puerto del Candado (km 12.2) and gradually ascends to the highest elevation of Stage 1, along the road barriers of the N-340. Construction was slowed down here because of a hill formed by limestone ridges. At the foot of the hill a pedestrian walkway has been built. The vegetation on this slope, rising between the rocks of the coast and the road, consists of spiny broom,

gorse, esparto grass, Mediterranean dwarf fan palm, and some herbs mixed with the more marine species such as the Sea Daisy (*Asteriscus maritimus*) or the interesting endemic *Limonium malacitanum*.

The surprising views over to the Playa del Peñon del Cuervo are spectacular in contrast with the landscape that has been left behind and, above all, which is about to come next. In the middle, there is a prominent crag resembling a peninsula and the delta of the Arroyo del Judío. The beach is actually an isolated cove between the previous and current hill which reaches into the sea. The tunnel of the Carretera de Almería penetrates the hill where the Paseo de los Canadienses commemorates the work of the mobile blood transfusion unit of the Canadian Dr. Henry Norman Bethune who came from Valencia in support of the people fleeing via the Almería road in 1937. The cement factory Cementera de la Araña



La Playa del Peñón del Cuervo with its rocky outcrop which divides the beach in two

provides the counterpoint to the emerging natural landscape, with its metal towers and the ground limestone dust covering everything, a price to pay for the production of this building material which was in such high demand at the beginning of the century on the Costa del Sol.

The rocky point topped with the Las Palomas watchtower located at km 14.1 km and at the highest altitude of the day, dominates the view with its haughty presence on a rise from where you can see the major part of the coastline forming the first and second stage of the Great Málaga Path. This very well preserved watchtower dating back to the 16th century is almost 11 metres high, built on two floors on top of the rock bed, as it is customary for such buildings. The bulk of the construction is based on stone joined together with limestone mortar, but the finish and the vault are made using strong ceramic brick. You can easily distinguish the two machicolations, one of

them supported by stone corbels and the staircase to the upper floor. In both rooms there is a fireplace to generate smoke and flames used in signalling other towers.

But it is not only this medieval tower which is willing to talk about history, above all is the so called Complejo del Humo, a complex of shelters and caves in the cliffs of Los Tajos de la Araña which provide numerous data on the prehistoric population of the coast. Next to the tower there is the Interpretation Centre and Museum of the cave complex, where you can find contact numbers and opening hours.

In any case, to imagine the potential of this place you would have to go back in time when the sea level was tens of meters higher than the current one, there were meadows and coastal forests to

Torre Atalaya de las Palomas

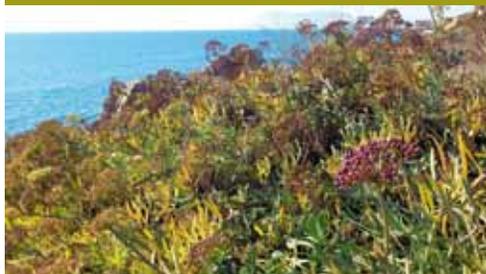


provide the early humans' diet of molluscs and crustaceans with complementary ingredients. The humans would have been protected by the mild climate and night fires lit in the shelters amongst the rocks. The current use of the same cliffs by the rock climbers from the so-called Escuela de la Cala de Moral generates some controversy.

In order to reach the very end of Stage 1 at the Arroyo Totalán, walk a little further along the road, passing by the exclusive Iberian populations of *Maytenus senegalensis* bushes, mixed with Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) and Searocket (*Cakile maritima*) in the sandy soil. Ahead and on the other side of Arroyo Totalán, the extensive beaches of La Cala del Moral and Rincón de la Victoria await. ◉



Peñón del Cuervo and the Sierra de Mijas



Rock Samphire growing on a seaside cliff

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

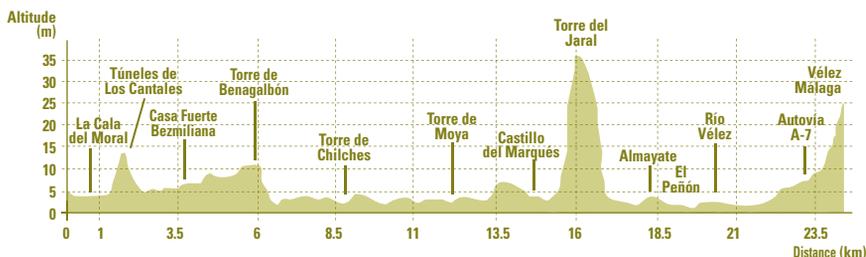
1 Km Zero at the Diputación Provincial de Málaga	30S 0371113 4061373	5 m	2 Chimenea del Parque del Oeste	30S 0371306 4061739	5 m
3 Monumento al Espetero	30S 0371461 4062008	4 m	4 Bridge over Río Guadalmedina	30S 0372624 4063748	5 m
5 Monumento al Cenachero	30S 0373181 4064420	1 m	6 La Farola and breakwater of Puerto de Málaga	30S 0373643 4064036	2 m
7 Arroyo and Playa de la Caleta	30S 0375210 4064953	0 m	8 Baños del Carmen	30S 0376583 4064860	1 m
9 Arroyo Jaboneros	30S 0377982 4064541	2 m	10 Puerto del Candado	30S 0379861 4064118	4 m
11 Peñón del Cuervo archeological site	30S 0380468 4063857	5 m	12 Peñón del Cuervo	30S 0380820 4063912	13 m
13 Las Palomas watchtower	30S 0381427 4063794	23 m	14 End of Stage 1 at Arroyo Totalán	30S 0382501 4063870	8 m

2 RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA • VÉLEZ MÁLAGA

Along the cliffs, beaches and orchards of Axarquía



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 25 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	24.4	Accumulated ascent	70	Final altitude	25
Ascent km	6.3	Accumulated descent	50	Maximum altitude	37
Descent km	6.0	Maximum difference	37	Minimum altitude	0
Flat km	12.2	Altitude at starting point	7	Average altitude	6

» Summary of this Stage «

This long leg of the walk begins together with the city limits of Rincón de la Victoria. You will get to know all of Rincón's beaches from the Arroyo Totalán stream in La Cala del Moral to the Torre de Benagalbón tower. The walk takes you along the coast of Vélez Málaga though it starts gradually veering away from it so that you can walk through the slate and chalk hills and then by the fertile orchards of the Vega of the Río Vélez. Almost at all times it coincides with an east-west direction, which is also the direction of the N-340 road. The Great Path of Málaga and the road run jointly from time to time, until the path turns north at the Vélez river.

The GR-249 uses the beach promenades, Paseos Marítimos, but also dirt roads, the beach, footpaths and roadside. Much of this stage is quite accessible, but its length, detours at the end and the industrial zone you arrive at, can give you an impression of the walk being harder than it really is. On the other hand, the variety of Stage 2 adds to its beauty, with its ever-changing terrain, closeness to the beaches and the landscapes. In any case, Stage 2 is a good way to discover that the coastline of Málaga province is as unique as the Axarquía region and its main river.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The east coast of Málaga appears before the traveller's eyes as a built-up zone where the beaches have sometimes been stretched to their limits. However, according to the findings of a staggering number of prehistoric and historic remains of dwellings, it seems this coastline has never been free of human presence. This is the first attraction

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
1	2	1	3	18.2	6.2	0	x 5

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

of Stage 2, discovering how the coast held up as a resource. There are many excellent examples of the different models of the final product.

Construction problems originally stem from the good climate, a main active ingredient of the southern edge of Málaga province. Then, the crowding of infrastructure and buildings is caused by, amongst other factors, the coast's characteristically abrupt and mountainous terrain, up to the point that the mountains literally finish in the sea, creating escarpments and cliffs which can be a barrier for the walker or, as it happens in El Cantal, the area's main attraction. It is interesting to discover how these inherited problems are being solved by environmental improvements and correct public use management, both of which are evident along the way. The beauty of this section of the coast of Málaga province, one of the few places with limestone cliffs, certainly deserves such an injection of care.

History, with a capital H, emerges along the Gran Senda de Málaga through the archaeological sites in caves, Phoenician settlements, Roman villas and factories, Arabic farmsteads, medieval watchtowers, 18th century forts, quarries and thousand-year-old paths.

Nature timidly survives on the sea cliffs and on the upper edges of the wider beaches, with beautiful populations of Rock Samphire and Searocket. And as a tribute to the remnants of the rural and agricultural coast which still persists, it is worthwhile to venture out into what's left of the traditional irrigated crops on the fertile flood plains of Río Vélez, where the walker might be surprised by the timeless image of a pair of "pajuno" breed oxen ploughing the same land which sustained in the past the hundred years old sugar factories and cane sugar mills.

- **Starting point:** Arroyo de Totalán, where you enter the city limits of Rincón de la Victoria direction east.
- **Access to starting point:** La Cala del Moral can be accessed comfortably from Autovía del Mediterráneo. There is a traffic hub close to the starting point where access roads intersect: the A-7S, MA-24 from Rincón de la Victoria and the coastal N-340.
- **Finish point:** Nuestra Constitución roundabout, at the western entrance to Vélez Málaga off the A-356 road
- **Access to finish point:** The A-356 road mentioned above. It connects the Autovía del Mediterráneo by two intersections with the A-45 in Casabermeja and the Puerto de las Pedrizas.
- **Possible "escape routes":** Practically any point of the journey is near the N-340, with all the services of the long stretched city which is what the eastern Costa del Sol actually is. At the beginning the N-340 is inland, to the north, and from km 13.2 (Arroyo de Iberos) it runs toward the coast, to the south.
- **No return point:** From the Peñon de Almayate onwards (the Almayate rock has an image of a bull at the top, approximately at km 19.5) it is more suitable to finish the stage than undertaking another alternative.
- **Maps:** Stage 2 begins on map **1053-IV** (Rincón de la Victoria), is continued on **1054-III** (Torre del Mar), and ends on the **1054-I** (Vélez Málaga).
- **District boundries:** Rincón de la Victoria and Vélez Málaga border at the Arroyo de Santillán Brook, at km 7.9, which means that Torre de Benagalbón and Chiches are the twin district of each city limit respectively. About 68% of Stage 2 lies within the city limits of the capital of Axarquía.



La Cala de Moral beach from the cliffs

• Enjoy the walk safely

This long and linear journey, with the beginning and the end of the stage being so far apart, should be well planned. There should be no problems with accommodation or in case you need to return, however these things should not be subject to improvising. There are possibilities to stock up on food or water almost all along the way. This becomes more difficult from Almayate onwards as the path moves away from the road, that great vertebra of the coast. On this last section of Stage 2 there is a certain amount of traffic related to the comings and goings of farm vehicles and you should take care walking on the side of the road.

The only troublesome stream crossing is over the Santillán, due to the collapse of the old railway bridge, but normally the stream's waters do not pose any danger except for major storms, which are not frequent. The little climb along the streambed in the Arroyo de Iberos should not present any difficulty under normal conditions. The cliffs of El Cantal have protective railings, but be careful standing close to the breakers when the weather is rough. The same rule should be followed in places where a narrow jetty of rocks separates the path from the crashing waves. At the moment the railway bridge over the river Vélez has no

protective railings, but it is wide enough to pass through quite safely. Be careful not to trip over the nuts and bolts which pepper the concrete.

Finally, and as a general rule on the coast of Málaga, the west to east direction of the path suggests that you will be facing the sun during the first hours of the day and having the sun directly behind you during the rest of the day. It is necessary to protect yourself from the sun's effects.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

From Stage 1, the GR 92 E12 continues meandering along the coast of Málaga, sharing itinerary with our GR but in the opposite direction. There are not many public paths along the coast and the existing ones seem to concentrate all in the same area, north of Rincón de la Victoria centre. There are three consecutive local "senderos" departing from Arroyo de Granadilla. As can be expected in this environment, they end up climbing hills and heights with spectacular views towards the south and the coast.

The SL A-82 Arroyo Granadilla Cerro Capitana is a circular 8.5 km walk that has the access to Albenda Tower as one of its attractions. The interesting ramble through the bottom of the valley is shared by the SL A-83. The two paths meet again at the highest point, offering more alternatives. The first path, Arroyo de Granadilla (or Granadillas on other signs) follows a loop to the west. The 7 kilometre circular called Cerro del Tío Caña takes you to the east.

Finally, the SL A-84 Cerro de Benagalbón Cerro del Tío Caña is a linear, the two walks coincide along the last few metres but in this case the walk starts from the centre of the village of Benagalbón and reaches Rincón de la Victoria as it descends. The three footpaths offer flexibility and allow planning a personalised walk.

It is also possible to visit the Cueva del Tesoro (before El Higerón) as a guided

tour. It is located on the upper cliffs above Los Cantales and with very easy access from the GR. Prehistoric human occupation and the legends and anecdotes surrounding it are combined with the attractiveness of its formation process, linked to the elevation of the land and changes in the level of the sea in successive geological times, together with the erosive action of the Mediterranean.

Also, there are three areas at Stage 2 which have drawn the attention of scientists and teachers resulting in different studies which sometimes are accompanied by detailed routes. These are Los Cantales, Peñon de Almayate (also called the Bull Rock or Cerro del Toro) and the delta of the Vélez river. In these three places, because of geology, flora and fauna, different groups of people have designed their own interpretive itineraries that are accessible in various formats, also as publications sponsored by CEDER Axarquía.

The same occurs with the obvious historical and heritage values reflected in the routes and suitable focus on the times of the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, the industrial era, etc. The coast line and the abrupt terrain have caused the traditional foot paths, animal paths and roads to be laid out along more or less the same route throughout the centuries. The Camino de Vélez (or the Camino Viejo de Málaga, its name changes depending where you start), has been known forever, in fact it is still possible to make out the surface of the old path at the end of it. Other than that, only spoken or written testimonies to this millennial passage way exist, and it can be traced to Roman times.

THE RIVERS & THE WATER

Los Montes de Málaga, in the broad sense, are a succession of hills with their maximum rise on the Cerro de Santo Pilar (1,020 m), located above the Totalán village north of Rincón de la Victoria and about 10 kilometres in a straight line from the beach. Then the hills start waning away eastward as the summits gradually approach the coastline then to disappear in the Vélez river as the Peñon de Almayate.

This means that the river courses that are generated in the watershed of the Santo Pilar, all draining to the south, are longer and more substantial in the west at the beginning of this stage. And so the Arroyo (or Río) Totalán, its fork shared by Olías and Totalán villages, must be the largest river of this stage, if one can use that term considering how short the length of the valleys is.

Then there is still a good number of little streams which flow on schist and slates on extremely steep slopes. Here, since time immemorial, olive and almond trees thrive, also some remaining grapevines. Where the terrain and the availability of water allows, there are avocados, mangos, kiwis and papayas. This diversification of production, by adding non-traditional crops, is especially important for the economy of the valleys.

Direction east the Great Path of Málaga meets the Arroyos, or streams, of Las Piletas,

A walkway conditioning in El Cantal cliffs



Los Villodres, Granadilla, Cuevas, Benagalbón, Santillán, Chilches, Cañuelo, Adelfa, Iberos, Almayate and del Búho among others. Although there is a profusion of streams, they lack in size. In general, the hiker will rarely manage to see them. Most of the time it's more by guesswork than anything else that you can recognize the delta of one of these streams as they can be meagre puddles on the beaches. The deceptively tame nature of all of the streams leads to such sights as vehicles parked under the pedestrian bridges or even whole meetings of locals, but one must take into account that the Mediterranean climate is characterised by unusual storms, above all at the beginning of autumn, returning every year without fail. The final sections of the natural draining systems of Los Montes de Málaga cannot therefore, support vegetation other than some oleander and tamarisk, becoming in fact dry streambeds used by the locals as just another means of communication, and so does the GR-249. From time to time you will find dense populations of cane, which do not last long if they are near a town or a village.

The Vélez River naturally deserves a special mention. It is much longer but its waters are depleted by the Viñuela reservoir and irrigation ditches, it comes back each year but it expires again towards the summer. From the geological point of view it's a wide delta of Quaternary deposits which has lost its dynamic character due to the above.

Despite being listed in the inventory of Andalucían Wetlands and being studied as a possible Natural Monument, the truth is that the real threats to the River are ongoing and alarming. High impact recreation, agricultural use and urban pollution, as well as industrial contamination being the main threats to this river, which deserves better treatment because of its importance to wildlife, especially the birds. The vegetation in the area where the river intersects with the walk is made up by one of the most impressive groves of poplars of the final section of the walk, with some eucalyptus trees, dense reed beds and some rushes.



In this section you can opt for the tunnels or the walkway

Recently the Diputación de Málaga, as part of the same project called "Idara" which sponsors this GR, has installed a birdwatching observatory on the left bank near the delta of the Vélez river, less than a kilometre away from the walk after crossing the river and planted native species of flora at the same time. It is an initiative that joins the numerous organizations and citizens who recognize the importance and value of the delta environment. The delta, as it holds islands, is suitable for nesting, resting and wintering of dozens of species of birds, some of them endangered.

The importance of water will be especially noticeable with irrigation channels at the end of Stage 2, and you will be walking next to some of the major channels bordering the rock of Peñon de Almayate. Other than the water being important for agriculture, its essential use for human consumption is evident in the urban and industrial water pipes running parallel to the path. This is the only place where they could have been laid out due to the shape of the terrain and the consequent stretched layout of the cities. While the origin of the drinking water is mainly the Viñuela reservoir, waste water management faces the same problems as it does along the whole coast. The latter have been corrected by means of the corresponding treatment facilities in Rincón de la Victoria and Vélez Málaga and numerous pump stations carrying water to the submarine emitters, after it has been treated. Thus an initially complex problem has found the right solution.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» The suburban railway of Málaga from the capital to Ventas de Zafarraya

Stage 2 of the Great Path of Málaga owes its layout to the coastal railway formerly linking Málaga with Vélez and with the province of Granada passing through El Boquete de Zafarraya. The cost of continuing the railway along the coast rendered it practically unfeasible due to the mass of Sierra Almijara, which stretches across to the sea with high sea cliffs in Maro, Cerro Gordo and Cantarrijan. The surviving tunnels, bridges and even some stations and train stops can be seen every now and then, but it is noteworthy that you actually walk along the former train tracks most of the time. The railroad was opened in 1908 to address the transit of passengers and goods along the coast, communicating the main coastal cities (to the east and west of Málaga) with the port.

The last section to open was the stretch which climbed from Vélez Málaga, made so much more difficult by the mountainous terrain that a cog railway system had to be used to help the train negotiate the steep slope. This was actually the last stretch to be closed, in 1968, leaving a certain feeling of nostalgia in the memory of the locals stemming from what the train meant for them not so long ago.

» Between the Cala del Moral and Rincón de la Victoria

Stage 2 begins in the city limits of Rincón de la Victoria, which includes the two above-mentioned population centres (in practice they are very closely connected and La Cala is involved in the life of the capital city). They are located in two coves separated by a rocky headland which is known as El Cantal or Los Cantales. Geology has deeply marked the landscape here. The white Jurassic limestone appears on both sides of the Arroyo Totalán forming fossil cliffs on at least three levels,

supported by a base of conglomerate rock, sandstone and red-tinted lutites which you can only see at the beginning of this stage. When you start walking, the profiles of Acantilados de Araña cliffs to the west are the first example of how the cliffs will look along the way. Los Acantilados de Araña is formed by an abrasion platform and marine cliffs, reaching 150 meters above the current sea level. At the foot of the Araña cliffs you will find the cave, Cueva de Tesoro, which is worth a visit.

The Cala del Moral beach has a long breakwater which aims to correct the phenomenon of the coastal drift which carries sand and boulders laterally. Here, at this spot which involves both visible forces of nature and human construction, you will find Los Cantales, a place whose name originates in the word "cantera", a quarry. In this case, and because of the quality of the rock, limestone was quarried in blocks for masonry, not to be ground up as it is currently done at the Araña quarry.

The GR-249 takes the only possible walking option which is along the cliffs, where you can either use the abandoned railroad tunnels, now converted into a pedestrian and cycling trail or a spectacular stairway with protective



El Cantal is an excellent place to see eroding coastal rocks and selected plants



Delta of one of the streams in Rincón de la Victoria

railings, which gives you more sea views. From the stairway built here by the city, you have an opportunity to witness the dynamic nature of sea cliffs, with their flat abrasion platforms visible and the evident erosion and wave-cutting of the bases of rock and even some caves and small arches. Moreover, the railway embankments show the underground rocks, cutting through and so exposing some of the caves which are, in some cases, filled with marine deposits of pebbles, sand and shells. The rock dwelling vegetation visible on the sunny side of the cliffs and exposed to a saline environment is characterised by its resistant nature. Most frequently present are the samphire and sea daisy, and once again you can see the local endemic *Limonium malacitanum*.

You can also see here the old beacon tower Torre del Cantal, in the middle of a housing estate. The tower is visible when you look west when exiting the last tunnel. It is very similar to the watchtowers seen at Stage 1 with a conical shape, circular at the base and with machicolations, which, despite its possible Arabic origin, marks an important remodelling in the sixteenth century. Curiously, the watchtower cannot be seen from the beaches of La Cala del Moral.

»» The Rincón beaches

The long Paseo Marítimo de la Virgen del Carmen, along the former old railway, shows the visitor the deep seated seafaring tradition. One of its most prized sea foods has been named after Rincón de la Victoria, as the Victoria anchovy, "boquerón victoriano".

Apart from successive streams on the way, sometimes bordered with railway sleepers as they cross the sand, the walk leads you along a wide dirt track, its surface firm and well used by locals and visitors for sports.

The path is bordered by houses and gardens for many kilometres, in the first line of the beach. At approximately km 3.6 you should look for an exit to the north, crossing the N-340 which here is called the Avenida del Mediterráneo, and reach the Casa Fuerte Bezmiliana, a fort built in 1766 a few meters from the sea to hold back the attacks of Dutch and Saxon pirates, well worth a visit if possible. In Rincón de la Victoria you can also see El Castillo de Bezmiliana and a magnificent Roman villa rich in mosaics with geometrical and mythological motifs.

Between the access to the Casa Fuerte and El Torre de Benagalbón (km 6) in the built up area about a 100 metres from the walk, at a makeshift roundabout, there is an abundant population of Searocket (*Cakile maritima*) with some scattered specimens of Sea Daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) just as you cross El Arroyo Granadilla. El Arroyo Benagalbón is followed by Arroyo de Santillán, where the remains of a rail bridge marks the beginning of the city limits of Vélez de Málaga and the first of the former coastal train stops (at km 8) called Chilches, significantly damaged by the graffiti but well preserved architecturally.

The former train tunnels converted into spaces to stroll through



» Chilches, Benajárafe and Valle Niza

Just like other coastal towns, Vélez has been built along the N-340 road and close to the beach. In its first Vélez section the road has been built partly on the former train platform which leaves just a few meters for transit, except for the first open flat areas, widely used by campers and for parking. La Torre de Chilches tower is the first one which is easily accessible from the walk; however it is on the other side of the N-340. This modest watchtower has slightly different features compared to the previous towers as it dates back to the beginning of the 16th century and its then architectural model. It has a solid appearance with four embrasures and brick fillings.

The walk now follows a narrow breakwater which separates you from the sea and it narrows progressively. At some point you will see on your right, one of the traditional orchards with figs and other fruit trees, surrounded by cane to protect it from the breeze and salt (km 10.4). As you reach Benajárafe, with its pleasant pavements along the N-340, you will start noticing again that you are following the old railway line when you reach the Station of Benajárafe, integrated in the urban structure. The coastline you pass by, as usual to the south, houses an important seagrass "meadow" selected by the Aula del Mar for its project Cordón Verde Litoral (Coastal Green Belt) located near the delta of the Vélez River.

The unique vantage point of Stage 2 is the tower of Benajárafe also called Moya or Gorda (which means fat, and is due to its size). There is a public access to the tower across the road. The tower is worth visiting. It has an interesting horseshoe shape of a military bastion and dates back to the 18th century. The building has a robust feel. The living quarters of the tower occupy the first rocky outcrop of shale, 30 metres above sea level, overlooking a large expanse of the sea. Already placed at a vantage point, the tower stands 11 meters tall. Its walls are two meters thick, made of stone, capstone and brick. It is the only tower on this coast with such a peculiar shape (however there is another almost identical one



A large population of Searocket at the foot of the walk on the Rincón de la Victoria beaches

on the coast of La Cala de Mijas). In addition to offering two rooms, it also housed two cannons used to hold off frequent attacks by pirates and privateers, both northern and African. The tower there is a brick chimney used to get rid of the smoke produced by a factory which was hidden underneath.

The walk leads to the beach, with its characteristic greyish colour of sand, and as it passes a few surviving clumps of tamarisk it takes you by an old house built of blocks of sandstone. You will be able to see where the sandstone has come from later on in the walk. Arriving at Arroyo Iberos stream the walk takes you upstream and then down under the N-340 (at km 13.2) and around a housing estate Valle de Niza, crossing the road from Cajiz (MA-3203) to arrive at Arroyo Almayate amongst fields. Close by there is a campsite and a major international avocado export company. However the must-do stop is the Castillo del Marqués, which, after many transformations, was finally converted into a catering school. Just like its twin, the Bezmiliana Casa Fuerte fort was built in 1766 to fight off threats coming from the sea. It was able to house four cannons. The highlight is the fort's façade crowned with hornwork fortifications and a double rampart (which aimed at more effective defence of the entrance), plus another semi-circular one. The main body of the building built of stone blocks is square-shaped, built around an arms court and surrounded by a moat, which nowadays has been filled in.



Vélez River delta and the outline of Sierra de Almijara

» The Old Málaga Road or Camino Viejo de Málaga

As you find yourself again on an old abandoned railway platform, you will find the evidence of the even worse destiny met by the failed Niza Beach urbanisation project, passing by abandoned roads and gardens on an enormous plot of land. The landscape changes with the appearance of chalk hills to the east. These nearby hills reach their maximum height at the Torre de Jamal. The Christian watchtower from the 16th century, which can be accessed at km 6.2 km, does not follow the usual architectural models since it is square, 12 meters high and built using much more brick. The surroundings, fairly degraded at times, are dominated by herbs and hawthorn, plus a few abandoned olive groves and isolated copses of Aleppo pine trees.

The walk descends and takes you across a bridge dating back to the same period as the Moya tower and the two forts seen in Stage 2. Having passed by another house built with blocks of sandstone the walk continues on an asphalted road that leads to Casas de Cabo (a stream), and shortly after that goes back to following the former train tracks leading you again through orchards in the so-called Tajo del Pinto. Past Monte Azul housing estate the walk passes through a vast wild area of abandoned citrus trees and thriving rabbits. Next you encounter the Arroyo del Búho and then the station of Almayate. Almayate is a

new urban centre which depends on the city of Vélez Málaga, it is famous for its orchards and fisheries, its recently discovered cave hermitage and an historical treaty of being able to establish a settlement less than 1 league (3 nautical miles) from the sea, a privilege granted after the Christian conquest.

The most famous of the hills that surround this small town is El Peñón Almayate (or Del Toro, named after the bull-shaped black metal advertising panel on top of it). This is a headland of sandstone, a witness to the forces which shaped the coast in the past. This hill is where stone blocks were quarried for the two built houses which are now ruined and which you passed by earlier at Stage 2 but also those which were used to build the Cathedral of Málaga between the 16th and 18th centuries. However, the easiness with which this stone could be worked was the reason why the quarry existed as early as the 8th century B.C. and had continued operating until very recently.

The rock harbours a selection of marine fauna (especially molluscs). In the past it stood as the western bastion of the now non-existent inlet of the Vélez River which was used by the Phoenicians to build a settlement, Los Toscanos. The rock continues being a distinctive feature of the landscape. The ancient Phoenician city of Los Toscanos, situated on both sides of the river, forms an extremely important part of historical legacy. The western part, which is accessed at km 18.5 in Almayate and at km 20.0 before crossing the river, consisted of the city, the port which was an embarkation point both for people and goods, storage for a multitude of amphorae and a walled outside area. There are other archaeological sites nearby at the top of the Cerro Peñón and Cerro Alarcón hills, also in the north-west and at the Necrópolis de Jardín. The main necropolis was on the other side of Vélez, at the Cerro del Mar. The planned Archaeological Park of Lower Vélez (Parque Arqueológico de Bajo Vélez) comprises sites also dating back to Roman and Arabic occupation. The high cliffs of the rock, shelter under it one of the "asequías", channels used to irrigate the

fertile soil which formed here in historic times and covered the ancient Phoenician bay. Few coastal farming areas of the city are as extensive as the plains of Vélez River, or as productive. The subtropical Mediterranean climate is due to the sheltering against the northern winds offered by Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara and the Arco Calizo Central.

At the junction in Los Toscanos you can turn south, crossing the N-340 and, in the middle of a plot dedicated to growing vegetables and fruit, you will find La Torre Manganeta, dating back to the 16th century, a tower which is in quite bad shape and is also the most humble of all the towers seen so far. The difference in height and distance from the sea between this vantage point and the Phoenician city shows the evolution of the sea level and accumulation of basin sediments. The slightly north-east tendency of the walk's direction becomes directly north as you cross Vélez river across the battered railway bridge, just at the entrance of the village of Torre del Mar, which you swerve around on the right. Again you will find yourself between



A traditional yoke of oxen in the Río Vélez fields, Cerro de Almayate in the background

irrigated fields and the river on your left, and in the distance, from a place called La Barranca, you can already make out the view of the capital of the Axarquia region. Behind you, the view of Vélez Málaga with its fortress crowning the brown hills and mass of Sierra Tejeda and Almijara at the back is simply spectacular. When the walk gets closer to the riverbed again, you will pass by a water treatment plant on your right and then you will walk underneath the A-7. Here crops begin alternating with industrial buildings because of the closeness to the city. The GR-249 passes above the A-356 by gradually turning northeast, as Stage 2 ends at the Nuestra Constitución roundabout. ◉

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Arroyo de Totalán	30S 0382501 4063870	8 m	2 Tunnels and cliffs of El Cantal	30S 0384019 4063842	9 m
3 Casa Fuerte de Bezmiliana	30S 0385776 4063911	7 m	4 Torre de Benagalbón	30S 0387986 4063572	11 m
5 Arroyo de Santillán before the old station	30S 0389903 4063717	2 m	6 Torre de Chilches	30S 0390928 4063805	4 m
7 Torre de Moya	30S 0394040 4064044	4 m	8 Castillo del Marqués	30S 0396311 4064534	2 m
9 Torre del Jaral	30S 0397342 4064670	29 m	10 Almayate Bajo	30S 0399184 4065565	4 m
11 Peñón de Almayate or del Toro	30S 0399992 4065645	3 m	12 Detour to Los Toscanos	30S 0400432 4065980	2 m
13 Río Vélez and railway bridge: Puente del Ferrocarril	30S 0400693 4066201	3 m	14 Roundabout of Nuestra Constitución in Vélez Málaga	30S 0401282 4069793	25 m

3 VÉLEZ MÁLAGA • TORROX

The Subtropical Coast

 **ESTIMATED TIME**
4 hours 10 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	19.1	Accumulated ascent	180	Final altitude	125
Ascent km	6.7	Accumulated descent	125	Maximum altitude	125
Descent km	5.6	Maximum difference	125	Minimum altitude	0
Flat km	6.8	Altitude at starting point	58	Average altitude	27

» Summary of this Stage «

Vélez Málaga and Torrox both lie in river valleys separated by three others that run southwards off quite steep hills. It would not be possible to walk from one valley to the other directly as it would mean over lengthening the journey by having to go in to and out of the river valleys crossing the walk. The design of the road attempts to solve the problem by taking you down closer to the coast and then back up. This same solution was applied to the GR-249 to organise the third stage. First the walk takes you down southwards to Puerto de la Caleta, through the Camino Viejo de Algarrobo and Río Seco, and then you walk for 10 km direction east-southwest following the coastline to the tip of Torrox and finally ascend to the village of your destination crossing another river and heading north.

The elevation is not too pronounced and concentrated especially around the beginning, with a slight slope to reach the settlement of Torrox, while the length of the stage is quite comfortable and lets you fully enjoy the walk. There are a couple of sections that use dry streambeds, there are many dirt tracks, some footpaths and the rest of the walk leads along beach promenades, Paseos Marítimos, of different sorts.

» Highlights of this Stage «

In Stage three we can witness the old Málaga province joining hands with the Málaga province of the 21st century. The first one is represented by watchtowers and Roman and Phoenician archeological sites. The latter is focused on two types of industry, both derived from the excellent climate of Axarquía: tourism and agriculture.

							
1	2	1	3	11.5	5.9	1.8	x 6

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

The tourist area is concentrated around the coast and, surprisingly, you can recognise construction models which have been already given up in the Costa del Sol, corresponding with the style of the mid-20th century and co-existing with recent residential areas which have been built according to very different parameters. There are fishing communities which maintain their roots; their houses lined up overlooking the horizon over the sea, their products which bring back the past both to locals and visitors. This could probably be one of the most attractive aspects for the visitors in Stage 3.

The other industry generated as a result of the benign weather conditions, is the agriculture based on growing sub-tropical fruit trees. These are mainly grown in valleys, taking advantage of the shelter and the most indispensable resource: water. You will be able to see highly advanced technology applied recently to the exploitation spread out on the Axarquían hill. On the other hand you will also notice the ancient terraces and walls which have been adapted to the present use and now harbour some of the new types of product destined for modern markets.

All in all, with this fusion of different possible components, Stage 3 offers a variety of landscapes which are worth mentioning; between urban and rural, with various sections of agriculture mentioned above, all of these landscapes are deeply interwoven into the very unique natural environment Stage 3 lets you explore.

- **Starting point:** In the south-eastern part of Vélez Málaga, where the city is expanding, at the intersection of the Avenida Pablo Iglesias with the Camino de Algarrobo. The starting point is next to the sports complex Polideportivo Municipal Fernando Ruiz Hierro and is known as the roundabout of Francisco Aguilar.
- **Access to starting point:** Vélez Málaga can be reached from the autovía del Mediterráneo (A-7S), which runs very close to the town centre. The A-356 which connects the high Axarquía and the region of Antequera, is found to the west of Vélez and runs in the direction north-south.
- **Finish point:** under the row of balconies along Almedina street, in the southern extension of Torrox. Nearby is the little square where the church and the convent of Nuestra Señora de las Nieves are located.
- **Access to finish point:** Torrox has direct connection with Cómputa and the Autovía del Mediterráneo (A-7S) through the A-7207.
- **Possible "escape routes":** possible exits for the walk are focused around the N-340 which runs beside the walk at all times and bus services are available. It is the artery that can be found even at the beginning (after the golf club, km 3) and at the end.
- **No return point:** the middle point of the tour is the nucleus of the population of Lagos. From there it is more convenient to complete the course.
- **Maps:** Named in counter clockwise direction, the way they will be needed, as they will be needed, the maps are as following: in the northwest corner the **1054-I** (Vélez Málaga), then the **1054-III** (Torre del Mar), the **1054-IV** (Nerja) and the **1054-II** (Torrox).
- **District boundaries:** up to km 5.8 you are in the city limits of Vélez Málaga, at the beach of La Caleta. The short journey along the beach up to km 7.5 is in Algarrobo, from that point in Mezquitilla to the Río Gui at kilometre 11.1 you are in Lagos which belongs to Vélez Málaga. Both Algarrobo and Lagos share Vélez Málaga's city limits. The rest of the itinerary of Stage 3 belongs to Tolox.

• Enjoy the walk safely

Rivers and streams that cross stage 3 are quite short. Additionally, the characteristics of the terrain and the fact that the rainfall is not too abundant here, converts the rivers into narrow streambeds which usually end up being dry. However, on the way down to the beach and walking up the subsequent rise you must cross the riverbeds of Río Torrox and Río Seco. In between the two, there are four smaller riverbeds you need to wade through and, although none should pose any danger, you should remember that they do serve as the natural drainage of the nearby hills and that specific weather conditions of the Mediterranean climate can result in torrential downpours which could complicate the crossings. Some sections of the walk follow an asphalted road which lacks a hard shoulder, fortunately these sections do not have much traffic. This happens, for example, between the nursery *Vivero Los Bambúes* and the housing estate *Urbanización Baviera*. There is a long section where you will be using the hard shoulder of the N-340 road and this, at times, offers little space for walking by the narrow breakwater and close to the crashing waves. In case of a storm you should take extreme caution and use common sense.

A similar situation occurs on some very unstable slate cliffs, made worse by the “invasion” of industrial buildings and equipment in this marine environment. It is recommended to use the dedicated path exclusively and to be well informed on the conditions of the sea and weather. It is possible to stock up on most supplies at this stage in the successive populated areas. Also, you will be passing by a couple of drinking water sources.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The old road called *Camino Viejo de Algarrobo* is used at the beginning of the stage to go down to the beach. The first section of it has been asphalted as part of the *Puerta Verde de Vélez* programme. There is a bicycle lane, two rest areas and various so-called *Bio-Health stations* (*Estaciones Biosaludables*). In 2013 the *Puerta Verde de Vélez* programme created four facilities in the province of Málaga, three of which have

direct access to The Great Path of Málaga. They aim at the recovery of the traditional footpaths and rights of way and re-unite the inhabitants of towns and cities with their immediate natural environment. *La Puerta Verde de Vélez Málaga* has a length of 1.4 km and entirely coincides with the beginning of the walk in Stage 3.

Camino Viejo de Algarrobo and the GR go separate ways at km 3.8, where the first one keeps heading east and the latter swerves southwards. The *Cerro de Bentomiz* hill is considered by the surrounding town inhabitants (the nearest one being *Sayalonga*, *Arenas* in the north, *Algarrobo* and *Vélez Málaga* in the West) to be a superb destination for walking.

From any of these towns there are footpaths which climb its 709 meters. They are excellent for unparalleled views of the *Axarquía* and also to see the ruins of the *Castillo of Bentomiz* which sit on top of the hill. The walls of the castle have been built using stone socles, and using so called rammed-earth as the base. The footpath leading up this hill from *Vélez Málaga* is 800 metres from the start of this stage, well sign-posted as it branches off to the left.

La *Diputación de Málaga*, the province council, has designed the *Topographical Guide of Walks in the Axarquía*, thanks to the *Plan de Dinamización del Producto Turístico Axarquía*, designed to stimulate the tourist offers of the area. Our Stage 3 contains one of the walks described in that book, it is called *Lagos Algarrobo* and it connects villages along the *Río de Algarrobo* for about 14 kilometres and then reaches its highest point on the *Cerro de Carraspica* hill in *Sayalonga*. At the finish point of Stage 3 there is a starting point of another *Puerta Verde* footpath, from *Torroxo* to *Frigiliana* and *Almijara*. It starts in *Torroxo* village and after about 19 kilometres and 1,000 m of ascent it reaches the *Natural Park of the Sierras Tejeda, Almijara and Alhama*. It branches off to connect with the white village of *Frigiliana*. Finally, GR-249 and GR-92 continue to run together as before sharing itinerary, however as mentioned, they are waymarked in opposite directions.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The two main activities of the environment surrounding the walk, tourism and irrigated farming, coupled with increasing housing demand, require enormous amounts of water. As you can see during Stage 3, the water network is extremely poor and carries very little water. This is due to the geology of the terrain made up mostly of shale and some limestone, and the short running courses of the natural drainage system of surrounding hills which are very close to the Sea (with the exception of the two main rivers). With what's available, in order for the area to be populated and the economy to function, water has to be found further north-west (El Pantano de la Viñuela reservoir) and north east (Sierra Almijara), as well as searching for underground water.

Streams have always been important in the development of this part of the Axarquía region, but it is a very common occurrence that during much of the year and the height the Great Path of Málaga crosses, the streams turn to a mere trickle or dry streambeds with very little vegetation consisting of some cane, oleander and tamarisk. Río Torrox and Río Seco are important to the GR as you walk along them to go down and up from the starting point and towards the finish. Between the two main rivers, to list the most notable ones, there are the Río de Algarrobo, El arroyo Mamelucos, Los Ríos de Lagos and Gui, and El arroyo de Manzano.

El Río de Algarrobo y Sayalonga is doubly important. Back in the area between the 9th and 6th century B.C. the sea level was higher and the beach was shaped into a cove (not merely a river delta as nowadays) and the elevated parts of the river's banks were home to Phoenician settlements of Morro de Mezquitilla and Chorreras. On the other side of the watercourse and according to the

Punic tradition, in the east, the Necropolis of Trayamar is located, which, together with the previous sites have been protected as part of cultural heritage from the year 2010. The above-mentioned river has its source in the Sierra Almijara, between Canillas de Albaida and Cómpea, in an area that the walk runs through at a later stage, and so this river's waters are higher upstream. The other major river in the area is, of course, the Torrox river, and it also boasts an archaeological site, in this case the so-called Mansio de Clavicum de Itinerario Antonino. At the mouth of the river a salt fish factory, garum industry and ceramic production were started. Later converted into a Necropolis, these ruins are now directly visible from the walk. The residential areas and the baths are at the back on the "peninsula" which forms the tip of Torrox. Torrox River also has its source in the Sierra de Almijara, between Frigiliana and Cómpea (Stage 5) where it is known as Patamalara, with beautiful crags and waterfalls.

Sierra Tejeda and the highest peaks of the province in the background, seen from the Río Seco riverbed



Water is as important to the current inhabitants as it was for the Phoenicians and Romans; along the walk's itinerary you will find ponds holding water for the irrigation of terraces of subtropical trees, and irrigation channels called "asequías" that carry the water. Arriving at the beach of La Caleta you will find a type of well called an "aljibe"; the base is built of stone and vaults are made of brick, it is elongated in shape, and equipped with a waterwheel. And a little further down is the Fuente el Pilar, in the middle of the N-340 road, a popular water supply in the village. Finally, and as it has become the norm in the Axarquía coast, waste water management faces problems because of the narrowness of

the coastline. This way, wherever the valley is wide enough the spot is used to build a water treatment facility, as it happens at kilometre 18.2 on the east side of Torrox river, while the manholes and pumping stations are scattered along the walk. This place, on the other hand, is a superb spot to learn about the type of irrigation used in the Axarquía region, with crops under plastic tunnels and others grown on terraces on both sides. In the gardens at the beginning of the walk, projects to improve the irrigation involve the complementary use of the wastewater, with additional water supplied from newly dug wells and from the reservoir of La Viñuela.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» El Camino Viejo de Algarrobo

At the Francisco Aguilar roundabout, beside the sports complex dedicated to the soccer player Fernando Hierro, leads south-east at the third stage of the GR-249. The track immediately enters semi-abandoned olive groves on a gentle slope. It is a good option for walking as it runs alongside the asphalted road separated from it by wooden logs. There are a few outdoor gyms along the road, but the first thing that draws one's attention is an ancient building in ruins on the opposite side of the track, with stone arches, stone skirting boards and walls made of rammed-earth. To the east there is the imposing

bulk of Sierra Tejada, with its multiple shades of grey, and the distinctive peak of La Maroma, the highest peak in Málaga.

Passing on the left El Camino a la Loma de Bentomiz and its fort, you will soon reach the course of Arroyo Seco (km 1.7). Walk south along the normally dry riverbed until you have to cross over to the eastern bank and make a 90 degree turn passing through Los Bambúes, which is a gardening nursery. Now you start climbing and heading for an underpass of the A-7 E-15. Then walk by a housing estate which has a golf course and asphalted streets. Again, terraced fruit tree fields appear at the Cerro Era hill with their watering ponds. The asphalted track ends, the Camino Viejo de Algarrobo continues straight ahead but the GR-249 swerves to the south. The ancient well, described before, is on your right and still stores plenty of water, it is the first sign that you have arrived to the settlement known as La Caleta de Vélez in the area of La Montosa. At Fuente El Pilar cross the N- 340, then head for the beach, leaving the port to the west.

La Torre Ladeada or Del Mar in a housing estate on the bank of Algarrobo river



» The Coast of Vélez Málaga, Algarrobo and Torrox

The walk swerves again heading south-east along the beach promenade Paseo Marítimo de la Caleta de Vélez, but very soon, at km 5.7, it enters the Algarrobo Costa. The walk coincides here with pavements separated from the sand by a low wall and a line of houses and leads along a one-way paved road. Perhaps unexpectedly, the traditional neighbourhood shops go hand in hand here with single family houses with two floors, a neighbourhood model which has almost disappeared on the coast of Málaga province. Then blocks of flats with landscaped gardens and boardwalks start coming into view. In the housing estate on the left, before crossing the river Algarrobo (Sayalonga) it is recommended to go for a little stroll to find the Torre Ladeada (also known as el mar o del Portichuelo) dating back to the 16th century; a watchtower which was left unused back in its time due to insufficient foundations and the wind and sea damage. On the other side of the N-340, direction north, is the tower's replacement, the spectacular Torre Depeche or Nueva (18th century), which, as a novelty, boasts a northern stairway that leads directly to the window entrance and which was added as an innovative accessory. It is of the few that can be visited, however it requires a permit from Algarrobo town hall. The wide riverbed of Río Algarrobo, scene of a rich past, has a delicate pedestrian bridge with access ramps and stairs. On both sides of the river, but well separated from it, used to be the Phoenician buildings.

Between tall buildings after passing by gardens and sports areas, exactly at the km 7 mark, pay attention to find the elongated nave of the chapel of our Lady of Fatima, of the westernmost neighbourhood of Algarrobo known as Mezquitilla. The highlight here

is the small dry dock reserved for repairing fishing boats, with metal winches right on the sand and fishing nets hung out in the sun.

Entering again Vélez Málaga city limits, in the small settlement of Lagos, you will notice how the coastal strip narrows considerably, with breakwaters built in an attempt to stop the crashing waves. After that, walk along the N-340, and once you've passed by the Arroyo de Mamelucos stream, walk along the wider shoulder that passes through the Punta de las Ballenas (also known as Morro or de Mezquitilla). There are vast views of Mezquitilla and Lagos ahead of you, the walk leads along the top of chalky cliffs populated with Sea Daisies, poppies and a few thorny bushes. The walk takes you by the earlier described archaeological site of Morro de Mezquitilla and Chorreras, before reaching the town of Lagos.

Here a majestic row of tall araucaria trees welcome the visitor. In Lagos there are such highlights as the traditional sailor's houses a few meters from the beach, the delta of the



Río Algarrobo (Sayalonga) delta is visible most of the time as a shallow pool of water

The village of Lagos seen from the walk along the cliffs next to the N-340



river and the Torre de Lagos tower located on top of an escarpment on the other side of the road, almost 50 metres above sea level. This 16th-century watchtower has a break in its flank but preserves part of the plaster with linear decorations. After another stretch of the walk between the coastal cliff and the road you arrive at Playa de Cachin where you continue walking on its sands and cobbles until you reach the river Gui (km 11.1), which marks the end of the city limits in Vélez Málaga and the beginning of the area of Torrox in El Morche, with the white Gui or Huit tower located on a 40 m high rocky vantage point. It is similar in style to the previous tower, and neither tower is easy to access. This part of the beach is quite constrained by buildings and various equipment, both public and private.

Having passed by a few traditional houses at the foot of the beach, you will reach the seafront in El Morche, where you leave the sand behind. Before crossing Arroyo Manzano stream, find to the right two winches which are rebuilt and signposted. These were used during the 20th century to drag nets from the sea instead of using oxen. After passing

through remains of a dune system you arrive at the main urbanized area of Torrox, the long Playa Ferrara. The walk takes you to El Faro de Torrox located on Punta de Torrox (km 15.5) along a paved promenade. Las Dunas de la Carraca are important because they are the last bastion of a dune systems from Málaga to the east. Its vegetation and wildlife species deserve special treatment.

» El Río Torrox

Sheltered by the Balcón Mirador del Faro which resembles the prow of a boat, the Roman necropolis is easily identified and is found a few metres from the dominating Faro de Torrox located on a rock which cuts further into the Mediterranean. At the foot flows the Torrox river. Instead of crossing it, walk along its western bank on an opportune little path with a grove of poplar trees and casuarina trees. After this new twist in the walk the valley becomes very open and the terraced crops begin to flank the Great Path of Málaga.

You must cross the river twice and the river normally doesn't dry out. The usual reeds

A curious traditional construction at the foot of the beach where the walk takes you back towards the sand



preside over the river banks, but frequently there is also watercress and algae. You may have to avoid passing underneath the N-340 in the case of the water level rising, but the pass underneath the motorway is easier. This bridge is frequented by climbers who have improvised a climbing wall here. The last ascent is quite steep and besides making a bit of an effort here, you must pay attention and walk slowly not to miss the long walls of Convento de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, on a slope of shale to your left and the citrus trees, loquats and subtropical species. These dry stone walls with large drain channels are the sign marking your arrival in Torrox, at the southern part of the village, where Stage 3 ends? under the balconies of? Calle Almedina street. ○



In El Morche two traditional wooden winches from the fishing industry, have been restored



It is possible to see houses belonging to two very different housing epochs in El Morche

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

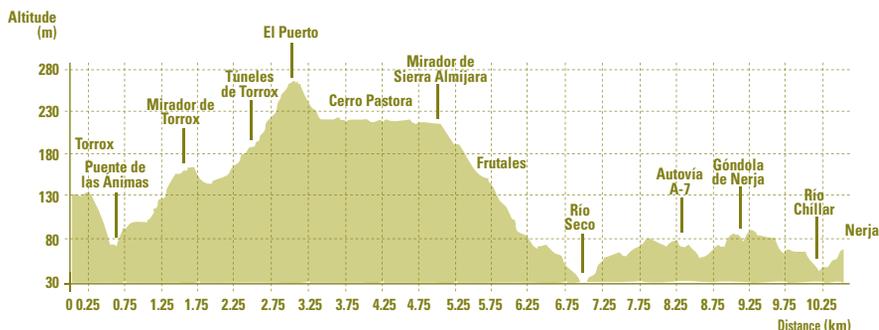
1 Avenida del Camino Viejo de Málaga	30S 0402487 4070123	55 m	2 Mirador de la Maroma y Sierra Tejada	30S 0403420 4069835	55 m
3 Pozo (a well) en la Caleta de Vélez	30S 0405289 4068020	35 m	4 Río Algarrobo or Sayalonga	30S 0406245 4067125	4 m
5 Ermita de Mezquitilla	30S 0406740 4067064	1 m	6 Punta de Mezquitilla or de las Ballenas	30S 0407789 4066800	9 m
7 Torre de Lagos	30S 0409544 4066766	6 m	8 Torre de Güi or Huit tower	30S 0410834 4066486	6 m
9 The winches of El Morche	30S 0411640 4066169	8 m	10 Punta Faro de Torrox and its tower	30S 0414511 4064926	9 m
11 Crossing of Río Torrox	30S 0415047 4067090	38 m	12 Calle Almedina de Torrox, finish point	30S 0415120 4068117	125 m

4 TORROX • NERJA

La Axarquía oriental



ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 15 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	10.5	Accumulated ascent	300	Final altitude	70
Ascent km	3.7	Accumulated descent	345	Maximum altitude	265
Descent km	4.2	Maximum difference	235	Minimum altitude	28
Flat km	2.6	Altitude at starting point	135	Average altitude	135

» Summary of this Stage «

The walk in Stage 4 leads down from the town of Torrox to the Nerja coastline. In the first 3 Stages the reference road was the N-340; here the walk follows the direction of the Autovía de Mediterráneo. Maintaining perfectly its general west-east direction, the walk uses a traditional path called Cañada Real de Motril a Málaga. The Great Málaga Path follows this Cañada scrupulously, the only exception being sections where the autovía, the motorway itself, takes over the old path and is built on top of it. The first obstacle you must conquer is the riverbed of the sizeable Río Torrox, which has been done since time immemorial using the two-arched bridge and then a river crossing at a fork where a small tributary joins the main river from the east. The itinerary leads up towards the vantage point between the Cerro Pastora and Cerro del Puerto hills, at 265 m of altitude, and then it skirts the southern slope of Cerro Pastora without losing height and follows dirt tracks. The walk starts descending towards the A-7 again at the point where the surface becomes asphalted and there are the first housing estates. Here the GR takes you through its second river crossing (Río Seco). The long ramble along A-7 service roads eventually takes you underneath the motorway, crosses town peripheries, a stone's throw from both Frigiliana and Nerja, and takes you across the Río Chillar. The length, the altitude gained and the type of surface used, mainly on wide tracks, makes Stage 4 quite accessible to the traveller. This stage contains only a couple of steep slopes to overcome, one of them going up and the other going down.

» Highlights of this Stage «

El Puente de las Animas is a good example of a traditional road bridge which was placed in the best possible location considering the terrain and the destination of the road. It was built using local

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required	 1.3	 8.5	 0.7	 x 3
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Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

materials and has been very important to the village, even though its old charm pales compared to the brand-new, imposing road bridge which rises merely a few metres away.

Slate slopes surrounding Torrox in the east seem to be reclaiming their mountain status here, because of their altitude and their steepness. This feel is added to by Torrox river, a deep gash in the abrupt terrain. Subsistent agriculture, extensive animal husbandry and other types of exploitation have caused deforestation of the landscape throughout the centuries, though from time to time you can find a surviving example of the primeval cork and holm oak forests which used to thrive here. There is a shaded area between km 1.5 and 3 where the existence of such forests in the past is particularly evident. There is also a diversity of shrubs and fauna associated with them, especially birds.

The GR lets you visit for the first time along the walk, in a long section, the different types of cultivated subtropical tree plantations, from the extensive areas of irrigated land on the southern slope of the Cerro Pastor to the small terraced orchards where you find the ever-present varieties of avocados mixed with kiwi, custard apple, mango, papaya and loquat. This is a new industry which is taking over, as there is more water made available to irrigate the land compared to the times when only dry crops were grown. The old crops are still present; above there are long dry stone walls surrounding rows of olive trees, some almond trees and a few surviving grapevines. The entire Axarquía coast has witnessed this modification of its landscape at the beginning of the new millennium with the exuberant greenness of foreign trees. These trees require high temperatures which are typical of Axarquía but they also require irrigation which involves intelligent management of water resources.

Ultimately, the walk takes you along the final sections of the major rivers: Río Torrox and Chillar which flow directly into the Mediterranean Sea in the south, which may encourage you to get to know each one of their tributaries in the future Stages of the Gran Senda de Málaga. The mountain ranges Las Sierras Tejeda y Almijara, though seemingly far away, supply the very necessary water for human consumption and for the industry, mainly agriculture, using drainage channels running along forested mountain slopes.

- **Starting point:** Calle Almedina in Torrox, in the north, on a turn. The starting point is south of the centre.
- **Access to starting point:** from the N-340 the best option is to use the A-7207 road which takes you to Torrox directly from the coast. However, the Autovía A-7S crosses the river next to Torrox and you can access the village there.
- **Finish point:** Intersection of the Julio Romero and Picasso streets, close to the Avenida de la Constitución and the Avenida de Pescía, crossing the N-340. There is a car park just at the end of the walk. This is in the northern part of Nerja which looks over to Río Chillar.
- **Access to finish point:** as mentioned above, crossing the N-340 is a good option, west of a sports complex Enrique López Cuenca.
- **Possible "escape routes":** the fact that you are walking in the vicinity of a motorway, does not mean that there are many exit points for the walk.

In reality this becomes possible around km 5 in the area where there are asphalted tracks. All of the housing estates have exits to the motorway and connections to Nerja, towards the south and then east.

- **No return point:** It is understood that having climbed el Puerto (km 3.1) the smartest thing to do would be descending towards Nerja, not because it is closer to the starting point but because the possibilities to find and exit from the walk are greater.
- **Maps:** Map **1054-II** (Torrox) should suffice, but you could complement it with the one which includes Nerja coastline **1054-IV** (Nerja).
- **District boundaries:** Obviously the first part belongs to Torrox. At km 6.1, when the path leads down towards Autovía del Mediterráneo from el Puerto you enter the city limits of Nerja. Close to finish point, before crossing Chillar river, Cañada Real path borders with a wedge of Frigiliana.



El cañaveral del Río Torrox y el Cerro de la Pastora detrás desde el Camino Viejo de Nerja

• Enjoy the walk safely

Crossing Río de Torrox, the stream that follows it and Río Seco, should pose no problems. Río Chillar is another story as it tends to have water all year round except for times of long droughts. Being so close to Nerja it is possible to try and find a nearby bridge if the water level is too high. In order to do so it is recommended to head south to find the N-340.

Sections of the path especially at the beginning can be quite steep and covered in loose gravel. Traffic along the tracks gets heavier as you get closer to Nerja, where farm vehicles add to people travelling between the villages and housing estates. Asphalted sections lack hard shoulders so you need to pay attention to the traffic. Service roads along the motorway follow the same pattern.

In the vicinity of the Góndola de Nerja roundabout you must use pedestrian crossings as the number of cars here and their average speed are much higher. There are no drinking water sources along Stage 4.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The star public right of way road is the aforementioned Cañada Real de Motril a Málaga, which leads to Torrox from the Puente de las Animas. The Gran Senda de Málaga had to abandon the Cañada Real as the Autovía de Mediterráneo had been built on top of it in places.

In the Torrox area other traditional paths mainly head north to connect with Cómpeta

or Periana and south to the coast. Frigiliana has its own public paths heading for Málaga which cross the GR-249 at the entrance to Nerja. The GR-92 E-12 Senda del Mediterráneo which coincides with our GR from the finish point of this stage pairs up with GR-242 Sierra Tejeda y Almijara (from Periana to Nerja) and both GR's are way marked in the opposite direction to the GR-249.

Nerja is famous for the guided tour of its caves and also for its water itinerary through the Cahorros del Higuero (in Frigiliana area) and, above all, Río Chíllar. Hundreds of people undertake a descent along these beautiful river canyons taking the adventure up to various points along the river apt for different ability levels, deeper and deeper into the Sierra de Almijara.

La Puerta Verde de Torrox, Frigiliana and Sierra Almijara connects two villages and the sierra to the north of this Stage, creating a good alternative to design a circular walk of various days around the east part of Málaga province.

Two protected nature reserves nearby, very significant for the walker, are Parade Natural Acanilados de Maro y Cerro Gordo (on the coast towards the east) and Parque Natural de las Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama, to the north east. In the Nerja area the highlights are the ascent of Alto del Cielo and the footpaths which will be used in the 5th Stage of the Gran Senda de Málaga.

Nerja Town hall advertises and recommends five walks through Sierra de Almijara (to the Río Chíllar dam, to the Fuente del esparto, to Nava Chica, to Almendrán and to the Cuesta del Cielo via la Civila) and one walk along Arroyo de la Miel (to Peñon de los Castillejos). The town hall website offers descriptions of the itineraries and quite clear plans of each walk.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Sierra de Almirajara, with its imposing chain of peaks over 1000 metres high, and the extensive pine forests covering its slopes, is the origin of the two most important rivers of the Axarquía region: Río Tolox and Río Chillar. These are the true backbones of this land, creating deep canyons which separate villages, but also enable transport connections along their valleys.

They both represent the main source of a very important resource: water. These rivers serve as the water source for the population of western Axarquía and, thanks to a network of irrigation channels and aqueducts, sustain a good part of the agricultural economy of the region. In the past, sugar cane was the main industrial crop and now it's the sub-tropical fruit trees. Close to the border with Granada province and outside Stage 4, Río de la Miel and, above all, El Manantial de Maro must be mentioned, the latter being the main draining channel of the dolomite massif of the sierra. The important issue

here is being able to observe during this short Stage 4 how a diversity of geological materials (light and dark-coloured shale and marbles of Sierra Almirajara) make up a "water landscape" whilst the river and marine dynamic in turn create new scenery based on travertine limestone, conglomerates, sand and gravel. The embankments of the Autovía del Mediterráneo and fluvial escarpments let you admire each of the above mentioned substrata where water accumulates, flows or circulates.

At the end of 2013 the construction of a water treatment plant in Nerja finally got the green light. It used to be the only place on the coast which did not correctly manage its residual waters. Once the situation is back to normal the purified water can be used as a resource, as happens in other coastal settlements, complementing the water which is diverted from rivers and the growing percentage of water which is obtained through tapping into the underground water system of Nerja region.

Southern end of Torrox with its Convent, terraced sub-tropical orchards and the gorge



WALK DESCRIPTION

» El Río Torrox

The Great Málaga Path starts in Calle Almedina, at the southern tip of Torrox, and leads south towards the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves and the centre for the social services which is housed in the former Convento de Franciscanos Mínimos. Before you reach the small square next to the convent you will notice on your left a steep path down, which, up to km marker 0.3, coincides with the end of Stage 3. The footpath twists and turns along the shale slopes in a steep descent (60 metres of elevation along the 300 m long path). Walking beside Oleanders, Narrow-leaved Mock Privet, Prickly Pear and Yellow Woody Thistle (*Carthamus arborescens*) pass by a terraced avocado plantation on your right and then arrive at the bridge El Puente de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (or Puente de las Animas). Only the base of the original medieval construction survives as it was later refurbished using slate and an abundance of mortar. The bridge has two arches and is



Puente de las Animas with its two arches of stone blocks and mortar

turned on its axis; it narrows just as you cross the river on the path known as Camino de Zamora, direction Nerja. The bridge's popular name, Las Animas (Bridge of Souls) comes from a Torrox legend about the souls of Christian warriors who had perished in a battle in this very spot and now they cross the river on their way to the Convent on All Saints night.

The long journey of Torrox river starts very high in the mountains of Axarquía, but when it arrives at Stage 4, its water level is very low, especially in summer. Boxed in the shale rocks which surround the village and covered in dense cane the river offers little botanical diversity, apart from some willow trees. The path, also known as Camino Viejo de Torrox a Nerja, uses a fork formed by the river and Arroyo del Puerto to cross both watercourses. The stream can be crossed simply by wading through. The rock face ahead harbours a few specimens of Ephedra and Nettle Tree.

Next, the walk starts climbing and keeps zigzagging south through an area rich in streaks of quartz, to end up under the huge road bridge of Autovía del Mediterráneo.

One of the large Yellow Wooded Thistles and avocado trees in the background



This dual carriage way is now behind on your left and you start following a service road through more stretches of sub-tropical plantations. The road starts veering east and climbs up to the point where there are superb views of Torrox; the white village over the cliff and surrounded by terraces of fruit trees.

» El Arroyo del Puerto

Having climbed the small hill mentioned above, the walk takes you to a cliff, quite transformed by the motorway construction, where, surprisingly, there are a few Holm Oaks (at km 1.7), one or two Carob Trees and an enormous Buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*), together with some Lavender and Spiny Broom. As you pass two tracks to your right, the walk starts descending. Following the forest track you will have good views to the Túneles de Torrox, the Torrox tunnels, until you reach an underground water drain. The very steep embankment to your right is

covered by a very dense colony of broom and cistus species, myrtle and a wooded area of rugged Holm Oak. This is a very inviting environment for birds, especially thrushes. There are remains of an old dry wall visible next to a spring, blanketed with rushes and oleander; the path now enters a long and steep climb.

At kilometre 2.7 on top of an escarpment on the right side of the path you will find a great specimen of myrtle. Its presence, together with the cistus species you passed before, proves that this area could potentially be appropriate for planting Cork Oaks.

The dirt track is what was used during the construction of the motorway to accommodate lorries carrying loads of sand from the nearby quarry. The area is being restored by protecting the newly-planted trees, installing retention walls and drainage systems. At km 3.1 you will find the Puerto viewpoint and a 350 m high hill, also called Puerto, to its right, towards the south. At this point the walk is crossed by an electricity line with its high towers.

Panoramic views from El Puerto over the Bahía de Nerja, the motorway in the foreground and Sierra Almijara in the background





Terraced tree plantation with the GR-249 track below

» Over the Cerro Pastora

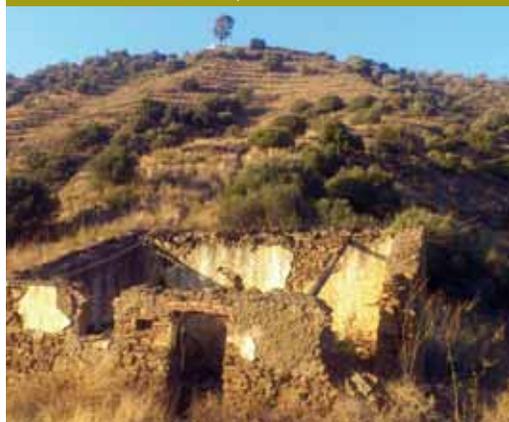
The scrub along the path consists mainly of Retama, Spiny Broom and other shrubs resistant to the dry and lonely environment of this long 442 metres high ridge. El Barranco del Puerto gorge starts here; it's been named after the same hill as the Arroyo del Puerto described before. It is a ubiquitous name in the area. The gully which the walk follows, now cut by the motorway, has been turned into an extensive and productive subtropical fruit tree plantation. The result can be overwhelming, however as you go a little further, you will see remains of the traditional tree species which were cultivated not long ago. It is possible that the impact on the environment then was very similar to the present fruit tree impact. On the side of the path, at km 4.1, having passed by an intersection leading to some beehives, there is a ruin on a rise surrounded by abandoned dry stone walls and olive trees. Just on the very edge of the path, there is the only specimen of a tree which should be dominating the landscape of Cerro Pastora, the Holm Oak. It is here at this point that you are reminded of the old and forgotten identity of this land and its quite recent traditional exploitation. Not far from the olives and the low dry stone walls, a few turns of the path away, the walk is lined with low-hanging avocados. The path takes you to a new mirador (km 5) with views to Vélez Málaga with the Mediterranean to the south and Sierra Almijara in the north. However, any photos of the panoramic view are made difficult by the same power line seen before over the Puerto hill.

» La Autovía del Mediterráneo

The walk starts descending and there is a good specimen of a Nettle Tree with two trunks next to a flat parking area on the side of the track. Here onwards smaller plots of land appear, with farms and houses along the track, which is now asphalted and leads steeply downhill.

Before arriving at Melí, note the specimens of the rare Yellow Wooded Thistle, old and up to two metres tall, just beside the track. Its distribution reaches only southern Mediterranean Spain and North Africa. The motorway is now ever-present and has many escarpments which at least are useful to the walker by showing the beautiful streaks of colours of the shale which forms the hills. The walk leads along service roads parallel to the main road and arrives at Río Seco (km 7), which you need to wade through, and then continue climbing. The escarpments found along the GR-249, as it leads up and down from the locally known plant nursery, are very interesting; they show the diverse textures of very recent sediments, from compacted sands to looser gravel of various sizes.

Traces of the old dry crops of Cerro Pastora, a ruin of a house and the abandoned dry stone walls



Having left an area of pine and herbs behind on your left, with its enormous Aleppo pine tree, find a crossing underneath the A-7 E-12, through the Imaroga area, which takes you to the Góndola de Nerja roundabout at kilometre 9.1, at La Loma de Las Vacas, where you must cross the MA-5105 close to an industrial area. Another descent leads to a crossing over the stream Arroyo de las Exóticas; its name comes from an old garden centre. Here, again, orchards and fruit trees appear. The walk passes by water channels of the Chillar river and the downhill slope ends further on at a river crossing. In order to reach your destination walk uphill again, passing through the part of Nerja which has been built on top of caves and escarpments of travertine limestone, its sediments accumulated here by the river. Kilometre 10.5 marks the end of Stage 4 at Calle Julio Romero, close to a sports complex. ○



At this point of the walk, Holm Oaks plus dry and irrigated subtropical crops merge



As a consequence of the motorway construction, the escarpments show their shale composition

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Convent Las Nieves in Torrox	30S 0415108 4068356	135 m	2 Puente de Las Animas over Torrox river	30S 0415284 4068010	75 m
3 Mirador de Torrox	30S 0415794 4067884	155 m	4 The large myrtle above the tunnel in Torrox	30S 0416924 4068216	225 m
5 El Puerto	30S 0417102 4068253	265 m	6 The ruin and a Holm Oak amongst avocados	30S 0417548 4068722	215 m
7 Mirador de Sierra Almijara y Nerja	30S 0418053 4068596	215 m	8 Population of <i>Carthamus arborescens</i> thistles close to the motorway	30S 0418672 4068378	87 m
9 Shale escarpment	30S 0419021 4068353	66 m	10 Crossing over the Río Seco	30S 0419400 4068312	30 m
11 An underpass of the Autovía del Mediterráneo	30S 0420306 4068551	72 m	12 Arroyo de las Exóticas	30S 0421279 4068518	65 m
13 Crossing over the Chillar river	30S 0421660 4068422	45m	14 Julio Romero st. de Nerja	30S 0421832 4068359	70 m



The impressive stone wall of Caz del Molino de Sedella

El Parque Natural *Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama* and the Great Path of Málaga

On 12th November 1989, the Park area was declared a Protected Natural Space of Andalucía. It has a decidedly mountainous character and spans a wide range of altitudes: from sea level to mountain peaks of over 2000 metres high. Additionally to the Park, there is also a smaller, complementary natural reserve protecting sea level landscapes called Paraje Natural de Maro y Cerrogorro.

In Granada province, the 40,663 hectares of Natural Park are formed by Alhama de Granada, Arenas del Rey, Jayena and Otívar. However, the Great Path of Málaga literally crosses its eight municipalities belonging to Málaga province: Nerja, Frigiliana, Cómpeta, Canillas de Albaida, Salares, Sedella, Canillas de Aceituno and Alcaucín. What's more, the path takes you deep into the heart of the Sierra de Almijara, and follows its north-western edge in the remaining section.

Time and again the GR-249 lets you experience first-hand the abrupt terrain of the Park, with its marble rocks and white

sands, but obviously without the necessity of conquering any of its main mountain peaks. However, you can admire from a few selected spots the peaks of El Cielo (1.508 m), Alto de la Cuesta del Espartal (1.601m), El Navachica (831m), El Lucero (779 m), Los Tajos del Sol (689 m) or La Maroma (2.066 m). One of the most important resources, the landscape, can be appreciated through so-called miradores or viewing points, which is subsequently suggested in this text. The geological makeup of the Park is characterised by karst modelling in the rocky areas. Heavy rainfall filtering through limestone has created a large network of potholes which often manifest their presence with water springs, as happens in the case of the Río Bermuzas and Cueva de la Fájara sinkholes. The Cueva de Nerja, marking the beginning of Stage 5, is a cave of international renown and constitutes an underground system which hasn't been active for a long time as nowadays water circulates deeper underneath it. There have been endless

findings in the cave related to the presence of early humans.

The cave is situated at 160 metres of altitude. 4800 metres of galleries have been explored and divided into three parts: Tourist Galleries, High Galleries and New Galleries, each one representing approximately one third of the total. More numerous and frequented are the shelters, holes and shallow caves which have always been populated by humans and animals and used as protection against inclement weather (it snows here every year). The most spectacular natural havens this Stage takes you through are located in El Barranco del Chillar (you can see quite well the ones called El Rincón and Los Hermanicos), also close to Cortijo del Daire and Cueva de las Cabras.

In these high Andalusian mountains there is a concentration of some of the most relevant selections of plants of the Park, such as yew trees, hedgehog vegetation or

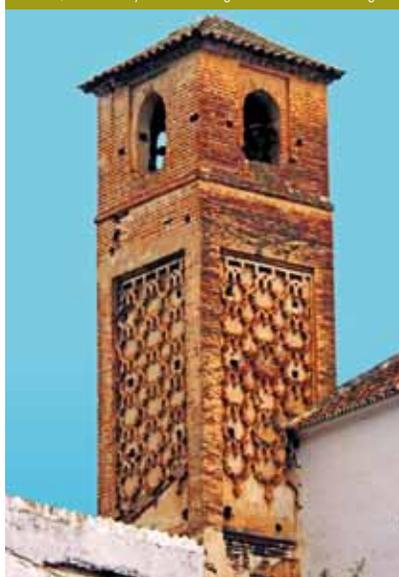
some, very localised, endemic plants. Gum Cistus and maples complete the spectrum of high altitude flora. Most of the natural richness of this area can be discovered by following footpaths. The trees here are mainly composed of Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*) and Maritime pines (*Pinus pinaster*) which are distributed according to the altitude and are well represented along the GR. Pine tree specimens which are particularly worth mentioning are found at Barranco de Chillar, Puerto de la Páez Blanca and Cerro Verde, Los Pradillos and, especially, at Cerro del Gavilán.

There are also small islands of *Quercus* species present and one of the best examples is the Holm Oak and Cork Oak areas mixed with Portuguese Oaks, in Salares and Sedella. The walk takes you through the entire stretches of some of these small forests. At the very foot of the path you will find such special plants as *Buxus balearica*, *Maytenus senegalensis* and *Cneorum tricoccum* which are representative of this protected natural space. However, there is also Rosemary, Juniper, Spiny Broom, Esparto Grass and Lentisc; all these plants are adapted to the harsh mountain conditions.

Rivers are also heroes of the Great Path of Málaga, possibly more than all the other features. The natural value of the Park's watercourses is based on the erosion of dolomite sands, creating very abrupt V-shaped passages. These ragged passages are locally known as "cahorros" or "cajorros", such as Cahorros de Chillar or Higuérón.

The high proportion of dissolved carbonates results in beautiful travertine rock concretions in form of pipe clay coloured cascades; the purity of water rewards us with deep turquoise pools. The vegetation adapted to the seasonal character of the rivers and streams is best represented by Oleander along with willow trees, cane and rushes but also Black and White Poplar and

One of the best known images of Axarquía, the minaret of Salares, welcomes you to the village at the end of the Stage



bamboo. Very few rivers you cross on the walk have any fish, on the other hand the amphibians and reptiles of the forested river banks are very interesting, as well as the invertebrates. The large eagles: Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle and Bonelli's Eagle stand out amongst other vertebrates. Reptiles are abundant. There are some squirrels, and they leave behind nibbled pine cones as traces of their presence.

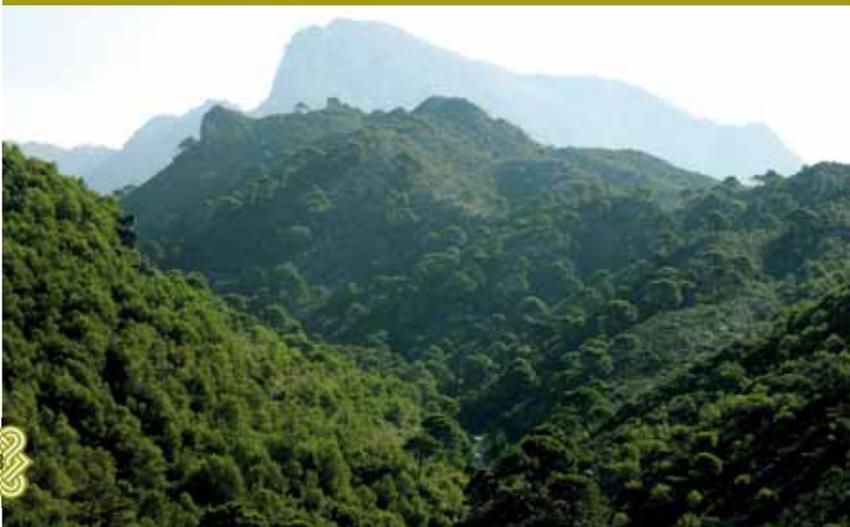
There is a good population of Spanish Ibex in these mountains, probably one of the most important populations of this exclusively Iberian ungulate. The animal covers a lot of territory but it is possible to see this wild mountain goat if you walk quietly. The connection between the Ibex and these sierras is so strong that the symbol of the Nerja Cave is a prehistoric painting of a Spanish Ibex. The first type of environmental protection in the mountains here was the creation of a National Hunting Reserve in 1973, due to the presence of the Spanish Ibex. After that, the area gained international protection forming part of the projects Red Natura 2000 and Zona Especialmente Protegida de Importancia para el Mediterráneo.

The list of the human-related treasures of the Park must start with the paintings and archaeological remains in the Nerja Cave discovered in 1959 by five youths from Maro. The cave was occupied by humans dating back to the era between 25,000 and 4000 BC. The cave has been declared an artistic, historical, and cultural monument.

Humans must have occupied this territory constantly in the past. As you walk along the GR, note that the line of the villages lies along the border between the sierra and the hills, around the main natural springs. Geological and biological diversity resulting from this ecotone (place where different landscapes meet), must have been very tempting for any living being, including humans. It is, however, the Muslim heritage which dominates the landscape, with the irrigation channels, mountainside terraces and type of cultivation as the first identifying features. Many of the villages welcome the walker with their Arabic bridges or bridges which have been restored by the Arabs (with a perfect example over Río Salares). The nearby Moorish almarin (minaret) has become one of the symbols of this protected area.

At the same time, churches and chapels

Rugged terrain, gullies and pine forests of the Natural Park





The walk at its highest elevation in the Natural Park showing the well-regenerating forest

are good examples of the area's development later in history and the GR's itinerary takes you to the main churches and chapels in the Park, from modest ones to quite grand ones.

The local cuisine, inherited from the Moors, Moriscos and Jews, is based on home-grown dry crops (grapevines, olives, almonds) and irrigated crops which today include mangoes, avocados and the custard apple, growing fast in the sunlight and plentiful water supplied by the sierra. The cuisine consists of the traditional game dishes, lamb, kid, cheeses and stews with natural ingredients such as fennel, raisins, olive oil and wine.

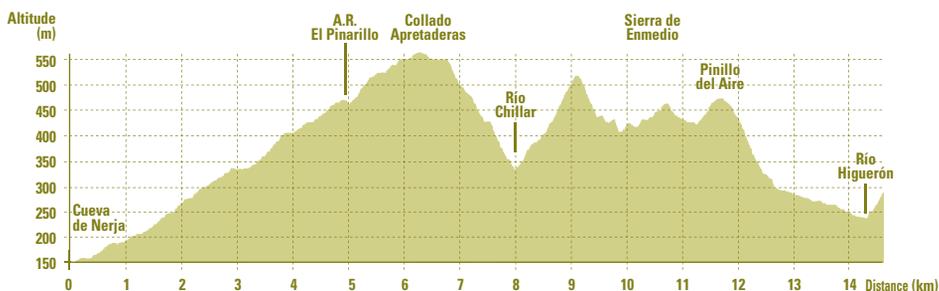
Places which the Great Path enables you to visit include such intangible assets as the many Caminos de Granada which venture out to the other side of the mountains through perilous passes. These paths used to be peppered with roadside inns which catered to the muleteers, lime and charcoal makers and all the people who worked in gardens, vineyards, and dry crop fields scattered all over the area.

Reviving this nomadic spirit and using the very same landscapes, the Gran Senda gives the traveller an opportunity to experience this very unique land first-hand; the land where tradition, history, progress and nature unite. ○

5 **NERJA • FRIGILIANA** *The Kingdom of the Aleppo Pine*



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 5 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	14.7	Accumulated ascent	765	Final altitude	310
Ascent km	6.9	Accumulated descent	600	Maximum altitude	565
Descent km	4.6	Maximum difference	422	Minimum altitude	142
Flat km	3.2	Altitude at starting point	145	Average altitude	380

» Summary of this Stage «

The walk starts very close to the sea and you gain height in a long climb to reach 565 m above sea level. Although there are some dirt tracks, paths prevail. There are two sections where the walk descends considerably towards the river Chillar and Higueroón and a few uphill sections. The terrain is dolomite rock and Aleppo Pine forests. Pay attention to elevation to elevation gained during the stage, both through ascents and descents.

» Highlights of this Stage «

Coming from a coastal town as touristy as Nerja, with the Nerja Cave being a sign of a change in the itinerary, you will be transported to the wild and rocky mountains.

Stage 5 enables you to explore two of the most important rivers of the western section of lower Almijara and then the usually dry El Barranco de la Coladilla valley.

You will cross the Sierra de Enmedio with spectacular views to the most representative gorges of this part of the Sierra, such as El Almendrón or El Sol and mountain peaks such as El Navachica or El Cielo.

The riverbeds of El Higueroón and above all El Chillar are heavily frequented by the aficionados of white-water sports. It is worth a mention that there is a network of aqueducts and water access points which use both rivers as water resources.

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
3	2	2	3	0	7.5	7.2	x 2

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

- **Starting point:** Nerja Cave, about 2 km to the east of town and very close to the settlement of Maro.
- **Access to starting point:** A-7 E-5 direction Nerja up to the exit 295 and direction Nerja Cave.
- **Finish point:** Plaza del Ingenio in Frigiliana.
- **Access to finish point:** MA-5105 with the A-92 E-7 as reference.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** it is possible to walk along El Chillar river if water level allows. However, it is about 8 km to the first populated area. This is a watercourse walk frequently used by hikers.
- **No return point:** from the mountain pass which you climb from El Chillar river, it is best to continue to Frigiliana which is closer (about 6 km away) and the terrain is less rugged. However, the rest area, Area Recreativa del Pinarillo, is located about 4 km away and it has car access.
- **Maps:** **1055-I** (Maro) at the start and **1054-II** (Torrox) at the end of the section.
- **District boundries:** Nerja (8 km of the walk) and Frigiliana (approximately 7 km).



In the foreground a dense Aleppo Pine forest with an outstanding Maritime Pine



Barranco de la Coladilla and Cerro Verde

• Enjoy the walk safely

There are no towns or villages along the whole itinerary. It is recommended to carry a well-stocked rucksack. The only point where you can get drinking water is the rest area, Area Recreativa del Pinarillo, about 5 km from the start. Although you will be walking through mid-size mountains, you must not underestimate the wilderness of the terrain and the changing mountain weather. Be careful

walking along the riverbeds of El Chillar and El Higuero. You will need to follow them for quite a long section, first ascending and then descending along them. During the seasons of the year when the water rises, you may have to make a decision not to cross the rivers.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Our GR coincides with the fourth and last section of GR-252 (Periana –Cuevas de Nerja). It's waymarked in the opposite direction, as you can see on the information panels which you can normally find at the finish point, once you have completed the corresponding GR-249 section.

In the vicinity of the El Pinarillo rest area and in the river valleys of Chillar and Higuero, there are starting points of footpaths which lead uphill to the main peaks of this part of the sierras.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Chillar river has recently become well known to people who practice white water sports at a beginner's level. The close proximity of the river to Nerja and the eastern Costa del Sol, low level of difficulty, and its four spectacular "cahorros", make the river a very powerful magnet. The river has become a focal meeting point for visitors. Despite the influx of people, the river shows an acceptable level of conservation (except for some graffiti and occasional rubbish). However, it is difficult to see any animals around here except for the least busy times.

The riverbed has been compacted by the cementing effect calcium dissolved in water has on the pebbles and boulders. Most frequently seen plants are Oleander, cane, brambles and rushes; they do not, however, manage to form galleried woods.

El Canal del Río Chillar taps into the river waters higher upstream, actually quite close to the walk, through a major water channel over 6 km long which carries the water at a level high enough to power the electricity station, while the river itself loses height. The channel is accessible but not recommended for people who have vertigo or who aren't skilful enough to walk along it.

El Río Higuero also has its own history of exploitation; in this case it was used for irrigation of both traditional and the new sub-tropical crops.

Towards the end of Stage 5 you will find El Pozo de Batán, an enormous water deposit with a water pipe which now substitutes the old "acequia", the aqueduct-type water channel.

This is a spectacular place. It is worth the walk uphill along the river to see its “cahorros”, the rocks hanging low over the river gullies. You will find *Osyris quadripartita*, *Carthamus arborescens* and also a novelty, *Rhamnus alaternus*, along the river bed at the end of the path.

The water pipes you will find only a few metres under the Pozo Batán water tank, supply irrigation water left over from a spring called Lizar. This spring, situated above Frigiliana centre, supplies the town with drinking water.

Both rivers are quite boxed in by the rocks which make them shady and also narrower. This results in scarcity of flora, restricted to various willow species.

Oleander is the great survivor of floods and droughts, together with rushes and cane. Travertine rock is very important along these limestone rivers. In the travertine, above the water, you will find thriving Southern Maidenhair Fern and Blue Throatwort.



Spiny-footed Lizard, typical inhabitant of sands and pebbles of the Natural Park

On the banks there are abundant large lentiscs and Spanish Boxwood mixed with thick Aleppo Pines. El Barranco de la Coladilla, a gully which runs along the left side of the dirt track up to the Área Recreativa del Pinarillo, although smaller than the other two river beds, is full of crevices and interesting rock-dwelling vegetation. There are some access points on foot leading to it (not waymarked) from the GR-249.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Up to the Collado de los Apretaderos

The first 5 kilometres consists of forest tracks in good condition, leading exclusively downhill. Almost from the beginning the track takes you into El Parque Natural de las Sierras Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama. There is only one intersection where you take a left, the track straight ahead leads to Barranco Romero and la Cuesta del Cielo. El Barranco de la Coladilla, which you cross as you go down towards Área Recreativa del Pinarillo, is before that, as you keep to the left of the track, and you can see in the east the forested slopes of Cerro Mangüeno. Vegetation here is unique, and there is an information panel at the beginning referring to the conservation of the flora by the Ministry of Environment.

First, underneath a thinned Aleppo Pine forest, find a good population of *Maytenus senegalensis*, a species of a spiny shrub which is threatened and catalogued as “vulnerable”; it favours climates with a coastal influence. The Spanish Boxwood (*Buxus balearica*) is

Pozo Batán water deposit in the river bed of Río Higuero, belongs to irrigation community of Lizar and Molino de Frigiliana





The path leads to Río Chillar, having crossed the water channel which feeds hydraulic facilities below

well-represented here due to the dryness of the soil, and it tends to grow in shady spots. Somewhat more difficult to find, but present here, is the *Cneorum tricoccum*, a rare coastal endemic, typical of tropical climates and very restricted habitat. It grows along with Dwarf Fan Palm, Purple Phlomis, Esparto Grass, Lentisc, Juniper, Asparagus, Spiny Broom, a few Carob Trees and Kermes Oaks. The Área Recreativa El Pinarillo has very good facilities and you can stock up on water here. The walk continues northwards passing by an “era”, a threshing circle, and then it crosses El Barranco de la Coladilla, leads steeply uphill and turns left onto a track. There is a fork which goes to La Fuente del Esparto, its name serving as a reminder of the importance of plants for the local economy in years gone by.

In this area of dolomite sands you can find the Spiny-footed lizard. Also due to the terrain, which is easily eroded, there has been a Málaga University, Tragsa and Junta de Andalucía Nerja region research facility built here, which measures erosion. This facility can be seen when climbing the mountain pass and looking eastwards. A little higher up you arrive at El Collado de los Apretaderos (de las Apretaderas on other maps).

» El Río Chillar and El Higuero Riverbeds

The long gash of Canal del Chillar is very visible as you walk along the gullies, keeping to the left side of the valley, where it later reappears in the next stage as Mirador de Chillar. You will cross the channel when walking down the

Cuesta de los Galgos towards the water and from here you can truly appreciate its size and how much water it carries. From the beginning of Cuesta Jiménez ahead, leading west and below the cliff Tajo de las Chorrerillas. Cuesta de los Galgos then veers away from the forest track at km 6.8.

El Río Chillar is a border between the city limits of Nerja (to the east) and Frigiliana (to the west). You will cross it at km 8 of the itinerary approximately.

This is a broad V-shaped valley, its bed excavated by erosion caused by the river into “cahorros” and enclosures which, although not very high in general, contain some extensive cliffs of varying altitudes. The climb towards the river is steep. In the current section there is an accumulated elevation of over 1000 metres, between the gorges and the challenging peaks of Sierra Almijara and mostly in the eastern ridges of the mountains. You can often hear the bustle of people at the river below however they do not tend to climb high enough as to reach the point where GR-249 crosses the river.

The station for measuring erosion and the Área Recreativa del Pinarillo on the other side of Barranco de la Coladilla



The majority of the forest consists of Aleppo Pines with Rosemary, Dwarf Fan Palm, Juniper, Esparto grass and Spiny Broom amongst the undergrowth. In some areas the trees are sparse, other areas are dominated by scrub and places which have escaped forest fires are more densely wooded.

Passing from this area to the next is done by walking along ridges which cut across dry stream beds, one by one, with Barranco del Espejo and its twin Barranco Ancho at the end; both are tributaries of Río Chíllar. El Barranco Ancho shows signs of a recent forest fire; you will find trees with blackened trunks and branches, and empty snail shells. In between the gullies there is a mountain pass with an interesting name: Pinillo de Aire (Little Pine Tree of the Air). Just before that pass, you will find a half-preserved lime kiln, remains of a past lime production of an almost industrial scale.

El Mirador del Tramo is situated on the Loma de las Garzas, the last rocky bastion of this section and a must-do stop to look back at the distance you have covered (eastwards) and what's coming next. The descent to El Río



Las instalaciones de medición de la erosión y, al otro lado del Barranco de la Coladilla, el Área Recreativa del Pinarillo

Higuerón involves walking along a dry bed of a mountain stream and it is here, along the path called Cuesta del Sordo, where it's easy to see Shrubby Violet (*Viola arborescens*). There is a good stretch of the Río Higuerón where you need to find dry land to continue walking. You will actually be walking along the wide riverbed, at the beginning of which there is a concrete irrigation channel, which becomes a line of pipes running through the cane and dispersed oleanders. Passing by the Pozo de Batán waters is always pleasant to the traveller, especially when the weather is hot, although taking a dip here is not recommended. The rest of the walk leads in a slight zigzag between limestone outcrops which tend to be bigger and bigger in size and where shelters and caves appear until the steep concrete Cuesta Apero, which finishes at the very Plaza del Ingenio de Frigiliana. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

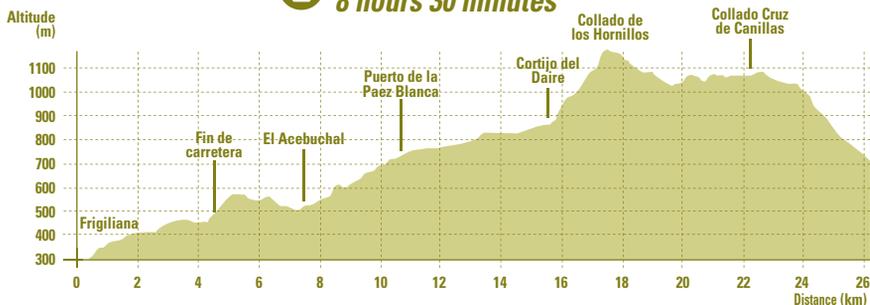
1 Cueva de Nerja	30S 0424476 4068982	145 m	2 Área Recreativa El Pinarillo	30S 0424220 4072901	465 m
3 Mirador del Cielo (E)	30S 0423840 4073214	540 m	4 Collado de los Apretaderos	30S 0423840 4073214	540 m
5 Mirador del Río Chíllar (S)	30S 0422936 4074179	550 m	6 Canal del Río Chíllar	30S 0423135 4074010	405 m
7 Vado del Río Chíllar	30S 0423840 4073214	335 m	8 Puerto y Mirador de la Cuesta de los Galgos (E)	30S 0422569 4073947	525 m
9 Mirador del Tramo (E and W)	30S 0421139 4073253	475 m	10 Río Higuerón	30S 0420673 4073277	295 m
11 Pozo Batán	30S 0420496 4072799	270 m	12 Plaza del Ingenio Frigiliana	30S 0420263 4072245	310 m

6 FRIGILIANA • CÓMPETA

Maritime Pine Territory



ESTIMATED TIME
8 hours 30 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	26.4	Accumulated ascent	1.065	Final altitude	685
Ascent km	11.7	Accumulated descent	680	Maximum altitude	1.180
Descent km	8.1	Maximum difference	890	Minimum altitude	290
Flat km	6.6	Altitude at starting point	300	Average altitude	810

» Summary of this Stage «

This is a long leg of the walk, without a doubt. There is a stretch of road for about 5 km and from then on you will be climbing continuously along forest tracks, ravine floors, and mountain paths, skirting the western slopes of Sierra Almijara. You will have climbed the total of 1.350 m and from there you will descend continuously along a footpath until you reach Cortijo or Venta de María Guerrero, where there is a 4.5 km of track which leads to Cómputa.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The same as Stage 5, Stage 6 constitutes an immense mountainous area covered in forests, in this case Maritime Pine. The walker has a privileged position here from which they can reach the surrounding peaks, above all the peaks of El Lucero or El Cisne. One of the places which stand out is Paraje del Daire, and the beginning of El Barranco Moreno ravine with its numerous tributaries you will be crossing one by one. The final part follows in the footsteps of the route of old roadside inns along the Camino de Granada (the beginning of another ravine, Barranco del Acebuchal, also used to be lined with roadside inns). Then the walk takes you to a very special vantage point from where you can admire the landscape: the immediate surroundings of La Cruz de la Canillas, both towards the Sierra Tejeda ahead and La Almijara behind you. This spot is so prominent that there is an observation point, belonging to the forest fire prevention group called Infoca, on top of Cerro Gavilán (or Peñón de Calimacos) which potentially could be used to control this vast territory quite easily.

							
3	2	2	4	5.7	13	7.7	x 2

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

- **Starting point:** Plaza del Ingenio de Frigiliana.
- **Access to starting point:** from the A-92 E-5 road take an exit direction Frigiliana onto the MA-5105.
- **Finish point:** Plaza del Carmen de Cómpeeta.
- **Access to finish point:** there are two possibilities of exiting the A-92 E-5, direction Algarrobo or Torrox.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** this is truly complicated. Up to Cortijo del Daire (km 16) the best option is to go back (covering up to 8 kilometres) using the track towards El Acebuchal. From the point at El Collado de los Hornillos it would be advisable to try and reach the track of El Daire which passes underneath the footpath. The track from Cortijo del Daire has car access. You could continue along the GR and look for the forest track which takes you to the immediate surroundings of the observation point of Infoca and then come down towards Cómpeeta or the Hotel de la Casa de la Mina.
- **No return point:** practically it would coincide with El Collado de los Hornillos, the highest point of Stage 6.
- **Maps:** **1054-II** (Torrox) starting point of Stage 6 **1040-IV** and (Canillas de Albaida) at finish point.
- **District boundaries:** you will be in Frigiliana town limits until km 10.7 approximately, in El Collado de la Paez Blanca, although the Barranco del Acebuchal marks the line between town and village limits. The rest of the way, up to km 18.5, you’ll be walking within Cómpeeta village limits and then between Cómpeeta and Canillas de Albaida. In fact the last ravine is named Arroyo de las Jurisdicciones (The Jurisdiction Stream).

Two cyclists freshening up at the stream crossing of Arroyo de Juan Rojo which is showing its clay coloured streaks





Aldea del Acebuchal Alto, mountain settlement at a privileged location

• Enjoy the walk safely

A climb of 1.350 metres of altitude should not be taken lightly. There are peaks of 1.700 m and higher in these mountains. The contour of the mountains is very rough, with semi-open valleys, gorges and ravines. This is why it's very dangerous to venture away from the sign-posted footpaths. Up to the halfway point of this stage there are places where you can stock up on untreated water or, at least, freshen up in summer. However, there is only one populated place along this stage. Also, the observation tower is possibly visited by workers during fire risk season. The walk is long and tiring and it's essential to plan well for such a physically demanding activity which will practically take

up all of your day. Be careful walking the stretch of the road leaving Frigiliana up to the intersection of Cuatro Caminos. This part of the road is very narrow and lacks a hard shoulder. Not only should you walk on the left but also in a single file, making yourselves visible. Be extra careful at times of limited visibility.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The third stage of the walk GR-242 Periana-Nerja coincides with Stage 6 of GR-249 fully, but it is sign-posted in the opposite direction. The road at the starting point has an access to Vereda de Frigiliana a Cómpea. Later on, from Cuatro Caminos up to La Venta Cebolleros the walk follows the old Camino de Granada, which used to lead to Granada province through La Venta Camila and the Puerto de Frigiliana pass. The GR-249 connects here with some local footpaths. It also follows the same itinerary as the so-called Puerta Verde Torrox-Frigiliana-Sierra de Almijara. From El Collado de los Hornillos the GR-249 joins and follows exactly another walk to Granada, the Camino de Granada-Cómpea. This walk goes through a well-known pass called Puerto de Cómpea.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

El Barranco del Acebuchal ravine is the first watercourse you will cross, however in this area it becomes a completely dry, wide and walkable streambed. However, one of the reasons why there are settlements here, such as the Acebuchal Alto y Bajo, has been the existence of natural water springs in the area. At this point the only watering point is a tiny fresh water spring which forms a small puddle at Venta del Cebollero.

The major streams of the area are at the Cortijo del Daire, situated right on top of the

ridge separating El Barranco de las Majadillas ravine, in the west, from the Barranco Moreno, in the east. The two streams you have to wade through are, in that order, Arroyo de Juan Rojo and Arroyo del Mirlo (on other maps the latter appears as Arroyo de la Zarzadilla). These streams shortly become El Barranco Moreno, where you can find a few surviving wild cherries. The stream crossing is done in a wide area along the track and it shouldn't pose any difficulties. Just as you cross the second stream you will find a footpath called La Cuesta de los Civiles.

El Barranco Moreno is adapted to practising canyoning; in this case the itinerary is not too complicated. The only challenge is posed by a 20 metre high waterfall in the main riverbed where you have to abseil. One of the accesses to the canyon, a little path, can be seen just as you pass Arroyo de los Mirlos. Another access option would be to pass El Cortijo del Daire, leave the GR and continue a little further until El Arroyo de las Majadillas, walk down the streambed to the point where it joins the previous stream. Here, at the headwaters and at this altitude, brambles reign over the watercourses, together with Oleander, rushes and a few willows. The lower part of the gully is slightly more open, mostly harbouring clumps of Oleander.

El Cortijo del Daire and other nearby farmhouses were able to survive in the past thanks to the plentiful water coming from springs in the high mountains. The kitchen gardens of Cortijo del Daire are still recognisable; they take advantage of an upper terrace of an old



Close-up of calcium deposits of Barranco del Acebuchal, with visible bedrock and a stone wall

travertine waterfall. All the watercourses here flow down carrying carbonates and they tend to leave behind plentiful tufa deposits.

As you climb towards El Collado de los Hornillos, at km 17, you will see the water deposit for Cómpea; this gives you an idea of how rich in aquifers the area is. The walk takes you along the pipeline and you can see the inspection covers.

Finally, the area of the old roadside inns such as Cándido and Los Pradillos, is rich in water sources, which are reflected in local names but also in the presence of clusters of rushes and poplars growing in between the pine trees.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Towards the Aldeas del Acebuchal and Venta del Cebollero

Having walked the inevitable stretch of the road, take a downhill track which passes through the Paraje de Cuatro Caminos and descends towards El Acebuchal. Pass by a house where a tiled mural tells a story of an orphan who was buried alive, with a gruesome description of her remains which were taken to Vélez Málaga.

The history of the two farmsteads, El Acebuchal Alto and Acebuchal Bajo (Upper and Lower Acebuchal) is very much connected to water and the gardens which make up 3 hectares of cultivated land, both on Cómpea's side where the houses are, and on the side belonging to Frigiliana.

Layers of rammed-earth wall over an arch-shaped opening, Venta del Cebollero





Supporting walls of the Daire track, surrounded by sparse Rosemary bushes

The progress of the local population has been very much connected to the Camino de Granada, suggesting that the mule drivers and the “service stops” along the way which tended to them, may have triggered the settlements here. There are information panels in the area which tell the story of these mountain inhabitants and the Maquis (guerillas who fought against Franco) also the story of the depopulation caused by the Civil War.

Having walked for almost 8 km, at El Acebuchal, take a narrow path uphill following a streambed most of the time, sometimes taking in and out short-cuts. In the shade underneath

Aleppo Pines and a few first Maritime Pines, there is dense underbrush of large gorse bushes and Rosemary. Here you can find unusual plants such as *Anthyllis citisoides* and *Ononis speciosa* with *Bupleurum fruticosum* growing close to the ruin of a threshing circle. The highlight of this section is the Venta del Cebollero or de Jaro, very close to beehives which have been installed here to take advantage of the dense rosemary bushes growing in the open areas. The “venta” was positioned before the climb along the Camino de Granada (these inclines do not cease until Venta Panaderos on the other side of the sierra, in Granada Province). They used to complement the hospitality services by working in the vineyards, which surrounded the venta in those times. Apart from the afore-mentioned water sources, other unique features are the architectural elements of the Ventas and other nearby buildings, which seem to go back to much earlier than the 18th century they have been dated to.

There are good examples of rammed-earth walls with putlog holes which can be seen very well from the outside, a frequently used andalusí (Andalusian-Moorish) technique very well suited to these dry environs.

Panoramic views from a viewpoint along Stage 6



»» Dirt Track Network

Starting from the venta the dirt track network truly begins. The one that the Gran Senda de Málaga follows, climbs up to the Puerto de la Páez Blanca pass (750 m), leaving the Cerro Verde hill to the left. This is a place of bloody skirmishes between the Guardia Civil and people who sought refuge in these mountains after the war of 1936. You will notice enormous Maritime Pine trees which stand out in the landscape; they have escaped forest fires unlike some previously walked areas. Also worth mentioning are centuries-old grapevines.

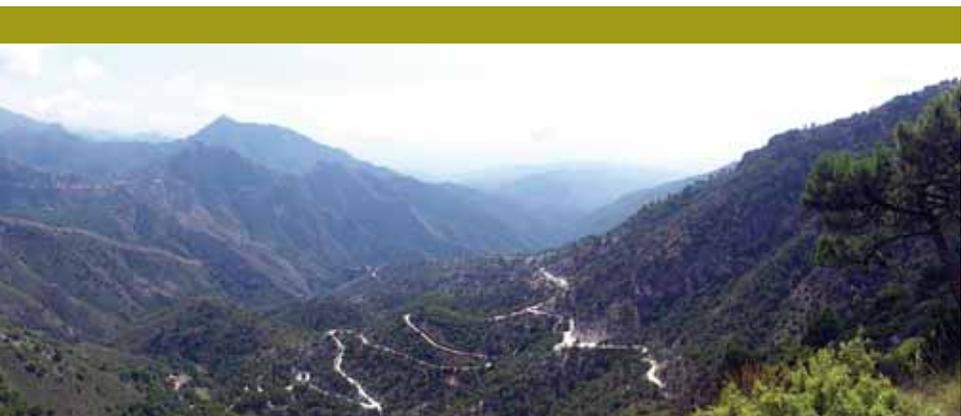
In general, the dirt tracks in the area climb from El Acebuchal, circle the rugged western slope of Cerro de las Tres Cruces, skirt half the slope of the Cortijo area and the southern face of La Loma del Daire. Then they pass on both sides of El Cerro Gavilán, heading for Cómpeeta, as they descend from the east and west side of the hill. The GR-249 uses the dirt tracks only up to Cortijo del Daire, a farmstead which has a definite Andalusian-Moorish feel.

Along the dirt tracks there is a notable elevation gain between the Cerro de las Tres Cruces until the ravine El Barranco Moreno. There are spectacular views towards the mountain cirque where the valley begins. Halfway between the pass and the farmhouse you should



El Cortijo del Daire and its terraces looking over El Arroyo de las Majadillas

stop to admire the impressive dry stone walls which support the dolomite sandstone and are true works of great craftsmanship. These walls harbour Viola arborescens growing in between sparse Rosemary bushes. El Cortijo del Daire dominates the broad valley from its privileged vantage point. There are some quite large caves on both sides of the Cortijo however they are somewhat difficult to locate, one of them lies underneath travertine limestone. Beneath the house, the terraced farmland still shelters a few surviving walnuts, pomegranates, fig trees, and wild olives. Currently there are also a few beehives.





walkers having a break under the large Maritime Pine with Sierra Almijara behind

» Towards el Collado de los Hornillos and La Cruz de Canillas

This is the wildest part of this stage. Starting from kilometre 16 marker you leave the forest track behind and walk on a path which climbs the white sandy slopes and dolomite ridges covered with dense Rosemary and Gorse bushes, recuperating after a fire which ravaged these slopes not that long ago. Ignore some footpaths to the left (towards La Loma del Daire) and to the right (leading to a water reservoir and to Lucero) and continue until you reach Puerto de los Hornillos, where there are splendid examples of surviving Maritime pine trees, giving you an idea of the original aspect of the mountain slopes. The mountain pass is the highest point of the itinerary and you start descending using a ravine which twists southwards. On the right you will pass by paths to Puerto Blanquillo and Puerto de Cómpea. The latter is an important landmark along the Camino de Cómpea a Granada. The GR will be following a part

of this Camino from now on. At another junction, a little lower down, there are the Ventorro de Cándido and Venta de los Pradillos, remains of old inns which prove that you are following the old transit path for people and animals. This doesn't seem to have been so long ago when you are passing by lime kilns and inns such as the one called De María Guerrero. Between this house and other Ventas there is an outstanding, enormous Maritime Pine tree, majestic looking amongst other incipient young trees. To the east you will see far in the distance another significant watercourse called el Arroyo de los Pradillos. It's worth mentioning that there is a view point at this stage, which lets you visualise the whole itinerary from Puerto de la Páez Blanca with Barranco Moreno between the two points. Following the track southwards arrive at Casa de la Mina and its hotel. However, the GR passes on the other side of the ridge.

» From La Cruz de Canillas to Cómpeeta

As you walk over the pass of La Cruz de Canillas (having covered 22 km up to this point), the views are equally beautiful: towards the west, then to Sierra Tejada to northeast and of Játar in the north; all are impressive. From the many forest tracks choose the one west of the watershed and towards Collado Moyano, leaving on one side the access to the fire fighting observation point in Cerro del Gavilán. The Maritime pine wood you're walking through is particularly lovely. Its appearance is a result of having withstood inclement weather, winds and thunderstorms as well as poor, insufficient soil, animal grazing and forest fires. Unlike trees in planted forests, here each specimen is unique in shape, not very tall with gnarled trunk, thick bark, twisted branches; the trees resemble larger-scale bonsais.

There have been attempts of abating the desolate feel of the area by planting more pine trees, with varying degrees of success, and you can see the protective tubes around the



The Lucero footpaths from the climb up El Collado de los Hornillos

small trees as you walk along the track. Except for a short section of a narrow path, the walk downhill towards the drinking water deposit for Cómpeeta and a football field is done along a track, surrounded with Esparto grass, Dwarf Fan Palms and Lavender. The first houses of Cómpeeta come together at the square called La Plaza del Carmen, where Stage 7 is completed. ○

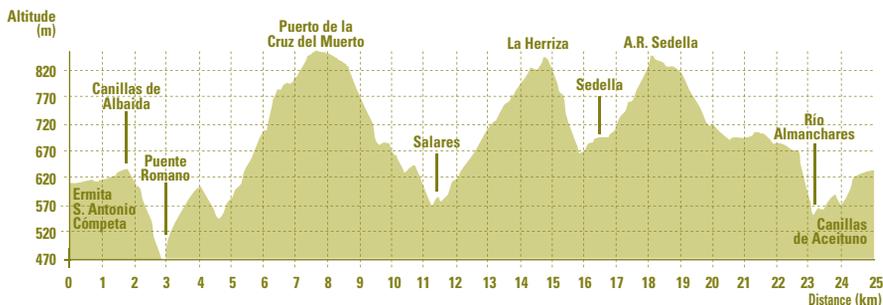
LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Plaza del Ingenio de Frigiliana	30S 040263 4072250	300 m	2 Cuatro Caminos. End of tarmac	30S 0417634 4073816	460 m
3 El Acebuchal settlement	30S 0417761 4075305	500 m	4 Puerto Paez Blanca	30S 0417702 4077148	715 m
5 Mirador del Barranco viewpoint	30S 0417692 4078221	775 m	6 Cortijo del Daire	30S 0418287 4079371	860 m
7 Mirador del Lucero viewpoint	30S 0417841 4079970	1.080 m	8 Collado de los Hornillos	30S 0417717 4080306	1.180 m
9 The old Venta de los Pradillos	30S 0416803 4079923	1.045 m	10 Mirador of Stage 6 viewpoint	30S 0415584 4078897	1.070 m
11 Mirador de Sierra Tejada viewpoint	30S 0415225 4078642	1.070 m	12 Plaza del Carmen de Cómpeeta	30S 0413255 4077145	685 m

7 CÓMPETA • CANILLAS DE ACEITUNO

Villages of Sierra Tejada

 ESTIMATED TIME
8 hours 30 min



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	25.1	Accumulated ascent	1.070	Final altitude	634
Ascent km	10.8	Accumulated descent	1.040	Maximum altitude	858
Descent km	9.1	Maximum difference	393	Minimum altitude	465
Flat km	5.2	Altitude at starting point	610	Average altitude	684

» Summary of this Stage «

Stage 7 enters the mountainous area of Axarquía which has been transformed by human beings. The walk climbs towards the mountains from one village to another visiting the total of five villages: Cómpea, Canillas de Albaida; Salares, Sedella and Canillas de Aceituno. Each village is separated from the next one by at least one major watercourse.

» Highlights of this Stage «

You will be crossing some of the rivers which flow direction south towards the Mediterranean Sea, from Sierra Tejada, walking over some spectacular bridges Roman and Arabic in origin. You will also walk up to various watchtowers from where you will be able to admire the nearby mountains and beautiful villages of the Axarquía wilderness. You will be able to visit some of the villages. Additionally to the terraced orchards in Canillas de Albaida, there are pretty oak forests before the village of Salares, and pine woods close to Sedella. The succession of rivers and woods, villages and historical bridges, mountain landscapes and the possibility of adapting the dynamic of the itinerary to your taste make Stage 7 a much recommended stage of the GR.

							
2	2	2	4	6.5	10.1	8.5	x 1

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

- **Starting point:** The Ermita de San Antonio chapel in the north-west area of Cómpeeta.
- **Access to starting point:** The MA-112 road to Cómpeeta and then following the long Calle San Antonio.
- **Finish point:** The south-east entrance to Canillas de Aceituno, by the roundabout with a sculpture devoted to “Labrador de la vid”, a vineyard worker.
- **Access to finish point:** From the A-7205 to the MA-4106.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** At each of the villages that you cross (Canillas de Albaida, Salares y Sedella) but also via the MA-4105 close to Sedella along a few kilometres of asphalt.
- **No return point:** The only somewhat difficult area is after the Cruz del Muerto, elsewhere is relatively well connected. It is advisable to follow the better quality road towards Salares, which is the closest, or otherwise to Canillas de Albaida which also has good vehicle access.
- **Maps: 1040-III** (Canillas de Aceituno) initially and then **1040-IV** (Canillas de Albaida) to continue.
- **District boundries:** El Arroyo de las Jurisdicciones (km 0.5) is the border of the villages of Cómpeeta and Canillas de Albaida, which in turn borders with Salares at Cruz del Muerto (km 7.5). Salares and Sedella are very close, and they become one administration district in Herriza, at kilometre 14.5. Lastly, you change village districts from Sedella to Canillas de Aceituno in Puerto de Sedella, at the end of the road, at kilometre 22.5.

The walk between Cómpeeta and Canillas de Albaida, adapted for walkers, is lined with almonds, olives and carob trees





Subtropical cultivation converges with the traditional dry land crops and pine woodlands along this section of the walk

• Enjoy the walk safely

This is a long stage with a significant cumulative elevation gain, as you pass through three populated areas you can stock up on sufficient supplies and water, or, be able to stop walking in bad weather. Bear in mind that you will climb up to 850 metres twice in this mountainous area. In the confluence of the Arroyo de los Álamos with the Río Salares, close to the Casa de Haro, there should be no problems in wading across.

The Almanchares River can have high water in times of flooding, but you do have the option to continue on the road from the Puerto de Sedella. It is worth a special mention that there

are stretches where you will be walking along the road, above all during the long section from the Área Recreativa de Sedella to the Puerto de Sedella. In addition, there are stretches of asphalt or concrete where vehicles can drive at high speed.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The seventh Stage of the Gran Senda de Málaga is also the second of the GR-242 Periana Nerja, but in the opposite direction. Between Cómpeeta y Canillas de Albaida there is a lovely path, neither marked nor officially approved, that serves as a promenade for both villages.

As you leave La Puente de Canillas de Albaida you will find a couple of itineraries designed by the workshop school "La Aceitera" starting from El Molino, to the Hoya de la Virgen and to the Cruz del Muerto. The latter joins the GR at the Cerro Cuevas.

Arriving at Salares the GR connects with the SLA-64 footpath Sendero del Monte de Salares, a circular path which is ideal for family groups.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

A quiet wander is recommended through the orchards in the first part of the walk to the dry stone walls forming steps at the foot of an irrigation channel supplied with water from a large pool that you'll see later near Canillas de Albaida. The attachment of this village to water is apparent when, along the way, you see the ornamental water channel below the chapel Ermita de Santa Ana. Beneath the village, a bridge sign-posted as the Puente Romano, situated in the area of the Molino, has served as a crossing point of the Río Frío for many centuries. The river is a result of the

nearby confluence of Cajula (which will be on your right for a long stretch) and Turvilla (de la Real in some maps and in others Las Allanás). The bridge is practically sandwiched between wild fig trees and willows that grow in the enclosed river bed. In the more open areas there is Erect Dorycnium, Oleander, and, on a small shady cliff, Ephedra and Juniper.

Before arriving at Salares, you will pass by the Umbría de Haro below the farmhouse, and wade across the Arroyo de los Álamos (also known as Fogarate) which is a tributary of the Salares River that you'll also cross,

using the excellently restored Arabic bridge.

There is no direct access to the river bed but it has interesting bank-side vegetation and subtropical orchards on both banks. During this section, just before entering the town village limits of Sedella, you'll be walking uphill along one of the canals that carries water down, in this case rapidly, from the mountains towards the cultivated plants. Later, you will the Río de la Puente on the outskirts of the village, after you have descended to the Cortijo dela Herriza, but the mountainous character of the river only allows meager Cleanders to grow in this area.

You will find the mill Molino de Montosa, which has recently been restored, above Sedella, passing by several well cared-for orchards. You will be able to see the water wheel and its paddles, but pay attention to the huge masonry wall that directs the water to the storage deposit at the rear of the building. It is also possible to see the large pool, shaped to the contours of the land,



The white building of the Ermita de Santa Ana overlooks the beautiful village of Canillas de Albaida

that ensured the constant supply of water during the milling. Lastly, the Almanchares River is famous for its barranco, one of the most rugged and longest ravines of the Sierra Tejeda. Upstream, where the path crosses it, there is a possibility of doing some canyoning, which here is medium difficulty level. There are about 8 abseiling descents, not very high, at the most 15 meters, and the access to the top is by the high canal which is accessed from the Área Recreativa La Rahige (between Canillas de Aceituno and Sedella). The waters which fall from La Maroma are clear, but their level drops significantly during the summer.

WALK DESCRIPTION

The description of this stage has been divided into many subsections corresponding to the walk sections between villages.

» From Cómpeta to Canillas de Albaida

In the north-west part of Cómpeta you can easily locate the Ermita de San Antonio Abad Extramuros, a smaller equivalent of San Sebastián, this you can access easily from the long Calle San Antonio street. You will be following 2 kilometres of a walk joining Cómpeta and Canillas de Albaida, practically level as it runs parallel to an old irrigation channel, which is now piped, and which supplies water

El Camino de la Puente leads downhill from Canillas de Albaida with Sierra Tejeda, the destination point, in the background



to the terraces of traditional orchards mixed with avocados and other subtropical fruit trees. In the abandoned areas, or those less productive for crop growing, there are good specimens of Small-leaved Elms, European Nettle trees and White Poplars. At the beginning, the track has been improved using albero (a crushed yellow sedimentary rock) and lined with wooden railings, but in the Arroyo de las Jurisdicciones it changes to a dirt track surrounded by dolomite; a prelude to the mountains. Above the track there are olive groves which are sometimes colonized by Juniper, Rosemary, Gorse and White Rockrose, and soon they give way to planted pine woods. A little further along you will cross the road which leads to the quarry of Canillas de Albaida and the mountains, but your walk continues below.

The restored Puente Romano over the Río Frío, and the GR-249



The traditional "paseros" for drying grapes, with the white hamlet of Canillas de Albaida behind

» Los Caminos de la Puente, Cruz del Muerto and the Umbría de Salares

Bypass the village of Canillas de Albaida to the north, at the foot of the Ermita de Santa Ana (in the urban area we can also locate the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Expectación and the Ermita de San Antón) and you will arrive at a transformer. Behind it, the Cuesta de la Puente begins, a stone paved track with wooden rails which goes down to the Puente Romano and then ascends in a westerly direction. Close to the Molino, two sign-posted paths begin. You will be climbing a recently restored historic road, until you connect with the asphalted road in the area of Fogarate, where there is a dirt track to the north offering the possibility of fine views over the village and a tour of the vineyards and olive groves in the hills, passing by some "paseros" (raisin driers). At the Cerro Cuevas the ascent leads into a pine forest and into the Parque Natural de las Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama. The climb follows a line marking the boundary between the replanted Maritime Pine forests and the crops of figs and grapes on the southern slope of the Cortijo del Bailarín. The mountain shelters a scrubland of Montpellier Cistus, with Purple Phlomis, Grey-leaved Cistus, Genista umbellata and Gorse. They reach their best at the pass of Cruz del Muerto, where you start walking on a track again.

Next, leave this excellent forest track after about two kilometres, changing to a less-preserved track to the left, and leading down to Solana de la Casa Haro or Jaro. Notice a small helipad and a mini reservoir used for fire fighting as soon as you begin the descent. The Cortijo is a very important landmark for hiking in this part of the Parque Natural. It retains some non-irrigated cultivated terraces and dispersed fruit trees.

The path which appears to the west of the ruin leads to a forest of Holm oaks, with Cork oaks and Portuguese oaks, a refreshing change from the previous pine woods. Finally the track fords, without difficulty, the Arroyo de los Álamos, a tributary of the nearby Río Salares. La Umbría de la Casa de Haro, as it is known, is a well-preserved forest on the eroding slopes of the limestone Cerro de Peñas Blancas. Once at the valley's base, the road maintains its height between the trees to the Cortijo Fofa and it heads to the village across the very interesting Puente Árabe, excellently restored, used formerly for the workers to travel to Barranco de la Mina and to transport the salt which lent its name to the village.



The Puente de Salares, which gives access to the village, has been restored to its former splendour

» From Salares to Sedella through Marchena and La Herriza

Climb through the El Encinar on a good dirt track leading to Cruz del Muerto, up to Benescalera where, after passing Fuente de Ocaña and a huge threshing circle, turn towards Cerro Marchena on a steep incline.

Leave the track in search of a concrete canal following it until you reach a small wood of Maritime Pines. You will come across some streams with rushes and a small pool at the side whilst walking up to the hill with views of the Hoya de Salamanca.

Then, walk along the hill a few meters westwards (km 15) until you start descending, and head for Cortijo de la Herriza. From there, walking through slate and a sparse scrubland of Grey-leaved Cistus and Gorse, zigzag down to La Puente bridge and stream. In this area there is a rare fern on the rocks and the path's retaining walls, *Cosentinia vellea*. In the final section, in front of the track which leads to the area east of Sedella, you will find pine woods and, above all, Holm oaks, growing on the steep slopes of the Arroyo de la Puente and the Barranco Blanco respectively, whilst the track that the GR follows is completely devoid of trees.



El Cortijo del Daire and its terraces overlooking the Arroyo de las Majadillas

» From Sedella to Canillas de Aceituno via the Área Recreativa and El Almanchares

At Sedella pass through the higher part of the village from the town hall, "Ayuntamiento", towards a few well manicured orchards above the village. Their location has been chosen because of an irrigation channel, which accompanies the path next. On the top of the hill called Huididero, overlooking the village, you can see the ruins of a small castle, or a watchtower, of Arab origin. Follow the canal, which leads to a restored hydraulic mill on a rise, the Molino de Montosa, from which the water is taken to the village and there are excellent views west of the Cerro del Tablón hill, which blocks the view of Sedella village.

A forest track takes you by a source in a streambed, where willows and Redoul grow, and to the Área Recreativa de Sedella, to the west of the village, where there are tall pine trees. The picnic/rest area has good facilities. Walk up to the sculpture of a Griffon Vulture, descending along an asphalted road which the GR follows. There is a spectacular Holm oak, its branches arching over the road, where we



At the natural springs of Sierra Tejada and Almijara traditional irrigation channels carry water to mills and gardens

approach the bottom of the valley. When you have walked 20 kilometres, it is necessary to do another two and a half along the road before reaching Puerto de Sedella, ignoring the intersections to Rubite and Los Valverdes. When the hamlet of Canillas de Aceituno comes into view, at the pass where, to your left, there is a hill curiously named Rompealbardas (Saddle Breaker), you have to make a steep descent to the Almanchares



The walk takes you along the Cortijo de la Herriza on the way to the Sedella village in the Axarquía

riverbed, while the motorway follows a wide curve and crosses the river upstream, then connects with the GR again, almost in the village. The GR now follows the La Cuesta del Molinillo which is very steep; it leads to a ford which generally does not pose any danger, and passes between semi-abandoned vineyards and ancient terraces of almond trees. The mill referred to in the name “molinillo” can be seen whilst climbing the dirt track uphill.

There are also terraces of old citrus fruits and subtropical trees, growing very close to the Almachares riverbed. Here it is sheltered by Oleanders although further down it opens up. The track ascends. Ignore the many farm and field accesses to the left while opposite, to the south, on the slope of the hill with a house on top; you can see the densely wooded La Hoya del Alcornocal. The dry farmland at the end of this stage has numerous Olive trees and is packed with country houses that end at the public swimming pool and the roundabout at the entrance to Canillas de Aceituno. ○



The support walls hold a selection of specialist plants, one of which is the rare fern *Cosentinia vellea*



This spectacular Holm Oak arches over the asphalted road which leads down to the Área Recreativa de Sedella

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Ermita de San Antonio Abad chapel in Cómpeta	30S 0412825 4077269	610 m	2 Northern area of Canillas de Albaida	30S 0412214 4078604	610 m
3 Puente Romano, bridge of Canillas de Albaida	30S 0411712 4078556	470 m	4 Puerto de la Cruz del Muerto	30S 0410640 4080050	850 m
5 Casa de Haro or de Jaro	30S 0417692 4078221	745 m	6 Puente árabe de Salares, Arabic bridge	30S 0408886 4079394	570 m
7 Puerto de la Herriza	30S 0408715 4081179	850 m	8 La Puente de Sedella bridge	30S 0408295 4080962	660 m
9 Sedella, north	30S 0408062 4080363	690 m	10 Área Recreativa de Sedella, rest area	30S 0407139 4081121	820 m
11 Puerto de Sedella	30S 0405284 4080727	670 m	12 Vado del Río Almachares river crossing	30S 0405147 4080953	545 m
13 Sculpture of “Labrador de vid” in Canillas de Aceituno	30S 0403721 4081444	635 m			

8 CANILLAS DE ACEITUNO • PERIANA

Between sierra and farmland



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 35 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	17	Accumulated ascent	620	Final altitude	570
Ascent km	7.7	Accumulated descent	690	Maximum altitude	640
Descent km	6.8	Maximum difference	340	Minimum altitude	300
Flat km	2.5	Altitude at starting point	635	Average altitude	515

» Summary of this Stage «

This stage passes through a mid-size village, Alcaucín, which separates two very different landscapes. Going to Alcaucín the GR lowers to the Garganta de los Tajos Lisos then crosses at the Cueva de la Fájara with its upwelling.

Then, always on trails, it ascends along the boundary between the Natural Park of the Sierras Tejeda, Almijara and Alhama and the cultivated areas, among pine woods and olive groves, marked by a fence which is dissected by numerous gates. After Alcaucín there is a succession of ups and downs via several water courses, the first being a steep slope to the river Alcaucín.

You will walk on forest trails of varying conditions, passing through olive groves to connect with the old train line that went up to the Boquete de Zafarraya, arriving at Periana station and entering the village.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The site of the Cueva de la Fájara cave is spectacular from a geological and speleological point of view. The walk along the boundary of the Natural Park offers the chance to compare the reforested areas with the more human influenced sectors, keep in mind that not too long ago grape vines dominated these very slopes of the sierra. >

							
1	2	2	3	8.4	4.6	4	x 3

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

› Both sections follow traditional footpaths which used to connect the villages. There are superb views, as you walk towards Periana, of Boquete de Zafarraya, the tourist area and residential area of Pantano de la Viñuela and Comares village. Strolling along the old train tracks of Málaga to Ventas de Zafarraya, which was in use between 1922 and 1968, is also one of the curiosities and attractions of this stage.



The Cueva de las Cabras, very close to the Fájara cave and spring, at the beginning of Stage 8

- **Starting point:** Extreme north-west of Canillas de Aceituno, at the road entrance, close to the football pitch.
- **Access to starting point:** Exit 272 of the A-7 E-15 direction Zafarraya and then A-356, A-7205 and lastly the MA-4106.
- **Finish point:** Entrance to Periana to the east, at kilometre 7 of the A-7204.
- **Access to finish point:** Main road A-7204..
- **Possible "escape routes":** Alcaucín at km marker 6 would be your best option. After this, there are many junctions with main roads or asphalted tracks; you will also be passing many inhabited houses, and farmhouses.
- **No return point:** In the first section, at the Cueva de la Fájara. In the second section, after the Alcaucín River, it is unnecessary to retrace your steps, it is better to use the asphalted tracks to return to the village.
- **Maps:** Initially **1040-III** (Canillas de Aceituno) and for the final part **1040-I** (Zafarraya). Periana is in a corner of **1039-II** (Periana).
- **District boundries:** Village district of Canillas de Aceituno up until kilometre 4 at Loma de Canillas. Alcaucín district stretches from this hill to Arroyo Seco, at km 12.5. The remaining 4.5 kilometres belong to Periana.



Fájara source, which is on the left of the path if you walk downhill a little, along the streambed

• Enjoy the walk safely

The only part of the walk which is a bit wild is the descent to Cueva de la Fájara. As it is a narrow pass where the two ravines unite to form the Río Bermuza river, you must be extremely cautious wading through during rain and in flooding season.

Fording the Alcaucín river would not normally present any problems; however there is a bridge close by which you can use for this crossing.

On the asphalted tracks and the stretches of main road, as always, it is necessary to

be aware of the vehicles, which here could include motocross bikes and mountain bikes.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

This eighth stage is the mirror image of the first stage of the GR-242 Periana-Nerja, which starts in Periana.

The first part of this stage follows the pedestrian way which always used to connect Canillas de Aceituno with Alcaucín in a straight line. However nowadays the walk does not follow a straight line; it actually leads in a wide curve at Loma de Canillas. This has been caused by the Cantera de Alcaucín quarry, as it interferes with a large section of the limestone mountain, to the point that the original walk has been permanently cut off.

In the second part the GR coincides with the Camino Periana to Alcaucín up until it crosses the cog railway line of the Tren Cremallera de La Viñuela a Periana and then the walk follows that line.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER



Stone-paved path which the GR-249 follows at the border of the Natural Park

In the area you are crossing for the most part there is one dry river bed, although at Fájara two ravines coincide, those of Tajos Lisos and to the west, Cueva de Don Pedro. This is an excellent place for exploring caves as there is an appealing cave shelter called La Cueva de las Cabras, and then the Fájara area's own cave; Cueva de la Fájara. This cave is very close to the previous one, down amongst the Oleanders. The galleries of the latter are 1.500 metres long. In the lower galleries there are three siphons from which the water escapes when the water table rises and the aquifer is at its highest, to the point that water starts flowing from the cave's entrance.

In addition to the two caves, the third noteworthy element is the the Nacimiento del Río Bermuza river source located a few metres below where you'll cross the river, overgrown with brambles and Oleanders. It's only been partially explored as it is a totally flooded siphon. The water is regulated right at the source by an "acequia", a water channel, which starts here.

The Alcaucín River comes from a spectacular area to the west of the Sierra Tejada, the Barranco del Alcázar ravine, and flows between olive groves. It has interesting riparian vegetation, principally Willows and Oleanders, and it has enabled the development of subtropical crops along its banks. The next watercourse



Sunset with the view of Axarquía coast from the walk

of importance is the Río Seco, formed by the streams of Los Migueles and Los Blancares just before the ford with a concrete base. Here the riverbank vegetation is quite altered by some eucalyptus trees which serve the purpose of stabilizing the soil, but there are still some ash trees, tamarisks and reeds.

WALK DESCRIPTION

»» From Canillas de Aceituno to Alcaucín

The exit from Canillas de Aceituno leads straight to a footpath between pine trees, it cuts through several small dry gullies to the start of a steep, downwards slope towards the west and finishes at the bottom of the ravine. Towards the north you can see the large entrance of Cueva de las Cabras, adapted as a corral for cattle and enclosed by a dry stone wall. The Cueva de la Fájara cave is a little below the spring of the Bermuza river which falls in a short cascade through a narrow channel to just beneath a large rock where the main river begins. The track gains height rapidly, passing through one of the many gates which cross the border of the Natural Park, which from here, remains on your right behind the fence. The pathway sometimes has a stone surface, it climbs continually, occasionally between pines, but mostly at the outer edge of the woods. There is a lime kiln to your left, between the esparto

grasses and rosemary and a little further on you will arrive at a group of houses, which also remain to your left. Here the cultivated area of olives and almonds is more cared for, and includes some grapevines. You continue with the same destination as before, with another lime kiln on the way, until culminating in the Loma de Canillas pass, where the natural line of the walk is altered to the northwest

Well preserved lime kiln on the left of the path in between the pine trees





Fuente de los Cinco Caños at Canillas de Aceituno, where Stage 8 begins

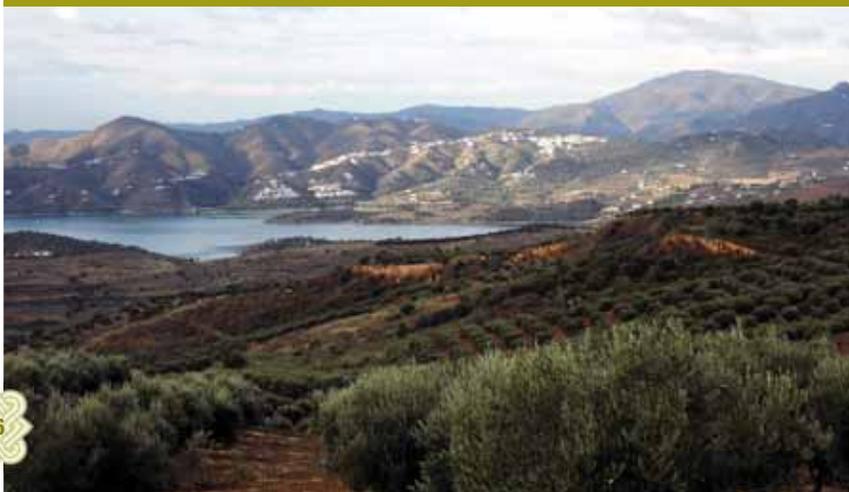
because of the conspicuous scar of the quarry at Alcaucín, whose excavations force you to turn sharply toward the southwest. Now the walk runs along a dirt track with vineyards on both sides, in a moment it will be concreted, near an area of antennas. There is a long descent that passes by the base of the quarry, the houses become more frequent and from here you will arrive at Alcaucín.

» From Alcaucín to Periana

The tone changes entirely in this second part. The walk is now unequivocally to the east, between fields of non-irrigated crops, mostly well maintained olive groves. These roads are going to Pilarejo and los Cortijillos, the second nucleus of houses remain on your right having dismissed the concrete track as nothing more than an exit to Alcaucín.

After fording the river and leaving behind the Molino Barco mill, you will connect with it again. The views towards Alcaucín from the Pilarejo hill are spectacular, especially in the evening. There is a contrast between the wooded limestone slopes and the settlements, marked by the line of the water sources that have always fed the springs, such as the well known Cinco Caños de Alcaucín. A little further on the leading role is taken by the Boquete de Zafarraya, the most direct and easy route to reach the province of Granada from the western Costa del Sol. In fact, it crosses the motorway A-402 and you aim for that. The railway used to go through the Boquete, from the east, to reach train stops at Ventas de Zafarraya.

El Pantano de la Viñuela, between century old Olive Trees and many scattered houses



But do not forget the views to the south, with the reservoir of La Viñuela lording over the landscape and Comares village watching from the hill top. You will notice the large number of dispersed buildings, something that has caused more than one problem for the urban development plans in the area. After fording the Río Seco the GR passes by the road signs to Veredas Blancas and El Hoyo del Toro and a slight incline takes you up to the Estación de Periana station.

The next train platform is that of Matanza which also has information of possible destination points. Periana can boast to being a great vantage point to see Axarquía, as from its viewpoints you can appreciate the views and landscapes of the region: the corridor Colmenar to Periana with the Montes de Málaga towards the west, the reservoir of La Viñuela and the Hoya de Vélez Málaga to the south and the Boquete de Zafarraya and the Sierras Tejeda y Almijara to the east. ○



Another view of the Pantano de La Viñuela from a different vantage point on the GR



Olivos those who have made them soil to facilitate the collection of olives

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Canillas de Aceituno Football Ground	30S 0403044 4081953	635 m	2 Cueva de la Fájara cave	30S 0402371 4082620	440 m
3 Puerto de la Loma de Canillas Pass	30S 0401318 4084044	630 m	4 Cantera de Alcaucín quarry	30S 0401089 4084241	525 m
5 Alcaucín centro urbano Town Centre	30S 0400840 4084821	510 m	6 Río Alcaucín river and Molino Barco mill	30S 0400027 4085710	300 m
7 Mirador del Pilarejo viewpoint	30S 0398565 4085947	515 m	8 Río Seco	30S 0396608 4086755	430 m
9 Estación de Periana station	30S 0394916 4087834	620 m	10 Periana Eastern area	30S 0394442 4087652	570 m



La Sierra de San Jorge from El Jobo, when the walk approaches the highest point of the itinerary

The Central Limestone Arch and the Gran Senda de Málaga

In the province of Malaga, there is a string of mountains, limestone for the most part, connecting the Sierra de las Nieves, to the west, with the Sierra Tejeda in the east, with a clear border vocation between northeastern regions and Antequera with the south of the province. For the lack of a popular or traditional name that unifies them, they have been called the Arco Calizo Central (Central Limestone Arch), Cordillera Antequerana (Antequera Mountain Range), Dorsal Bética (Betic Spine) or Arco Calizo Malagueño (Málaga's Limestone Arch).

They cover a length of 50 kilometres from the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes to the Puerto de los Alazores, and a width that is augmented towards the east, from 5 km at the Sierra del Huma to 11 km in a straight line in the area that you begin your journey at the start of the Gran Senda de Málaga.

From the halfway point of the Guadalhorce river and towards the west you can see in succession, the Sierras del Almorchón (619m), Pizarra, Huma (1.186 m), Valle de Abdalajís (1.186 m), Llana, de las Chimeneas (1.378 m),

Torcal (1.346 m), Cabras (1.283 m), del Co or del Codo (1.353 m), de Camarolos and Jobo (1.641 m), Gorda, de San Jorge (1.413 m) and Enmedio, alongside other smaller ones.

The Guadalhorce river, begins at the Puerto de los Alazores, it is forced to traverse the northern area of the mountains until it finds, or even forces its way south, in the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, which is an area of reservoirs. The railroad infrastructure also passes through this area, made possible by the means of tunnels. The highways of major importance utilize the Puerto de las Pedrizas pass (1.040 m in altitude) to connect the plains of Antequera with the Costa del Sol.

The mountain formation, therefore, is responsible for separating two very different climatic zones, the depression of Antequera in the north from Axarquía, the Hoya de Málaga and the Valle del Guadalhorce in the south. One of the reasons for the good climate along the coast of Málaga is the obstacle posed by these mountains reducing the winds from the north. This mountain range is formed in parts

by the districts of Álora, Ardales, Valle de Abdalajís, Campillos, Antequera, Villanueva del Rosario, Villanueva del Trabuco, Alfarnatejo and Alfarnate and to a lesser part Riogordo and Periana.

The Great Málaga Walk takes you into this magnificent succession of sierras at its western end (a journey that will be described in the relevant chapter) and the part we are concentrating on now, the east. The latter is perhaps the most interesting from a geographical point of view (if not geologically or for the scenery) as it includes the highest altitude of the range, the largest concentration of rugged mountains, the most representative gorges and connecting with two unique villages that can be considered to be within the parkland, on the spectacular mountain planes of Alfarnate and Alfarnatejo. It is unique to the extent that this last enclave has been described with the inappropriate name of the Small Pyrenees.

Here, the natural karst relief, with the scarcity of soil that is associated with the pronounced slopes and altitude has prevented excessive use of these mountains and deterred the establishment of population centres in the heart of sierra. This has gained the site a biogeographical island status where you can find plants and animals that are extinct in the surroundings due to the intensive agriculture. Anthropogenic practices in the area have been limited to agriculture, extensive livestock farming, hunting and at most, some mining activity. Out of all of these activities in the sierras, the quarries removing aggregates and the road infrastructure have been the most harmful, but all in all these were isolated cases. This means that the Central Limestone Arch of Málaga retains many of its prime ecosystems, sometimes with considerable extension and in good preservation.

El Tajo del Fraile, one of the landmark cliffs in the area viewed from the access path to Alfarnatejo



Another factor to be considered is its value as a Green Corridor between other natural areas of the province and for some species in particular, for example the Spanish Ibex, which is a wild mountain goat endemic to Iberia. Despite all we have described here, the Arch is not completely protected, only in isolated spots, such as the Parajes Naturales del Torcal de Antequera and the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes as the main bastions, and other areas under the umbrella of the Red Natura 2000 and LIC (Lugar de Interés Comunitario). From the scientific field, environmental groups and regional development, its designation as a Natural Park has been proposed on numerous

occasions. The threats posed to the area are specifically; the overexploitation of groundwater, quarries, wind turbines, urban expansion projects, the use of poisons, livestock overgrazing and hunting. In regard to the direct relationship of the Great Málaga Walk with the Central Limestone Arch of Málaga, the eastern part is a highly recommended itinerary. Beginning with the journey from Periana to the area of the Río Sabar, with the mass of the Sierra de Enmedio and its areas of wild olive trees on the southern slopes settled with picturesque farmhouses. In the vicinity of the Río Sabar a journey begins in the crescent shape of the gorges, with the Bermejo, de Doña Ana, Gomer and Fraile to the

In the north-east cliffs of the Sierra de San Jorge you can practice climbing





Mirador del Alto de Hondonero viewpoint and the Sierra de Camarolos

right while the Sierra del Rey appears on the left with the peak of Cerro Castejón, it is here that the river Río Borbollón begins, between Holm oaks with Portuguese oaks and Turpentine trees. You finally arrive on more gentle terrain at the poljes of Alfaratejo and Alfarate, the latter is a more level area, after climbing the Sierra de Enmedio at its north western end through the landscape of Malinfierno. Once you have arrived at this narrow valley enclosed between mountains, you will now ascend to the highest part of this range. Leaving firstly the Sierra de San Jorge and later the Sierra Gorda, with its pines and Holm oaks, to the right, you will climb to the Puerto del Quejigo, which is the highest point of the GR-249, very close to the summit

of the Sierra del Jobo and of the Dorsal Bética, the peak is named Chamizo. Tussock grasses, dwarfed spiny shrubs and maples take over at these exposed altitudes. In your descent the Sierra de Camarolos remains to your left and going via the Dehesa de Hondonero you will arrive at the opposite end of the Arco Calizo alongside the springs of Villanueva del Rosario. The stretch to Archidona is just a means of getting to the next point, it isn't like walking through the mountains but you are passing by the last bastions of limestone and the loamy-fields of the Hoz del Arroyo Marín as a culmination of the past escarpments. In fact, in Archidona it is the Sierra de Gracia which is now at the forefront of the Betic domain. ○

9 PERIANA • ALFARNATEJO (PULGARÍN ALTO) *The Train and the mountain hamlets*

 **ESTIMATED TIME**
3 hours 30 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	13.5	Accumulated ascent	415	Final altitude	670
Ascent km	6.7	Accumulated descent	320	Maximum altitude	880
Descent km	4.6	Maximum difference	290	Minimum altitude	590
Flat km	2.2	Altitude at starting point	590	Average altitude	730

» Summary of this Stage «

The Stage 9 begins the walk through the Limestone Central Arch in Málaga leading up to the Stage 12. From Periana it leads in search of the beautiful districts of Marchamona, where at the cross-roads it reaches its maximum altitude, and the hamlet of Guaro. Then it directs you towards the west to the foot of the Sierras de Alhama and Guaro (La Torca, 1500 m) and the Sierra de Enmedio (Vilo, 1,415 m). From the hamlet of Guaro the itinerary acquires a jagged profile passing through an area of dense Mediterranean vegetation and olive groves, until it reaches down to the towns of lower Pulgarin and higher Pulgarin.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The four villages which are in this stage deserve a peaceful visit, even if Marchamona is out-of-the-way. Guaro is noteworthy, especially in the rainy seasons as the waterfalls at the source of the river Guaro are then brash and deafening. The farmhouses Cortijo de Zapata and Cortijo la Cueva situated between the sierra and the fields make up a typical picture of integration into the environment. The wild olive trees in the vicinity of the Cortijo de Zapata and the Monte of the Cerrajon de los Baños recall the Mediterranean forest, with plenty of vines and evergreen thickets. And from this site the landscapes towards the surrounding mountains and low Axarquía are spectacular. ➤

							
1	2	1	3	0	13.0	0.5	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

› Finally, entering Pulgarin Bajo the walker is welcomed by olive groves which are hundreds of years old and without a doubt, photogenic, also there are views to the gorges of Caballo and Bermejo to the north and Tajo (gorge) de Doña Ana to north-west.



The GR uses the old train line at the beginning and passes under many bridges

- **Starting point:** Eastern area of Periana, follow the Torre del Mar Avenue and leave the village along Algarrobo Street.
- **Access to starting point:** the access road is the A-6118, or from the A-7 A-335 or by the A-3100 from Colmenar.
- **Finish point:** Hamlet of higher Pulgarin, road MA-4102, close to lower Pulgarin.
- **Access to finish point:** MA-4102 road, which climbs to Alfarnatejo.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The village of Guaro is a good point of reference as a place to look for help if necessary.
- **No return point:** At the highest point of travel, where it is connected with the GR-7 E4, it is better to go to Guaro. Then, from the viewpoint Mirador del Tramo onwards it is preferable to continue to Lower Pulgarin.
- **Maps:** **1040-I** (Zafarraya) to begin with and **1039-II** (Periana) to finish.
- **District boundries:** almost the entire walk leads through the municipal district of Periana and its surrounding villages Marchamonas and Guaro. From the Cortijo de la Cueva (km 11.5 approximately) you enter the municipality of Alfarnatejo (Lower and Higher Pulgarin).



The Cortijo de los Peñones, between limestone outcrops, on a rainy day

• Enjoy the walk safely

Caution is needed at the intersection of the road from Alfarnate and in through the Alfarnatejo.

Tracks which this stage crosses are heavily used by two-wheeled vehicles, which, if they travel downhill, can carry enough speed.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR7 E4 Tarifa-Athens, from Villanueva de Gauche, has two branches. Southern Branch goes to the province of Granada, the other one heads to Córdoba, and could be an alternative to discover in later stages

of the Great Málaga Path. The Southern Branch in Málaga consists of three phases. In regards to this stage two phases are relevant: of Riogordo to Guaro and to Zafarraya.

The ones called “end of the railway” (km 4.5) and high Pulgarin coincide with the GR geographically, although not in the sense of the description that appears in the panels. From Periana to km 4.5 the surface of the route is that of the old railway which used to run between Periana and Zafarraya, the line westward following the GR from here.

Between the Marchamona junction and the Cortijo de la Cueva the trail coincides with the Royal Path of Málaga to Granada coming up the hill from the west, from the village of Riogordo. Finally el Sendero de Diputación Provincial de Málaga known as Boquete de Zafarraya-Mondrón can also be undertaken in the Cerro López.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

There are no major streams during this stage but there are significant spring sources. The birth of the river Guaro belongs to the basin of the river Vélez and is located in the same village. It is a vauculian upwelling that bursts out in rainy season and is depleted quickly. Even then, it is one of the main contributors to the reservoir of La Viñuela, of up to 100 l/s come from the carbonate aquifer of the Central Limestone Arch; one of its mountains behind the village reaches 1,500 metres of altitude as the Summit of La Torca.

Above the spring, there is a gallery with auxiliary probes, excavated to regulate the

flow of irrigation. And precisely from the Guaro horticulture comes the legend of “The maiden of the river Guaro”, a Moorish blue-eyed girl increasing the water flow with her eyes until the day she disappeared leaving things as they are now. History blends with the dependence of humanity on drinking water and the Andalucían proverbial relationship with the element. When you cross the road from Alfarnate, to the left there are a couple of water sources, a lagoon and the Baños de Vilo.

The latter is renowned for its medicinal properties, which even have led to the construction of a spa. Recently it has

been refurbished again for tourists as country-style accommodation. Finally, in the vicinity of the Cortijo Zapata, a huge farmstead used as a rural hotel, there is a small water source but important as a shelter to a singular grove. There is a very dense copse of Elms with large specimens, joined by poplars and fruit trees which are particularly fond of water, such as walnut and fig trees.



The major rocky escarpments are coated with spiky plants and pines

WALK DESCRIPTION

» The Zafarraya Train

The first steps of the stage take the traveller to a historic site, the layout of the railway line from Málaga to Ventas of Zafarraya, which was dismantled and the only preserved part is the pavement and the adjoining buildings.

The train project was started by the commuter railroads company of Málaga in 1905, using Belgian capital to manage local narrow-gauge line trains. Already in 1908 the stretch to Vélez Málaga was working, crossing the rolling hills of the Axarquía coast. This stretch was also the last one to close in 1968. In the area covered by Stage 9, the train arrived in Periana in 1921 and connected the village with Las Ventas de Zafarraya in 1922, but due to the steep slopes which had to be conquered and despite the layout following wide curves, the trains had to be aided by a set of cog wheels, becoming the well known rack railway. In 1960 the railroad closed and it never did manage to join the province of Málaga with that of Granada.

In Stage 8 you passed through Estación de Periana, this Stage gets you close to the train line, still recognizable by the numerous bridges either for vehicles or connecting ravines

and streambeds. The walking surface is quite good and the dirt track climbs gently. You will pass by a quarry converted into a landfill and little by little the path will enter limestone area which has been cut by the road construction and formed trenches filled with young pines.

El in the vicinity of the Cortijo de los Peñones the views over to all of Axarquía are impressive, dominating the whole landscapes of the region, as mentioned in the previous Stage. A little further up, the track veers gently to the right and on your right you can see the origin of the

In the higher levels reached during the day, the track is flanked by large Aleppo pines





These ancient olive groves on a steep slope grow long dry stone walls

name of the farmhouse (Rock Farm), a limestone rock face of considerable height, facing north. It harbours a tall scrub of Holm oaks, broom, gorse and Kermes Oak, a promise of a future mature forest. Here and there, limestone cliffs make up a maze filled with shrub vegetation.

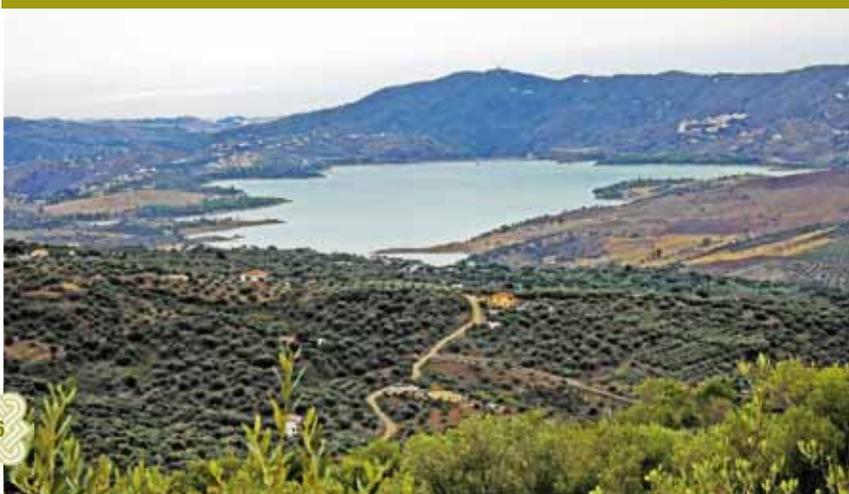
Ignore junctions to Fuerte and mezquita and climb a slope between the hills Cerro de los Mosquitos and Cerro de López, where you also abandon the old railway line. There are remarkable views towards the west and east of the Limestone Central Arch and splendid specimens of pine trees that pepper the embankments.

» The Hamlets of Periana and Alfarnatejo districts

At the beginning of this new stretch which takes you downhill and westward, ignore the immediate junction to Marchamona, a village which dominates the basin of the river Guaro from its rocky hillock. Guaro village consists of a small group of houses and is inhabited by about 80 people dedicated to extensive animal husbandry and dry land and irrigated farming. The number of groups of houses, from the seasonally inhabited farms to established nuggets of population is remarkable here. The walk leads along the foot of the mountain, so the landscapes are typically mountainous, with outcrops of 700 metres rising behind the houses. While strolling between olive and almond trees, note frequent signs of erosion, cliffs of gray limestone and the steep treeless slopes.

In the Cortijo de Zapata landscape changes, the south flank of the Sierra de Enmedio is covered by a striking dense grove of wild olive trees. As you pass a farmstead the road becomes a forestry path, branching off to the left, which leads through a real jungle covering the ancient

The reservoir of the Viñuela from Cerrajón de los Baños

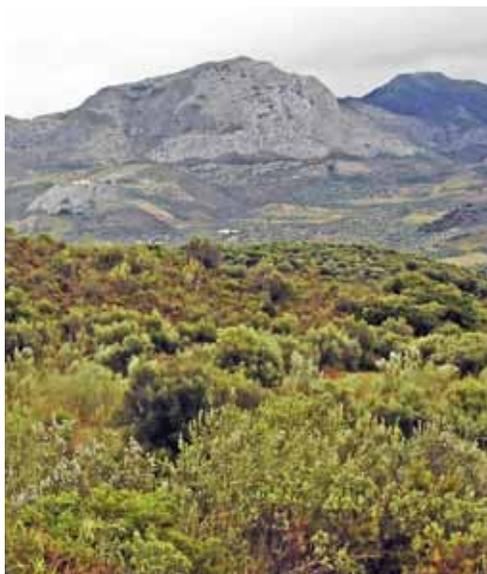


olive groves with all the Mediterranean species so well-adapted to the heat, with special mention to the enormous mastic trees and climbing plants. This area is dedicated to controlled hunting.

After the penultimate hill the walk descends among olive trees with a drip irrigation system towards the Cortijo de la Cueva (named after the small cave at the of the house) with good views of the Colmenar Periana corridor, a peculiar geological area. The last ascent is undertaken at the threshing circle at the farm, in mixed terrain between mountains and olive groves, some of these crops growing along dry-stone "albarradas".

The last descend takes you by a centenary olive grove, some of the trees are enormous with gnarled trunks. The road ends in a series of winding curves and you can admire some of the cliffs which form part of the celebrated Ruta de los Tajos, namely the Bermejo and Doña Ana. Pulgarín Bajo and, on the other side of

the road, Pulgarín Alto, two hamlets of Alfarnatejo, welcome the walkers as they finish this Stage. ○



Mediterranean "jungle" in the foreground, in the background the bare limestone mountains and the settlement of Marchamona

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Av. Torre del Mar en Periana, street	30S 0394440 4087648	590 m	2 Mirador del Cortijo de los Peñones, viewpoint	30S 0394831 4089286	825 m
3 End of train line	30S 0395637 4089925	870 m	4 Junction to la Aldea de Marchamona	30S 0395667 4090397	865 m
5 Hamlet of Guaro	30S 0394264 4091310	715 m	6 Cross roads MA-4103 Periana-Alfarnate	30S 0393380 4091145	738 m
7 Cortijo Zapata	30 S 0392520 4091050	715 m	8 Mirador del Tramo, viewpoint	30S 0391206 4090231	743 m
9 Cortijo de la Cueva	30S 0390479 4090063	685 m	10 Pulgarín Alto, Higher Pulgarín	30S 0389207 4090542	670 m

10 ALFARNAJETO (PULGARÍN ALTO) • ALFARNATE

The Route of the Gorges and Flatlands



ESTIMATED TIME
4 hours 35 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	18.1	Accumulated ascent	540	Final altitude	885
Ascent km	8.3	Accumulated descent	360	Maximum altitude	895
Descent km	5.7	Maximum difference	350	Minimum altitude	548
Flat km	4.1	Altitude at starting point	710	Average altitude	730

» Summary of this Stage «

This itinerary describes a great arch in the anti-clockwise direction between Pulgarín Alto, a village of Alfarnatejo, and Alfarnate. As you wander, you pass on your right the rocky mass of the Gorges of Doña Ana and Gomer and on the left the dry farming fields and olive groves, until you come to the riverbed of Borbollón, marking long climb towards the plains in Alfarnatejo, where the walk flattens out to pass through the village. The rest of the walk concentrates on a search of the Tajo de Malinfierno and following the course of the Sabar river to Alfarnate.

» Highlights of this Stage «

Few Tajos or Gorges have such a mountainous image as Gomer, the star of the day, three of whose four flanks you can admire perfectly from the road. And don't miss Doña Ana, the Sierra de Sabar preceding it or the Tajo del Fraile which closes the set of Tajos from the north. The Sabar and Borbollón rivers are noteworthy, intersecting at the spot where they both carry enough water.

You will even pass through the source of the second river in the area of the farmhouse itself, a supposed Omar Ibn Hafsum birth place, and, in any case, a historical setting. The Valle del Arroyo de la Cueva leads to an excellent oak forest with Holm oaks accompanied at the mountain pass by numerous examples of cornicabra, the Terebinth Tree. >

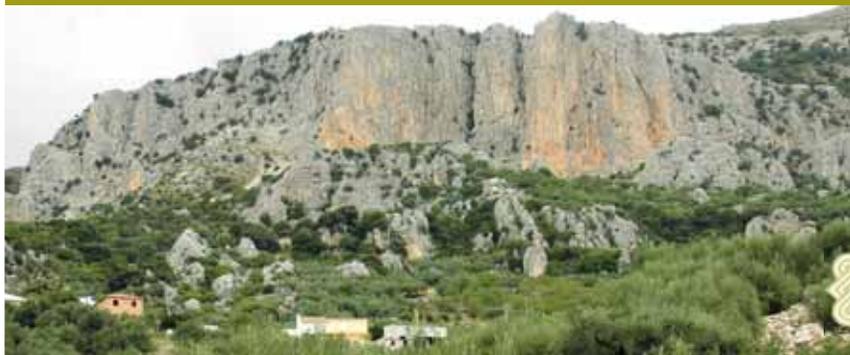
							
1	2	2	3	3.0	13.5	1.6	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

➤ The flat valley from Alfarnate and Alfarnatejo is a cultivated plain between the mountain ranges of the Jobo and San Jorge to the north, and the Tajos and the Sierra de Enmedio in the south. It is at an altitude of 850 meters on average and is home to the villages of Alfarnate (with its famous Venta restaurant) and Alfarnatejo. The altitude, climate and isolation that are provided by the amphitheatre of mountains conjure up a serrano ambiance that makes you forget that you are a few kilometres away from the Costa del Sol.

- **Starting point:** Alto Pulgarin road MA-157.
 - **Access to starting point:** The road that connects with the A-6100 to Alfarnatejo.
 - **Finish point:** La Plaza Puente de Alfarnate.
 - **Access to finish point:** From Málaga on the A-6118 direction Periana and taking the MA-155. From Granada, exit 187 of the A-92 direction Zafarraya and take the MA-4102, which leads to the village by the Puerto de Alazores.
 - **Possible “escape routes”:** The road up to the Puerto de Sabar and the village of Alfarnatejo.
 - **No return point:** As you reach the Cortijo de Auta it is quite difficult to make a decision at this point however it would be recommended to continue forward once you’ve started climbing the hill.
- However, the most sensible thing to do in case of any problems would be not following the GR any further and taking the main track south-west and then south which takes you to Río Gordo, relatively close from the farmhouse.
- **Maps:** The stretch is covered completely by **1039-II** (Periana).
 - **District boundaries:** In the Puerto limits of Periana and Alfarnatejo meet (you walk in the latter boundaries till km 5) and with those of Riogordo, and the path follows its boundaries during the next 6, 5 kilometres up to the pass with views to Alfarnatejo, except a few meter tip that belongs to Colmenar. Alfarnatejo boundaries are entered is again from kilometre 12 up to almost 16, at Malinfierno viewpoint. The rest, as you might guess, belongs to Alfarnate.

Alquería de Pulgarin seen from the first steps of the stage, with the Tajo Bermejo behind





White clouds crown the peaks of Sierra Tejeda, with Alcaucin in its lap and Periana in the foreground

• Enjoy the walk safely

There are no excessive risks at this Stage, except the 3 kilometres of road that must be walked, both at the beginning and between the river and the Puerto de Sabar, and a section out of Alfarnatejo. There, as always, you have to take extra precautions. There is mud and some sections of the trail are covered in loose stones and surface is in poor condition. There will be no wading across major streams.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-7 E4 in its Southern Branch or Granada Branch coincides with the Great Path

of Málaga, but in the opposite direction, from Pulgarin Alto up to the farmhouse Cortijo de Auta. The farmhouse had been mentioned as the “escape route”, since it passes close to the village of Riogordo. That sector is advertised by the village of Riogordo as route of the cliffs to the Puerto de Sabar (Ruta de Tajos) and the GR-249 is suggested to follow that route. It also proposes another walk Ruta de la Sierra from the Cortijo de Auta. They are not marked as legalised public paths but there are nice information panels showing their locations.

The Vereda de la Costa path follows the course of the Sabar River to Pulgarin Alto and follows a dirt track by centuries-old olive groves. Final part of this Sage coincides in part with a circular path of Alfarnate, the PR 268-A Bosque de Las Morillas-Alfarnate. It is 5.3 kilometres long and climbs to the Morrón del Águila connecting with the Great Path of Málaga in the ascent to the Puerto and Mirador de Malinfierno. There is a somewhat longer variant that leads to the Venta de Alfarnate.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Sabar River is present at the beginning and at the end of the route. The road from Alfarnatejo climbing from Pulgarin Alto leads along the river when it cuts into the Sierra de Enmedio. You will cross two bridges, one at the lowest point of the walk and one near Alfarnatejo. Then you will pass by the riverbed as it contours around the village of Alfarnate. The river is somewhat contaminated upstream by urban residues and leaking from the landslide of Malinfierno. The river seems to recover downstream. Its

nature of a turbulent torrent makes its riverbed open and very stony, as in the strikingly named Charco del Aceite (the puddle of oil). However there are calmer parts in the flat areas surrounded with cattails and rushes and pools overtaken by water plants. Some willows, poplar and ash, make up the rest of the vegetation. The locals called the Sabar river Arroyo del Palancar or Alfarnate. In terms of quality of water the Borbollón river is quite different, since you are close to the source in the

rocky amphitheatre formed the Tajo Gomer and the Sierrecilla del Rey. The stream Arroyo de la Cueva comes down from the mountain pass but the source itself is a lagoon, extensively colonized by catkins, which you pass on your right. The Borbollón supplies water to Riogordo and yet it is a river with a significant and permanent flow. The proof of this is the fact that there is fish, mostly barbel, in the pools near the Cortijo de Auta.

The farmstead houses are built on a travertine terrace of an ancient waterfall

which had long disappeared. The current waterfall is more modest and you can hear it as you cross the river on a small make-shift bridge (although there is also a ford on the side). These calcareous waters give life to a dense and well conserved wood with tall Elms and Poplars, Ash and some Willows. As always, the brambles occupy their usual place in the sun in more open areas. Finally, given its proximity to the walk, let's mention the spring called Fuente de Conejo, near Alfarnatejo, sign-posted by the local training workshop-school.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Up to el Puerto del Sabar

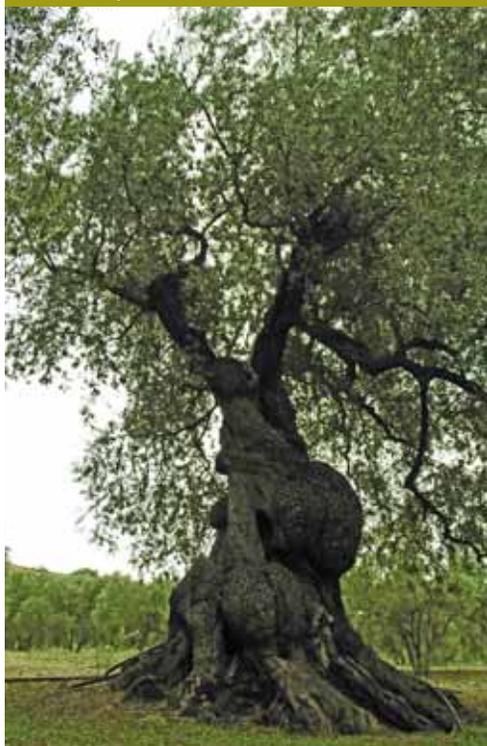
The walk starts climbing along a stretch of road veering left onto the mentioned Vereda de la Costa, under the Tajo de Doña Ana with its recent landslide. The Sabar River runs parallel to the trail and separates it from the Sierra de Sabar, a limestone promontory its true size dwarfed by the grand environment. Note several large olive trees with thick trunks, visibly repeatedly pruned.

When you arrive at A-7204 between Riogordo and Periana, bear right, and cross the bridge over the river Sabar. Walk up to the Puerto de Sabar where you leave the road. Find a track which is partly concrete and partly dirt.

» Towards Cortijo de Auta

The concrete track gives access to a reservoir of water atop a small hill and continues until km 5.5 where a deserted track leads westwards, overtaken by ruderal plants and some broom, between crops of dry land, olive groves and almond trees. When you pass by the source of Arroyo de las Morenas there is a striking-looking fallen oak tree on an isolated sandstone rock.

One of the majestic olive trees near Río Sabar





Contrast between sharp contours of the Tajo de Gomer and Tajo del Fraile and fields that surround the path

Here and there arboreal witnesses of the past splendour of the oaks in the area appear. You have a wide panoramic view towards the southwest; however Riogordo is not visible, stuck as it is in a depression. To the north, ever closer, you can see the profile of the Gomer's more accessible side.

The descent towards Auta and the river Borbollón, after wading the Auta stream, harbours only typical riparian vegetation, a wide green belt between fields of cereal crops, and the plants growing on rock piles scattered throughout the hilly ground. A sign explains the unconfirmed hypothesis of this being the birthplace of Omar Ibn Hafsum, the leader of the revolt against the Umayyads and the Caliphate of Cordoba, who placed his royal leaders in the fortress of Bobastro (described and seen later). In fact, written records indicate that he was born "in the hamlet of Torrichela, near the Castillo de Autha", and the similarity of the name makes it worth taking into account. As it happens so many times, his origins are disputed today by several towns.

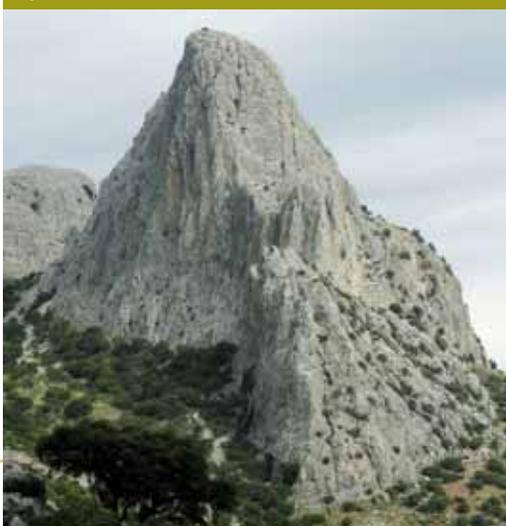
In the hamlet, in complete decline and with a huge threshing circle that welcomes

the walker, the walk turns northward and begins the ascent. Once one gets to the source of the river Borbollón, at the foot of a hill marked as archaeological site, made up of siliceous rocks of plutonic origin and with nice green colour.

» El camino de la sierra

The contrast with the previous sector is evident when one enters the forest of Holm oaks and Portuguese oaks that occupies the entire southern slope of the limestone cliff between the Sierrecilla del Rey and the Tajos. The ruins of the farmhouses of Farinas and El Cuartillo are on your right. The acebuche, wild olive tree, thrives everywhere. When you climb the mountain pass, near electricity towers, the walk turns eastwards and the landscape softens. There is a flat area with reddish soil, known as polje resulting from the erosion of the limestone, suitable for cultivation. Pass on your right the limestone cliffs, with the increasingly obvious Tajo del Fraile. In the north Holm oak wood is mixed with large Terebinth, spectacular in autumn when they turn red.

The craggy Tajo de Gomer accompanies the walker during a large section of the route; note the oaks at its base



» Between Alfarnatejo y Alfarnate

The two pueblos occupy areas of the plains not as suitable for cultivation, on the banks of the river Sabar and between the crags. El Morrón de Malinfierno (the northwest rocky spur of the Sierra de Enmedio) stretches from Alfarnate to Alfarnatejo blocking the view between the villages. These foothills are also occupied by a Holm oak forest, in this case younger, especially along the initial climb. The Tajo de Malinfierno is much more tree-less and covered with laston grass, gorse and white cistus carpeting the rocky outcrop with a dispersed Hawthorn here and there.

The Sabar River (or Arroyo del Palancar) meanders around the mountains and leaves the ruins of an old olive mill on your right where, as it seems, the remains of squeezed olives used to be thrown into the so-called Charca de Aceite, “oil puddle”. The proximity of the old quarry converted into a landfill casts a shadow over the landscape. On the other side of the Cerro de la Venta, atop which the mill used to sit, is the famous Venta of Alfarnate restaurant. The hillock has dense vegetation on its northern slope, which is visible as the walk takes the hiker to the



Herd of goats, Málaga breeds: payoyas and velenas, close to Alfarnate

foot of the river again. The trail runs parallel to the river, passes through a rest area and turns off to the right suddenly in order to avoid the road, leading through an area of ancient terraces, with paved flooring and dry stone walls bordering it. Alfarnate is accessed via Calle Pozo Rincón and continuing along the river which flows under the Plaza del Puente. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Pulgarín Alto	30S 0389236 4090531	710 m	2 Puente sobre el Río Sabar, bridge	30S 0388578 4090148	550 m
3 Puerto de Sabar, mountain pass	30S 0387619 4088935	615 m	4 Mirador de los Tajos y Periana, viewpoint	30S 0386279 4090054	720 m
5 Cortijo de Auta y Río Borbollón, farmhouse	30S 0384940 4089923	600 m	6 Mirador del Tajo Gomer, viewpoint	30S 0384829 4091333	720 m
7 Fuente del Conejo, natural spring	30S 0386663 4093036	810 m	8 Alfarnatejo	30S 0386829 4093497	845 m
9 Mirador de Malinfierno y Alfarnatejo, viewpoint	30S 0386614 4094431	895 m	10 Plaza del Puente en Alfarnate, village square	30S 0388066 4095155	885 m

11 ALFARNATE • VILLANUEVA DEL ROSARIO

Crossing the Sierra del Jobo



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 15 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	15.4	Accumulated ascent	590	Final altitude	695
Ascent km	4.9	Accumulated descent	770	Maximum altitude	1.387
Descent km	7.5	Maximum difference	695	Minimum altitude	695
Flat km	3.0	Altitude at starting point	865	Average altitude	1.095

» Summary of this Stage «

The course describes a Z on the Sierra of Jobo, representing the maximum altitude of the Limestone Central Arch at Chamizo with 1,641 metres above sea level. First section climbs between this mountain range and the San Jorge in a northwesterly direction to a nearby campground. There it turns south-west to ascend to the mountain pass and lead down through Hondonero until you reach the junction to Tajo de la Madera. At this point you change direction for the third time to the north-west again towards Villanueva de el Rosario. The Great Path of Málaga reaches here its maximum altitude in the Puerto del Quejigo (or the Llano de la Cueva) at 1,385 meters. The average altitude of the walk here is almost 1,100 meters, which gives you an idea of the mountain character of Stage 11. The other three mountains that mark the way are the San Jorge at the beginning, Sierra Gorda to the west of the highest point and Camarolos at the end. All of them are limestone mountains with steep slopes, cliffs and karst relief, difficult to walk as it is not done on paths.

» Highlights of this Stage «

Landscapes, both around Alfarnate at the beginning and towards Hondonero and the Comarca of Antequera at the end, are worth stopping for. In fact, there is an interpretive panel in Hondonero that you can take some time analyzing. The karst topography creates cliffs like Tello, Hondonero or the Tajo de Madera, large, high quality rock to practice climbing, as many climbing schools do. ➤

							
3	2	2	3	4.4	6.6	4.4	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

► There is also a via ferrata, not too high level of difficulty, in the Cerro de Cazorla mountain.

The forests of Holm oaks and Portuguese oaks, thickets of Hawthorn and Cistus, laston grass fields and hedgehog broom in the high mountains, stands of maples of the Dehesa de Hondonero; all are a powerful attraction for botanists. And where there is such a variety of plants there is also an abundance of animals, especially birds, reptiles and amphibians being the most conspicuous, not to mention the Spanish Ibex or the elusive Roe Deer.

There are a number of karstic lakes, undoubtedly interesting from an environmental point of view. Given the terrain, the human heritage elements here are quite dispersed, and isn't easy to spot. Thus please note the wells and fountains, threshing circles and the huts and cave shelters such as the Cueva in the Puerto del Quejigo.

- **Starting point:** Plaza del Puente de Alfamate.
- **Access to starting point:** From the A7, from Vélez Málaga direction Periana and on the MA-155 to arrive to Alfarnate. There is another access from Colmenar and the A-6100. From the Puerto de Alazores, coming from Loja, the connection to the MA-155 is on the A-341.
- **Finish point:** Villanueva del Rosario, at the intersection of Calle Arroyo with the Camino de las Lomas.
- **Access to finish point:** From Málaga, the A-92 M, exit 20 toward the A-7203. From Granada, the A-92 exit 177 to the MA-92 direction Málaga and exit 16 to the MA-231 towards Villanueva de el Rosario.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The best chance for escape before climbing the highest mountain pass is retracing your steps the abandoned campsite (vehicle access) then down to Villanueva del Trabuco, which is very close. From the pass downwards, go to the Mirador de Hondonero, where there is car access and use the forest track to access Villanueva de el Rosario.
- **No return point:** La Fuente de Toma y Bebe or the Llano de la Cueva.
- **Maps:** Almost the entire Stage is on **1039-II** (Periana), except for the section with the abandoned campsite, which is found on the **1024-IV** (Villanueva del Trabuco) and the end of the stage, which is already on the **1039-I** (Villanueva del Rosario).
- **District boundaries:** Up to kilometre 4.2, after the first ascent, you are in Alfarnate, right up to the entrance to the country house Puerto del Quejigal. The boundary between this village and Villanueva del Trabuco is on the ridge, so that the area of Hoyo Virote and Cañada de Quejigos is in the latter district. The fences which meet in the Erilla de Juan Moreno mark the three district boundaries, past the gate (7 km) you enter Villanueva de el Rosario and walk in its boundaries until the end of this stage.



The Sierra of Jobo and the Pico Chamizo seen from Alfarnate plain

• Enjoy the walk safely

It must not be underestimated what altitude can mean at this stage. To the average elevation you must add the maximum height and mountain pass character; weather conditions can be very typical of mountains. The path sometimes has a stony surface and you may be walking directly on limestone pavement. You must wear the right footwear for such conditions.

It must bring appropriate footwear. There are no watering points until Hondonero, and even so it is not treated for human consumption.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

In Alfarnate there are three PR walks (Pequeño Recorrido or short-distance), the well-known PR A-268 Bosque de las Morillas, PR A-267 Pico de Vilo and that one which is most closely related to this stage, the A-266 PR de Las Pilas which starts at the Morales stream.

Access to climbing sectors of Darrin and Toriles are marked at the entrance to the abandoned campsite. As far as right-of-way trails, the climb at the start of this stage is actually a part of Vereda de Archidona, which turns towards Villanueva del Trabuco and

changes name to Realenga de Alfarnate. The second part of the stage coincides with the Vereda del Camino de Alfarnate but only up to the forest of maples as it climbs to the highest mountain pass. Then, from the entrance to the Tajo de Madera there is another Vereda, del Camino de Riogordo, which you walk downwards, though the Vereda then continues to the top of the Sierra de Camarolos and veers to the destination town.

In the area of Hondonero, Villanueva de el Rosario authorities have prepared a circular 10 km route that follows the same path as the GR, passing by the Chapel and the Tajo de Madera, and it is called Ruta del Nacimiento. At the church there is a sign pointing to the Nacimiento del Chorro which isn't too far way. The last route can be done even by car and leads to the viewpoint of the Alto de Hondonero, with a large number of interpretive panels due to the complexity of environment and heritage of the area.

Panoramic views from Mirador de Hondonero



THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

At the beginning you will cross Arroyo de los Morales, in the middle of the vega de Alfarnate, a watercourse choked by the surrounding crops, where you also can find a nice specimen of poplar, some elm and quinces on the soil-covered slopes. Then the limestone composition of the terrain will force the water to circulate underground, except for pits and plains where seasonal puddles can occur. This process can be seen here and there in the rainy season but is especially significant in the lagoons of Hondonero or Cerro Urán, visible at the foot of the path and with their respective signs and information panels. Similar phenomenon occurs at the Laguna de la Sierra de San Jorge.

In Hondonero, a string of small water springs can be found and they are sign-posted. These springs are very important for the numerous amphibians which exist in the area, including the Iberian Ribbed Newt, Pygmy Newt and the Parsley Frog; unique species with restricted habitat. The water springs are called Hondonero, Zarza,

Canaleja, Raigon and Urán. In general these constitute small contributions sprouting from the clay strata that have been channelled for the livestock.

Completely different in origin are the large outflows of water coming from carbonate aquifers of these enormous mountains. They drain into two powerful sources at foot of the mountains, Nacimiento or Chorro sign-posted opposite the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary and the recently declared (in 2011) Natural Monument, La Fuente de los Cien Caños in Villanueva del Trabuco, traditional source of the Guadalhorce River despite the fact that the latter comes from the Puerto de los Alazores.

El Chorro, channelled by a dam right at the source, creates the Arroyo de los Cerezos which joins Arroyo de Canaleja, a steady companion of the GR at Villanueva del Trabuco. This latter stream was involved in some serious floods in the village in September 2012, causing substantial material damages.

Plains of Alfarnate and Alfarnatejo soften the landscape that is viewed from the first stretches of the sierra



WALK DESCRIPTION

» Up to the Puerto del Quejigal

The first steps of Stage 11 are flat, across the working fields of Alfarnate leading towards the sierra. There is a steep slope where traffic is banned, but it used to be a well-known path of Escariguela, which today is almost lost. These sunny mountain slopes are being gradually planted with oak, but they are dominated by gorse with some Terebinth. The landscape is made interesting by the whimsical karstic modelling in the Puerto de Quejigal, even with temporary pools. The track improves greatly as it leads downhill in search of Villanueva del Trabuco, which you can catch a glimpse of among planted Aleppo pine woods ahead, after passing the entrance to a country house on your left.

» Pits and flatlands of the Quejigal

The walk turns sharply at the Parque de Arborismo and Aula de Naturaleza buildings, whose buildings, almost finished, occupy one of the best areas of pasture and cultivation. There are a couple of adventure circuits of different levels of difficulty built among the trees.

The journey continues and arrives at a hollow called Hoyo Virote, surrounded by good specimens of Aleppo pine, very dense oak and great examples of Terebinth, beside the Portuguese oaks (Quejigo) that lend their name to the entire area. Locally, glens are called "vagas", such as the one here which leads the walker down into a labyrinth of thick forest of erect trunks of Portuguese oaks. A new flat area appears, where you start feeling the altitude and you reach a fence (previously mentioned in district boundaries) that leads the hiker to the left Juan Moreno threshing circle (km 6.9), a proof of the agricultural activity associated with these remote areas.



Hermitage of the Virgen del Rosario, reaching the point of destination of the stage in Villanueva del Rosario

» La Sierra

If you turn around you can see a spectacular view of the mountains of the Central Limestone Arch blocked to the north by the rocky mass of the Sierra de Loja.

The glen which The Great Path of Málaga climbs is placed between la Sierra de Jobo (with its peak, Morrón, sometimes just called "peak" by locals), del Chamizo to the east and the Sierra Gorda to the west. The dimensions of this second limestone mountain are hard to fathom from this position, unlike from Villanueva del Trabuco where it raises behind the village. The walk reaches the highest point of all the GR in an area with several sinkholes, where also the Fuente de Toma y Bebe located. Above, on the left, there is a shelter that is widely used, with protective masonry walls.

» La Dehesa de Hondonero

From the Puerto de Quejigo and the Llano de la Cueva (km 8.3 and 1,385 m altitude) there starts a descent where there are views towards Dehesa de Hondonero. The objective

is to use the trail to reach the Mirador de Hondonero, passing by impressive tamarisk bushes interspersed with some impressive maple specimens.

At the Mirador (km 9.5) take the wide track with vehicle access from the village which is the destination of this stage. The environment of this viewpoint is privileged because of the amphitheatre of rugged mountain ranges that surround it, but also the extent of the views to the north, towards the extensive plains of the two Villanuevas. The itinerary which starts at the Mirador follows various information panels that have been placed (described in reverse to the Great Málaga Path direction). The panels let the hiker discover the very diverse aspects of the Dehesa de Hondonero, such as the geology and facts related to karst lakes and water sources.

The area is frequented by walkers and tourists as the place evidently attracts people. Mountain walkers and climbers in search of the via ferrata come through as well, so do cyclists. The walk is still mostly heading west, but to get to the village it turns slightly



The Sierra de San Jorge and the Tajo Tello

north where there is a detour towards the Tajo de Madera, an imposing ginger-coloured rocky cliff located about 500 metres to the west.

What's left to do now during the Stage 11 is to walk discovering successive water springs among farms, holiday homes and orchards, while olive trees are taking over the landscape again. Arrive at the chapel of our Lady of the Rosary (km 14.1). From the broad plain that there in front of this bright building there is an access to El Chorro, a short and recommended detour. The walk then passes between the incipient valleys of the Arroyo de Cerezo, which originates in the aforementioned source, and along the Canaleja stream, which gets closer and closer to the path until you come to a little bridge that gives access to Villanueva del Rosario, where Stage 11 ends. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Alfarnate, Plaza del Puente, village square	30S 0388066 4095155	885 m	2 Ermita Nª Sª del Rosario and access to spring source	30S 0379556 4094578	825 m
3 Puerto del Quejigal, mountain pass	30S 0386374 4096770	1.120 m	4 Cross-roads Alfarnate-Puerto de los Alazores	30S 0386908 4096066	880 m
5 Erilla de Juan Moreno, gate	30S 0384507 4095682	1.198 m	6 Hoyo Virote pit	30S 0385134 4096579	1.071 m
7 Puerto del Quejigo y Llano de la Cueva, pass and plain	30S 0383556 4094982	1.385 m	8 Fuente de Toma y Bebe	30S 0383735 4095077	1.370 m
9 Mirador de Hondonero, viewpoint	30S 0382839 4094443	1.222 m	10 Aceral de Hondonero, maple trees	30S 0383193 4094790	1.300 m
11 Access to Tajo de la Madera	30S 0381219 4093696	995 m	12 Access to via ferrata del Cerro Cazorra	30S 0381747 4094015	1.064 m
			13 C/ Arroyo Fuente Vieja Villanueva del Rosario, street	30S 0378819 4095366	695 m

12 VILLANUEVA DEL ROSARIO • ARCHIDONA

The Río Guadalhorce river and the Hoz de Marín



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 20 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	18.5	Accumulated ascent	365	Final altitude	710
Ascent km	7.8	Accumulated descent	360	Maximum altitude	830
Descent km	6.5	Maximum difference	200	Minimum altitude	630
Flat km	4.2	Altitude at starting point	695	Average altitude	712

» Summary of this Stage «

This is possibly the best path, from an environmental point of view, connecting two towns. Always aiming northwards, the walk takes gentle detours to avoid geographical features, such as the Hoz de Marín and some infrastructures, the most important being the A-92M motorway.

Archidona and Villanueva del Rosario are at the same altitude, in this Stage the ascents are almost equal to the descents, and the highest points are the Cerro de la Cruz (810 metres) and the hill where the fire break runs between Saucedilla farmhouse and the Hoz de Marín, which is at 830 metres. The lowest points are the Guadalhorce river and the Arroyo de la Hoz de Marín (or del Ciervo), both at the identical height of 635 metres.

Therefore the mountain ridge profile reflects the path well, being very varied in terms of landscapes, and between the agriculture, pure woodlands, domestic livestock and game hunting of the oak dehesas.

» Highlights of this Stage «

A main point of interest at the beginning of this Stage is that you will see the Guadalhorce river while it is just a small stream close to the path. The areas of dehesas during the first third of this section are very interesting, situated as they are in a limestone area along with clays, which gives an opportunity to see a karst sumps and temporary ponds. The Holm oak forests also take the form of islands, with isolated specimens as witnesses of past splendours. >

							
2	2	2	3	2.2	13.0	3.3	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

► The views from the pine covered hills are very enlightening, with a complete panoramic view toward the south of the Central Limestone Arch, in the area where the previous Stage crossed it. On the other side is the Aleppo pine forest of the Hoz de Marín. This site leads the walker to an island of vegetation and nature, into an enclosed valley, carved through the layers of gypsum and clay, with little effort, by the river flow.

- **Starting point:** Villanueva del Rosario, on the bridge over the Arroyo de la Canaleja, Calle Arroyo (Fuente Vieja).
- **Access to starting point:** From Málaga, take the A-45, exit 114 to join with the A-92M, exiting at 20 onto the A-7203 and finally taking the MA-231.
- **Finish point:** Archidona, where Calle Luis Braille meets the Avenida Andalucía.
- **Access to finish point:** Motorway A-92 Sevilla-Granada and the A-359 (Pedrizas-Salinas) and finally the N-331.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** Once you have passed beneath the motorway for the second time, at kilometre 7.5, the option to leave the GR is at the Cortijo de La Saucedilla; take the track to the east. This will lead you to the main road that connects Villanueva del Trabuco with Archidona, the latter being the closer village, to your left.
- **No return point:** There is a very important point, the highest of this Stage, where the viewpoint of the Central Limestone Arch has been situated. After this, a fairly steep descent towards the Hoz de Marín begins. Alternatively backtrack from the lookout point or continue from the Arroyo towards Archidona.
- **Maps:** Almost all of Stage 12 can be found on **1024-III** (Huertas del Río), except for a few metres at the beginning on **1039-I** (Villanueva del Rosario) and to finish **1024-I** (Archidona).
- **District boundaries:** Almost half of this Stage is within Villanueva del Rosario boundaries and the other half in Archidona. As it could not be any other way, the district borders meet at the Cerro de la Cruz, at the point known as Sumidero, where you will have covered 9.5 kilometres.

It seems that the agricultural and mountainous landscapes do not want to separate completely in this area, here the olive groves climb to meet the low scrub





The Central Limestone Arch seen from the GR-249

• Enjoy the walk safely

The greater part of the way is along comfortable forest tracks or well maintained footpaths. In the short section which takes you along the A-7230 main road it is obligatory to take the necessary precautions.

The steepest descent is towards the Hoz de Marín, through a terraced replanted pine forest. Due to the steepness and sandy terrain, you should descend carefully.

In the Hoz de Marín, you will ford a stream bed, which can have high water levels, sometimes sufficient to exceed the capacity of its

natural riverbed and to flood the footpath in places where it runs close alongside the stream.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The first part of the way takes you along the Camino to Archidona; it does not enter the gorge for obvious reasons instead it veers off to the east.

In the Hoz de Marín, due to the uniqueness of the area, it coincides with the PR-A-157 "Hoz del Arroyo Marín". This is a linear walk and you have to turn back when you reach the point that the streams flooded and destroyed in 2012. The number of fallen tree trunks and sections of disrupted pathway only allow you to walk for one kilometre downstream from where the GR connects with the riverbed. For this reason, the whole PR is used and walked in its entirety.

There is another PR, the A-125, "Archidona north-east and Hoz de Marín" which is currently not in use.

There is a possibility to do a circular walk from Archidona, but walking around the area.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Guadalhorce is the principal river of Málaga, due to its 166 kilometres and the fact that it does not leave Málaga's boundaries (Málaga's other great river, which the GR also visits, is the Guadiaro). In fact, the Guadalhorce river cuts the province in half,

receiving its waters from the Central Limestone Arch, the Vega de Antequera plains and the Sierra de las Nieves mountain range. Of course, the importance of this river attests to its other names, although no longer used; Río Málaga river and Guadalquivirejo.

Central Limestone Arch and the Hoz de Marín



During the Great Málaga Path walk you re-visit the river in the middle section at the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes when one of its tributaries, the Río Turón river, flows up to its source. Towards the end, it joins with the Desembocadura del Guadalhorce estuary, another Espacio Natural Protegido, (Protected Natural Area). In this Stage you can admire for a little while a few black poplars and ash trees, along a sparse water flow during the summer.

It is popularly said that the river begins at Villanueva del Trabuco, at the Fuente de los Cien Caños (Spring of One Hundred Spouts), which makes sense as it is a spectacular place. But following its course upstream to the slopes of the Sierra de San Jorge you can reach a spot, no less emblematic, the Puerto de Los Alazores, among unique rocky escarpments.

In the Dehesas of the central area of the walk, there are some small lagoons and slow waters, which are enlarged and topped-up with water for domestic livestock and wild game. The GPS referenced deep pond found at one of the high places along the footpath, is a point where water filters out from the underground aquifer.

The Hoz del Arroyo de Marín is an emblematic area, despite its size being little more than 600 hectares, it has been declared by the Diputación of Málaga an Espacio Sobresaliente con Protección Compatible. The aerial view of the Hoz (Sickle shaped valley) demonstrates the origin of its name as it is a pronounced, semicircular scar, with an average depth of 250 meters, levelling out at the northern end. The valley ends at the Huertas del Río; (River Orchards) where its course takes a turn to the



The arable lands still sustain some Holm oaks while on the Loma del Pinar hill pine trees emerge

west, towards the Peñón de los Enamorados, (Lover's Rock) while Archidona town overlooks its eastern end.

In fact there are satellite images of before and after of the powerful storms in 2012. You can see the consequences of the abnormal water flow in the uprooted and dragged tree trunks, erosion on the most open banks and damage to the infrastructure.

Despite this, the area you will pass through has well maintained walks, beautiful riparian vegetation, not so much for the size of the trees but because of the diversity and density. To begin with the narrowness of the gorge is more evident (it is actually very narrow at the base) and the flood terraces are reduced to a minimum; but they are wider above, here allowing the installation of mills and orchards.

Hoz de Marín used to house a mill on the Arroyo del Ciervo, Deer's Stream, oldest and probably most curious name in the area.

Here the ash-trees abound, especially at first, along with many elm trees. The gall-oaks or Portuguese oaks, which are fairly scattered, reach the edge of the river. At the end of the walk, when the valley opens up, the poplar trees prevail.

The milky coloured water is typical of this stream, it is due to the unstable nature of the bank's terrain (gypsum, clay and other Triassic rocks), because of this the stream does not contain fish but it does have other animals associated with water, especially amphibians, and forest ecosystems.



WALK DESCRIPTION

» The Guadalhorce River basin

The walk begins by leaving Villanueva del Rosario on the Camino de las Huertas, alongside the Arroyo del Cerezo or los Cerezos, which joins the Guadalhorce river at the stretch of road that you will be walking along. You will make a sharp turn, leaving the asphalt and circling the Cerro Cuca and then, after passing under the A-92M motorway, make another turn at the Venta Alta so that you are walking northwards following the motorway through the areas known as the Dehesa del Raso and El Ventorro.

A new underpass beneath the motorway takes the walker to an area full of trees which contrasts boldly with the previous landscape.

» The Holm oak Dehesas

After walking 7.5 kilometres of this Stage, you will reach hills with the unusual name of Siegaliebres (Blind Hares), covered in Holm oak trees. The low scrub consists of gorse, thyme, Montpellier cistus and *Genista umbellata* with Retama Broom and Kermes Oak being the slightly taller plants. The walk is lined with fences and numerous gates; continuing uphill you will reach the highest point so far, Cerro de la Cruz, where you will soon turn 90° towards the northeast in the area of Cortijo de La Serena (o Gómez) farmhouse, and the deep pond, which remains to your right.



The Saucedilla farmhouse and Central Limestone Arch

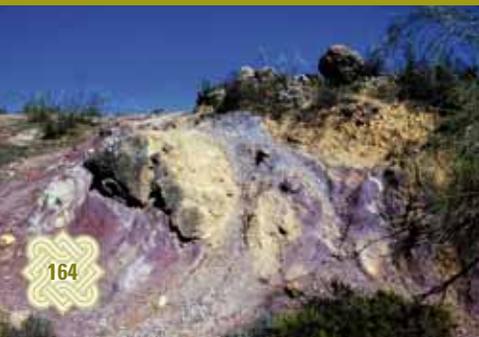
The landscape opens up to some extent, but you will continue to see isolated copses of 100 year old Holm oak trees, with lone examples, too. Towards the south you will notice the profile of the distant Central Limestone Arch, while to the north the horizon is closed in by the Loma del Yesar and Loma del Pinar hills. The latter is recognized by the line of pines that cuts short its elongated summit, a prelude to the forest behind.

The walk leads to some ruins (km 11.5) in the area of Calasana and begins to ascend and descend through olive groves, almond trees and non-irrigated crops until you reach the Cortijo de La Saucedilla farmhouse, by which time you will have completed almost 14 km of the walk.

» La Hoz del Río Marín

The stream which flows to the north is La Saucedilla, a tributary to the Marín, but the path, after turning at a right angle towards the north, leaves it to your left, while you climb a steep slope over gypsum terrain. The walker benefits from the height gain as one can look over the previous hilly stage to the south, and

Gypsum and marl of different colours



the densely wooded valley to the north, which contrasts with the recent landscapes.

After circling the hill and walking a short distance along the border between the pines and thyme bushes, bear left in order to descend the 200m to the river, into an area known as Pilatos.

There is very little undergrowth below the pine trees due to their density, but they have fostered the growth of quite a few young Holm oaks. To continue northwards you will need to follow a pronounced curve at the base of the valley.

You will cross the river at kilometre 15.8, just where the river zigzags around a high

outcrop of gypsum and marls, which it continues to erode. The PR A-157 continues with a slight descent, but our path changes its direction and feels as if it traces a line parallel to the river going upstream. To the left, steep, almost treeless slopes are sparsely covered by thymes and retama broom. The valley begins to open up, the path becomes a track and you start to climb, leaving the Hoz behind. Just a few metres from Archidona, you can see the shoots of some Caper plants and wild Violet cabbage (*Moricandia* sp), indicators that the land here is rich in clay and gypsum. ○



Pine woods hold the slopes of gypsum and clay in Hoz de Marín



Arroyo Marín, riparian woods

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 C/Arroyo Fuente Vieja. Vva. del Rosario, street	30S 0378819 4095366	695 m	2 Venta Alta /Río Guadalhorce, 'High Inn' / Guadalhorce River	30S 0376348 4097130	635 m
3 Pass beneath the A-92. Begin the ascent	30S 0376560 4100089	735 m	4 Sumidero in el Cerro de la Cruz, sump	30S 0375298 4101291	805 m
5 Cortijo de La Saucedilla, farmhouse	30S 0378080 4103381	745 m	6 Mirador de la Hoz de Marín	30S 0377721 4103405	775 m
7 Central Limestone Arch, viewpoint	30S 0377704 4103679	825 m	8 Vadeo del Arroyo en la Hoz de Marín, ford in the stream	30S 0377246 4103865	635 m
9 Arroyo Marín stream, galleried riparian vegetation	30S 0377293 4104729	636m	10 Mirador de Archidona de la Hoz de Marín, viewpoint	30S 0376958 4105834	700 m
11 C/ Luis Braille and Avda. Andalucía, streets	30S 0376716 4106117	710 m			



The interaction between woodland and crops shown perfectly in this Dehesa with interspersed olive trees

The Great Málaga Path in its passage through the sea of olive trees

Since the dawn of Andalucía there has been an agricultural triumvirate that dominated the landscape, consisting of vines, olive trees and wheat. Unevenly distributed around the province, but always present, we can consider the Vega de Antequera plains and the north-eastern region, as the granary or the larder of Málaga.

The factors that have shaped this area are: its situation on a high plateau between the Ríos Genil and Guadalhorce, gentle contours and a good quality clay soil for these crops. Obviously, if it is a good place to grow these, then it is also good for woodlands. Or to be more exact, it used to be. Along the Gran Senda de Málaga there are occasions to verify these assertions, strolling between the villages that are in the industrial areas of Archidona, Villanueva de Tapia, Alameda and Antequera.

The territory belonging to Antequera is the big protagonist of the area that you will cover. Not in vain, for the municipal district is the largest in the province of Málaga and the eleventh of Spain, with 814 km² and 13 districts. Villanueva de la Concepción separated itself administratively from Antequera in 2009, thereby constituting Málaga's 101st town.

The Gran Senda de Málaga, for its part, devotes itself to connecting the neighbouring towns: Archidona, Villanueva de Tapia, Villanueva de Algaidas, Cuevas Bajas, Alameda and Fuente de Piedra, scribing a circle that is always one step away from entering the province of Córdoba. Almost the whole territory is between 400 and 500 meters in altitude, when not completely flat it has a curved landscape of gentle slopes.

La Comarca Nororiental de Málaga (NORORMA), the north east region of Málaga is very well represented along the GR-249, except for Villanueva del Trabuco, that you will hardly touch during Stage 11.

From an environmental point of view it is a transitional area between olive groves and Holm oak woodlands, with good, if perhaps scarce examples of Dehesas and copses. The watercourses are not very important here, the Arroyo del Bebedero stream (later becoming the Río Burriana river) is a channel which drains springs and surplus rainwater, delivering them to the Genil river.

The long journey through the Antequera region provides a real perspective to the naming of this group of Stages as “el mar de olivos”, “the sea of olive trees”, it also connects with another subsection with defined characteristics of its own, the towns clustered around the Sierras de la Camorra and the Humilladero mountain ranges.

This area is one of the Andalucían bastions in Olive Oil production, The “Denomination of Origin” geographical indication is designated to the Extra Virgin Olive Oil, amongst others, in all of the districts covered here by the Gran Senda de Málaga walk. “Hojiblanca” is the variety of olive tree with the highest production in the 80.000 hectares in cultivation, although varieties include amongst others; verdial, arbequina, gordal, picual. In total there are about 10 million olive trees belonging to 11,000 farmers. According to official data the production which meets all the regulation requirements, is around 35,000 tonnes of oil.

The Roman culture marks the highpoint of the diffusion of Olives in the Málaga province, with numerous villae scattered through the region, as the dozens of farmsteads are now that you will come to know during the following five Stages. Without doubt, the industrialization of production will be obvious in certain parts, but in others the survival of ancient olive



Hunting, specifically of small game, has many followers in the region, both nationals and foreigners



Often there are large rock piles within the olive groves, collected to clear the working area

trees grown in the strictly rain-fed traditional manner and bears witness to the fact that there have been consolidated providing oil and table olives, a mainstay in the Andalucían farming culture.

Other cultivation accompanies the olive trees; also of non-irrigated annual crops are cereals which occupy more hectares (wheat and barley) and also sunflowers. In the Vega of Antequera there are potatoes, onions and asparagus grown with irrigation, but the GR does not reach these.

If you think of olive groves as Dehesas, you would be talking about immense woodlands, but you need to take into account that the present

methods clear all other herbage which would accompany the trees, and the use of pesticides limits greatly any animal diversity.

Fortunately there is an exception, that of game species. Compared to the overall decline of small-game animals for hunting in the province, in particular the lagomorphs (rabbits/hares) in the areas of Sierra, it is practically impossible for the user of the Great Path of Málaga to go through these stages without seeing a huge number of rabbits, hares and partridges, approximately in that order. Hunting is deeply rooted in this area; it holds numerous managed hunting zones, obviously with good result as these abundant resources show.



Diverse varieties of olives are consumed once pickled and dressed; they are also the base for the manufacture of some of the best oils of the market

Rabbits continue to be troubled by myxomatosis (transmitted by vectors such as mosquitoes and fleas) and viral haemorrhagic disease (hepatitis with less alarming symptoms and transmitted through contact). It is not uncommon to see a change of behaviour in animals as they suffer from a decline in sensory faculties, hence you may observe them in full daylight. Rabbits are commonly seen in border areas: lagoon edges, hedgerows, roads and railway lines, around isolated oaks, river and stream banks.

Hares, which differ from rabbits in that they do not dig burrows but sleep on “beds” and their offspring are virtually self-sufficient from birth, they are considerably bigger and very

fast. Hunting hares with Spanish greyhounds is very popular in this flat area. Partridges are more difficult to see, they are present in large numbers and often reluctant to take flight in the presence of potential enemies in a behaviour called “apeonar”: running as fast as the bird can on foot.

Other (hunting) game species which are present in the olive groves are Thrush sp, Collared Doves, Turtle Doves, Rock Doves and Wood Pigeons.

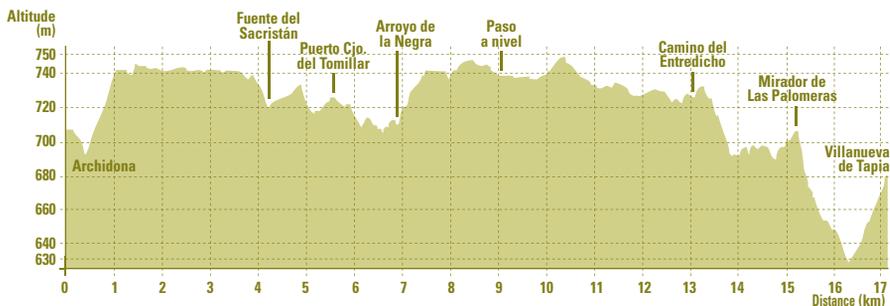
The itinerary proposed to visit this interesting area is: Archidona – Villanueva de Tapia – Villanueva de Algaidas – Cuevas Bajas – Alameda – Fuente de Piedra. ○

13 ARCHIDONA • VILLANUEVA DE TAPIA

Relict Dehesas



ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 50 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	17.1	Accumulated ascent	170	Final altitude	680
Ascent km	6.3	Accumulated descent	205	Maximum altitude	750
Descent km	6.7	Maximum difference	125	Minimum altitude	625
Flat km	4.1	Altitude at starting point	710	Average altitude	710

» Summary of this Stage «

Stage 13 is a fairly comfortable path between two villages which are at the same altitude and without deep valleys between them, so the ascents and descents are minimal and very gentle. Almost the entire stretch of land uses tracks of different grades, but generally well maintained, given the intense use by agricultural traffic.

There is an unavoidable stretch of road and you pass beneath highway plus a railway line by means of a level crossing without barriers.

The path is towards the Northeast, between some low altitude mountains to the left and hills occupied by Holm-oak woods and dehesas to the opposite side. You will visit one of these areas of dehesa, it is an example of the harmony between the original inhabitants of the territory and the resources needed for the development of human societies.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The two traditional paths, united somewhat artificially for the sake of the motorway and the train line are two examples of traditional infrastructure of impeccable path, part of the common heritage of the villages.

The star of this Stage is without doubt the dehesas of Málaga's north-eastern region, one of whose better spots are grouped around the above-mentioned communication channels. >

							
2	2	2	3	3.0	13.1	1.0	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

➤ Following the Arroyo de la Negra upstream, acquaints the walker with one of the streams that forms the Hoz de Marin, this Stage complements the previous one. From an historical point of view, the Trifinio is an emblematic place near to Villanueva de Tapia. In this location three provinces meet; Málaga, Granada and Cordoba, which gives an idea of the disputes unleashed in this area until the boundaries were set in the early nineteenth century.

The Trifinio cairn is where Arroyo de la Cerca joins with the Barranco del Valholgado to form the Arroyo del Cerezo (this name occurs at the beginning and end of this Stage), east of the town and very close to the trail.

- **Starting point:** Archidona, at the converging point of Calle Luis Braille with Avenida Andalucía.
- **Access to starting point:** A-92 Motorway Sevilla-Granada and the A-359 (Pedrizas-Salinas) and finally the N-331.
- **Finish point:** Villanueva de Tapia, at the roundabout closest to Avenida Constitución, at the southern part of the village.
- **Access to finish point:** From the A-92 you should take the A-333 Archidona Alcaudete. From Málaga, the A-359 towards Granada and turn off onto the A-333.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** The walk connects with two major roads, the A-92 Sevilla -Granada and the A-333. You could leave this Stage at either of these, but preferably on the regional road.
- **No return point:** It is not a question of it being a difficult stage from the point of view of the effort or the orientation, but, once you have passed the railway line the best thing is to continue to Villanueva de Tapia.
- **Maps:** The walks begins on 1024-I (Archidona), for the most part it continues on 1024-II (Estación de Salinas station) and the last small part at Villanueva de Tapia on map number 1007-IV (Villanueva de Tapia).

At the beginning of this Stage you'll pass close by the Fuente de Sacristan spring, which is very important for the walkers in Archidona



- **District boundaries:** You will remain in the district of Archidona for most of this Stage, until you reach the A-333 (km 11.8). Here you will enter the district of Villanueva de Tapia not leaving it until the end.



This Stage allows for gazing anew from some of its hillocks over the grey crests and woodlands of the previous Stages

• Enjoy the walk safely

The most dangerous, as it often happens, is walking along the few stretches of road, especially the A-333 as it is a fast, straight stretch with high numbers of traffic. But also, on this Stage is the level rail crossing without barriers on the Seville-Granada line: although it is in an area with good visibility. Be very cautious if there is rain or fog.

The only wading point on this Stage is through the Arroyo de las Negras stream, but here it tends to gain mostly in width without too much depth. The only alternative, in any case, would be to use the flyover of the motorway, which is not recommended. The A-92 is passed by means of a tunnel, which usually presents no problems not even by the circulation of water.

Except from the Fuente del Sacristán spring, which is not drinking water, there is no possibility of replenishing water along the way.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The road to the Fuente del Sacristán coincides with the beginning of your walk for the first few metres, until you rejoin the Villanueva de Tapia again, as far as the junction below the motorway. This section coincides with the PR- A-125 up to crossing the railway line. This is indicated in the previous stage as being discontinued, or at least under evaluation. This path is called the "Archidona noreste y Hoz de Marín", and it is circular.

As you reach the level crossing, take the GR-7 E-4. If in previous stages the Gran Senda de Málaga was coinciding with the Ramal Sur, direction Granada, on this occasion it is with the Ramal Norte, direction Córdoba, in this occasion it is a short section close to the road in which the other goes to the Cortijo de Galván farmhouse. The stage of GR-7 E-4 in question is that of Villanueva del Trabuco to Villanueva de Tapia

What they both have in common is their use of the Salinas road, which goes from Villanueva de Tapia to Las Palomeras and continues southwards to the main road.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Fuente del Sacristán spring gives name to the whole area, including the nearby farmhouse. It must have been very important, not only as the point of a water supply which had a good reputation in the village, but also as a reference point giving name to the road. The nearby Sierra de Archidona mountain range provides a water supply which merits the continued care of its environment.

The Hoz de Marín stream only gains that name close to Archidona, near where you exit this Stage to enter the town, it is still called the Arroyo de la Fuente de la Loma. The tributaries which feed from the north into this watercourse from left to right are Arroyo de la Acequia de Caballero, Arroyo del Sequillo and Arroyo de la Negra, with the Arroyo de los Pirineos entering from the south.

The Gran Senda de Málaga introduces you to the Arroyo de la Negra stream which runs parallel to east, up-stream you cross its river bed. In this part the bank vegetation has been altered, with only some tall black poplars and other insubstantial trees. The plants that do prosper are the rushes and bulrushes. The scarce bank side vegetation does not prevent the stream hosting an important fish and amphibian fauna. Some 500 metres before reaching the stream, the torrential rains of 2012 have provoked a 2 metre deep gully in the clayey ground, allowing the walker to recognize the many different sediment layers.

The Arroyo del Sequillo gully, is of a lesser flow and length than that of the Negra (until it is joins with an irrigation ditch), you will cross it higher upstream when walking to beside the motorway, here, just a small stream among the Holm oaks.

Although they are not on our path, there are lakes near Archidona, to the east and situated near to the motorway A-92M.

Lastly, the longest descent of the day leads you to cross the Arroyo de la Cerca gully besides Villanueva de Tapia. The softness



This traditional path is used by many hikers, cyclists and horse riders that cross the dehesas

of the clays on which the olive groves are grown has been deeply scarred by uncontrolled gullies which the locals have tried to repair and prevent with varying results. There are still some poplars, but more common are the brambles which grow in the earthy slopes. The Fuente de la Alameda is close to the village, but perhaps the most curious place name is that of the Fuente de Allalantes, which you will pass on your right as you reach the end of the section.

Olive groves and Holm oak trees surround the Gran Senda



WALK DESCRIPTION

» From Archidona to the Arroyo de la Negra

You leave Archidona by its eastern side, via a long avenue (Llano de Pablo Picasso) which is flanked by housing developments and an industrial estate. The road runs parallel with the direction of the Sierra de Archidona, it remains to the west, but accompanies you for a good distance. The limestone hill has an altitude of 1,014 meters at the peak named Pico Conjuro in the southernmost pepper next to the Ermita de la Virgen de Gracia hermitage. The escarpments of this mountain range are toward the other side, that of the Seville-Granada motorway from there can be seen caves and cliffs with spectacular climbing and some ferratas (build climbing routes). The profiles seen from the path are softer, lacking in vegetation except the dense esparto tussock grass, small and isolated Holm oaks, while you walk between olive groves and crops in search of the Fuente del Sacristán (km 4.2), which is a tributary of the Negra stream. The highest area is covered by olive groves and well maintained almond groves, but all around are beautiful and ancient Holm oaks sometimes

Toward the middle of the Stage Holm oak dehesas and Sage-leaved Cistus dominate alongside the trail



The gully caused by this stream in the olive grove, allows you to see a cut into the soil, showing layers of different particles

forming copses. They are more frequent on either side of the path, marking the boundaries between public and private ownership. The two important farmhouses of this section will remain to your right, those of Monaguillo and Tomillar, it is from here that you will get the best views in this Stage of the Central Limestone Arch. Certainly the penultimate that the Gran Senda offers you which are close to the mountain ranges which are the backdrop to Villanueva del Trabuco and Rosario.

» Las dehesas

As soon as you have passed beneath the motorway (km 6.5) you turn for Realenga del Puerto, which runs parallel to the motorway. You will leave the Cerro del Umbral behind you, as clear as the previous ones, and enter an area of the best preserved oak dehesas of this Stage.

The Holm oak dehesas are a way of non-intensive farming utilizing mature trees; here it also combines well with hunting. Further combining these facets, in the surrounding patches of rough mountainous terrain there is a dense scrub of Montpellier rockrose, while other areas are ploughed and Olives have been planted.

There is a sign close by for the Vía Pecuaría, drovers track from Sevilla to Granada. Where your path turns towards the north from the motorway it is called Los Borbollones and the Hoyas de Galván follows afterwards, and the Sureco farmhouse.

When you leave the district road (km 12) there are still some Holm oaks to the right, while the gullies to the east host mostly gorse, retama, and rockrose scrubland due to the more pronounced slopes.

And soon you will arrive in the absolute domain of Olive trees, which is noted especially when you reach the last hillock, the Palomeras (15 km), where an illustrative poster at the viewpoint Mirador del Entredicho welcomes visitors to Villanueva de Tapia, at the head of the valley, gleaming white between the green of the olive groves and the paleness of the bare soil.

This was the first of the New Villages to gain independence from Archidona, there were so many law suits that the village acquired the nick name El Entredicho (The Dubious) until guardianship was granted to the graduate Pedro Tapia, and the village took on his surname. ○



Panoramic view sign at the Mirador de las Palomeras viewpoint



Villanueva de Tapia amongst olives from final vantage point of the stage

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Archidona, C/ Luis Braille with Avda. Andalucía, street	30S 0376716 4106117	710 m	2 Fuente del Sacristán spring	30S 0379232 4108309	715 m
3 Puerto en el Cortijo del Tomillar, mountain pass	30S 0379966 4109348	725 m	4 Arroyo de la Negra stream and crossing the Sevilla-Granada motorway	30S 0380619 4110118	705 m
5 Level crossing without barriers	30S 0382656 4110425	740 m	6 Villanueva de Tapia to Salinas main road	30S 0382478 4113086	728 m
7 Beginning of the Camino del Entredicho	30S 0383230 4113107	730 m	8 Las Palomeras and Mirador de Villanueva de Tapia viewpoint	30S 0382806 4114508	700 m
9 Arroyo de la Cerca stream	30S 0381849 4115836	625 m	10 Villanueva de Tapia/ Avda. de la Constitución roundabout	30S 0381380 4115742	680 m

14 VILLANUEVA DE TAPIA • VILLANUEVA DE ALGAIDAS

La Sierra del Pedroso and Arroyo del Bebedero



ESTIMATED TIME
4 hours 15 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	16.7	Accumulated ascent	375	Final altitude	525
Ascent km	6.7	Accumulated descent	510	Maximum altitude	895
Descent km	7.9	Maximum difference	370	Minimum altitude	525
Flat km	2.1	Altitude at starting point	670	Average altitude	728

» Summary of this Stage «

The stage 14 unites two pueblos in a straight line east- west which is interrupted in the middle by a large bend to the south.

This is solved later by taking a long way by the stream Arroyo de Bebedero. The start is at higher altitudes than the final 150 meters, and you must add almost 900 meters, so the cumulative altitude is significant even if it does not pose a serious obstacle.

At the beginning you skirt around the Sierra el el Pedroso, passing very close on your left and to the south. Then there is a long journey through hills of olive groves, reaching the highest point of the stage before linking with the road MA-5100.

From there it's down to the bottom of the Valley to follow the downward course of the Arroyo del Bebedero, passing through the hamlet of Albaicín, and retrieving the path to the west that places the traveller on a hillock from where you can see Villanueva de Algaidas and an Atalaya tower separated by a ravine that you will visit in the next stage.

							
1	2	1	3	5.6	11.1	0	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The Sierra of el Pedroso shows in satellite photos as an island of much defined boundaries, a high promontory of 1,023 metres of elevation. In a sea of olive trees, the karstic massif occupied by a dense Mediterranean scrub with Holm oaks seems to want to re-conquer the outskirts ahead with grand old oaks proportions and areas of dehesas between crops.

The Arroyo de Bebedero is another type of island, a linear one, which maintains rich vegetation with its clean waters. In the valley, in the area of Rondán, there is a good tree-lined, surface still standing because of growing on extremely steep slopes to the east and west.

This stream is very important to the Great Path of Málaga because it will also be a hero of the beginning and the end of stage 15, under the shared name of Arroyo or Río de Burriana, (depending who you ask).

- **Starting point:** Villanueva de Tapia, at the roundabout near Constitution Avenue, in the south of the village, passing below the road A-333.
- **Access to starting point:** From the A-92 take the A-333 Archidona Alcaudete. From Malaga, the A-333 direction Granada and then A-359.
- **Finish point:** Villanueva de Algaidas via the Almeria Street, ending the stage at the junction of the MA-6416 with MA-7203 to Cuevas Bajas.
- **Access to finish point:** There are two connections from the A-92 Seville-Granada, A-7201 from Archidona and the A-7221 from Antequera.
- **Possible "escape routes":** From the road that you cross at the km 6, before descending to the Arroyo de Bebedero you can continue and reach Archidona train station.
- **No return point:** When you reach the road MA 5100 it is not worth going back, continue down and reach the next village on the GR.
- **Maps:** The starting point is located on **1007-IV** (Villanueva de Algaidas), the middle on the **1024-I** (Archidona) and the final part **1007-III** (Villanueva de Algaidas).
- **District boundaries:** At the beginning, logically, you cross the boundaries of Villanueva de Tapia bordering with the Algaidas, but only up to the km 2.5, a little before the Cortijo de la Morena. The foothills of the Sierra of el Pedroso are the border between the two pueblos. Villanueva de Algaidas from km 7 to 8 and until the end, but between 8.5 and 10.5 points you enter territory of Archidona. It's the stretch down to the Arroyo de Bebedero.

• Enjoy the walk safely

The stretch that may worry you a bit more is the long way from the Sierra of el Pedroso to the Arroyo of Bebedero. There is a real maze of tracks, a few asphalted and others not, and the advice is not leave the waymarked way. There is no drinking water throughout the tour.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

An important livestock right-of-way, La Colada de los Alamillos, starts at the same point as the GR. It was used by the neighbouring village to bring their animals to the royal cattle fair, in Villanueva de Tapia, the last chance to make deals of the season. The authorities of Villanueva de Tapia have signposted the walk, which has been renamed as El Encinar, it is a circular 5.5 kilometres long and up at the Cortijo de la Morena it coincides with the GR. There are some information panels along the route that explain this infrastructure. La Colada de Entredicho (Debatable) is the camino that leaves from Villanueva de Tapia. The name comes from a process of assigning the village to the nearest town and this one, as we mentioned, is a stone's throw both from Granada and Córdoba.



In the distance, the mountains of the Central Limestone Arch framing the white village of Villanueva de Tapia

The surrounds of la Sierra del Pedroso (Stony Mountains) are, obviously, the least appropriate to walk and so there are no approved paths except for the GR-7 E4. The itinerary of this walk practically coincides with the GR except for the section downhill to Arroyo de Bebedero. (which flows around on the left) and arriving to Villanueva de Algaidas where it follows Camino del Albaicín.

The GR-249 the Cañada de los Puertos uses to reach the destination of the stage, passing by northward through houses of the Albaicín, and turns to the west by the Camino de las Peñas.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

La Sierra of el Pedroso is the collector and dispenser of water from the streams that have their headwaters here.

One of them is seen just as you pass the Cortijo de la Morena. It is a watercourse quite closed-in between clay slopes and it has been granted the name of Barranco del Infierno, Hell's Ravine. From the walk it offers a rugged look, with dense riparian vegetation, on its way northwards. Then it meets a tributary and is directed towards

Villanueva de Algaidas next to the short road linking it with Villanueva de Tapias.

The other watercourse is the Arroyo de Bebedero. This arises from the western flank of el Pedroso and makes a wide curve to meet up with the GR. It follows the walk during quite long e a stretch. During this nice section you will see a pool using a small natural spring and after a hydraulic mill, El Molino de Pozo, in front of other, also ruined, buildings.

On the other side, is a thick belt of Gall aks and Holm oaks that are holding onto a stout clay escarpment goes down in an oblique line among olive trees in search of the stream.

There are plenty of trees: ash, willows, elms and poplars on the banks, plus a good specimen of an Holm oak wood on the slopes of Rondán. The watercourse has crved uout the banks down to the finest strata of limestone, whic is visible following a short detour to your left. The numerous Brambles, when not the cane fields are responsible for consolidating the high land of the river embankments. The many brabmbles, in the absence of reedbeds, are in charge of holding the soil of the tall embankments of the river together. The river bed is compacted due to the high contents of carbonate minerals, which



The clay slopes covered in Olive trees surround a little riparian forest in Barranco del Infierno

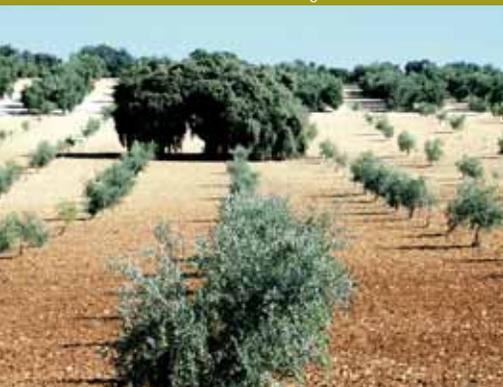
at some time encouraged a pulation of crayfish. A little after passing the bridge over the Arroyo de Bebedero, the path meets the afore- mentioned ravine barranco or Garganta del Infierno and they enter the village together, breaking the village nugget of the village's population in the north called Atalaya apart from the village proper.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Sierra del Pedregoso y la dehesa de encinas

The climb from Villanueva de Tapia, through the Colada de Entredicho, overcomes a steep rise among ancient olive groves through terrain that has suffered

The rows of olive trees respect the ancient specimens of oak, some of them large and in excellent health



recent episodes of erosion, causing huge gullies on both sides of the track. When you reach the first sections of the sierra, on the left, you pass by a cluster of houses in ruins known as the Los Curros and then La Casilla de Sierra, situated in a strategic location with good views of la Nava and the shady slopes of the Sierra of el Pedroso. Here you will find a young Holm oak wood interspersed with numerous Kermes Oaks, forming an extremely thicket on the sharp limestone pavement, which makes for very tough walking for hunters, who mainly ue this spot. Interestingly, the oaks that grow down from the sierra to the path are small specimens, but the ones on the right side of the walk, tucked among olive groves, are much larger, which makes them a benchmark of past splendors. However as human-influenced the area is, a certain balance can be observed,



Rows of Holm oaks and Gall Oaks stand out amongst the olives in the streams and dry stone walls

Interesting when natural forests are allowed to colonize in the environment and occupy ravines field edges, slopes, rocky areas and to secure the soil. The north corner of the sierra, an emblematic point, is occupied by the Cortijo de las Morenas at the beginning of the Barranco del Infierno (km 3). The Cortijo is an example of traditional construction with the inner courtyard and the front pavement, to avoid the transfer of abundant mud from the fields into the house. There is still a meagre garden with some fruit: quince, walnuts, apricots, figs, pear and persimmons.

» The farmsteads between olive groves

From here, with according change in vegetation, olive production becomes a monoculture, but only occupying slopes of certain height. The walk, which leads to

the south now, has been used since time immemorial to climb up to the area of sierra and properties scattered in it, so the walk is escorted by many houses and cottages. Beside the track, in order, you will see the Cortijo de las Cascabeles, and then de los Isabelicos. Further up beside the junction to Villarto there is a group of houses: casa Blanca, Cortijo Armanda, de Moreno and la Casella, now very close to the MA-5100

The Arroyo Bebedero maintains enough pools and an excellent representation of riparian groves



road, which you will walk on for a kilometre and a half towards north-east until you leave it at km marker 7.2 of the GR. Take a downhill track, in the area of Rebollo, to the west and then turn left along a paved track which you abandon soon to get to the bottom of the Valley.

» El Arroyo Bebedero

There is no doubt that, given where the traveller is, the diversity of landscapes acts like a calming tonic during this stage. Now the path is accompanied by the dense natural vegetation of Holm oak forest and Portuguese (or Gall) Oaks which on both sides of the watercourse come down from the galleried woods, as already described. The area is known as Rondán and Malabrido, between km 10 and 11.5.

When the valley widens new houses appear, Mateos, the Castillo de los Peláez, the Ventorro, lo de Prieto, increasingly separated from the watercourse, until you reach the Albaicín. So far you walked predominantly in the north direction, at km 13.4 turn west onto an asphalted road, which climbs to a small pass Cerro de Peña



The flashy *Biarum*, of intense colour and unpleasant smell grow in the grasslands of the Sierra of el Pedr

ahead as you cross the Arroyo de Bebedero. A new twist of the path to the left reveals the village of Villanueva de Algaidas, down at the Arroyo Burriana, where Stage 14 of the Great Málaga Path ends. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Villanueva de Tapia, roundabout with Avda. de la Constitución	30S 0381380 4115742	680 m	2 Casilla de la Sierra	30S 0379609 4115727	830 m
3 Cortijo de la Morena	30S 0378941 4116082	870 m	4 Cortijo de los Isabelicos	30S 0377890 4114897	870 m
5 Ctra. MA-5100, km 7, road	30S 0377892 4113686	845 m	6 Threshing circle and finca El Rebollo	30S 0376239 4114084	720 m
7 Molino Pozo, mill	30S 0374956 4113418	680 m	8 El Albaicín	30S 0374012 4115199	600 m
9 Puente sobre Arroyo del Bebedero, bridge	30S 0372844 4116584	720 m	10 Villanueva de Algaidas, Polígono Industrial, Industrial Estate	30S 0371418 4117081	530 m

15 VILLANUEVA DE ALGIDAS • CUEVAS BAJAS

Mosarabic Road

 **ESTIMATED TIME**
2 hours 45 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	10.1	Accumulated ascent	260	Final altitude	330
Ascent km	3.2	Accumulated descent	460	Maximum altitude	705
Descent km	5.2	Maximum difference	375	Minimum altitude	330
Flat km	1.7	Altitude at starting point	530	Average altitude	510

» Summary of this Stage «

Nothing could be more fitting the environment than sharing the walk during Stage 15 with the Camino Mozárabe, since there is a medieval chapel in the village of this origin and an abandoned convent that starts the ramble of both long stretches. The predominant direction of travel is north up to the Cerro de la Cruz to progressively turning west, a journey marked by the ascent to the top of that hill. Both the distance and the slopes are quite approachable.

You must pass through the nugget of population called La Atalaya separated from Villanueva de Algidas by the Arroyo de Bebedero or Burriana River, which forms a gully in the calcareous sandstone spanned by a medieval bridge. Then there comes the climb in search of Cortijos Loma Vieja and Loma Nueva farmhouses until the edge of the three district boundaries, from where you begin walking downhill. Always following dirt tracks, this part offers an impressive viewpoint over the Valley of the Genil and passes through a new farmhouse, the Cerdón, as you walk to your destination, again the riverbed of the river Burriana.

							
1	1	1	2	5.4	3.8	0.9	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The gully carved into the rock where Villanueva de Algaidas stands (Villanueva of Forests in a free translation) is a true island in the sea of olive trees, a relic of the original vegetation caused by the shadiness of the slopes. Such is the attraction of the place that there was the convent of our Lady of the Consolation of the Algaidas built here, which was awarded by the first Duke of Osuna in 1566 to the Congregation of the Recollected Parents of San Francisco de Asís. Attached to the ruins of the convent is a Mozarabic rock chapel dating back to the IX and X centuries with the Church divided in three naves (the Baptistry, the sacristy and the prayer area) and a nave used as housing quarters. Normally you can visit it without any problems. A medieval bridge still in use crosses the river and communicates with the watchtower.

The Cerro de la Cruz (Junction Hill) is one of those important those landmarks which as its name suggests, is a place where three boundaries unite. But for the traveller it may be the spectacular panoramic views over three provinces from the viewpoint of the Cedrón, conveniently explained in a commemorative panel.

Finally, the visit to the farmhouses of the Cedrón (of Jewish origin) and the Moheda (founded by the Andalucians) offers some beautiful glimpses into communal life in these small centres of population which thankfully resist the passage of time. The Moheda is out of the way but so close that it is worth a detour. The connection with Camino Mozárabe is one more added value to the stage.

- **Starting point:** At the crossroads of MA-6416 with the MA-7203 to Cuevas Bajas, at the northern end of the main centre of population of the village.
- **Access to starting point:** There are two connections, Seville-Granada A-92, A-7201 from Archidona and the A-7221 from Antequera.
- **Finish point:** Arroyo of Barranco Hondo, after crossing the village of Cuevas Bajas, at the south-western tip of the village.
- **Access to finish point:** From Villanueva de Algaidas the MA-7203.
- **Possible "escape routes":** They are not necessary to plan at this stage, given its short length and low difficulty.
- **No return point:** Once you are on top of Cerro de la Cruz it is worth it to continue going down instead of coming back. The settlement El Cedrón is already quite close.
- **Maps:** The entire route is located on sheet AC **1007-III** (Villanueva de Algaidas).
- **District boundaries:** On the Cerro de Tres Cruces you are in between three boundaries: Cuevas de San Marcos (which you don't walk along) Villanueva de Algaidas and Cuevas Bajas. It is the km 4.5; the remaining 5.5 kilometres belong to the latter village.

• Enjoy the walk safely

You have to stock up on water in the heat, since there is no drinking water along the walk. Be careful with the traffic on the road before reaching Cuevas Bajas.

The paved track before that does not hold danger as there is scarce transit of vehicles.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The main novelty for the GR at this Stage is the fact that it follows entirely the 7th section of Camino Mozárabe de Málaga, coming from Cartaojal. At the beginning, you will traditional paths, like the Camino de Algaidas to Loma Vieja. The final section walked on the road, is called Colada de Cedrón which also passes through la Moheda.

The twin GR, 7 E–4, on this occasion only shares with the Great Path of Málaga a section along the ravine of the river Burriana, and then follows the course of this river to reach the same destination. They separate at km marker same to reach the same destination. They are separated at kilometre 1.5, at its access road to the Atalaya. The PR-A 129 circular of Villanueva de Algaidas is 7, 5 km long and connects two nearby settlements, it



Mosarabic rock church and Villanueva de Algaidas La Atalaya, seen during the first steps of the day

coincides with the GR from the beginning of the stage up to the bridge on the Burriana, but then turns towards the east to complete its loop. The Town Hall in Cuevas Bajas has designed three short tours under the heading of Routes for a Healthy Life. Two of them go to the vegas del Genil to the eastern part of the Fernández Lake and the west of the farmhouse of Isla Grande and Las Huertas. Both share the starting point at the municipal gymnasium. The third walk climbs la Moheda and El Cedrón, and the itinerary resembles more the GR-249.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

There is no consensus on where the well-known old Arroyo de Bebedero gets its name of Río Burriana but yes, that is its new name as it leaves Villanueva de Algaidas. This is logical since from the pueblo up there is a fan of tributaries of various sizes. The watercourses which are important have been named here: Arroyo de Bebedero and del Infierno which come from the remote Sierra de Pedroso.

Arriving at Villanueva de Algaidas you are faced with sandstone a cliff, identical to the popular Tajo de Ronda or of Alhama de Granada which is excavated and forms a canyon, not long but considerably high. On the vertical walls of the path you can see orifices which had been carved out by water when the river waters reached higher. The rock preserves its pretty clay colour in these orifices and in the overhangs which

contrasts with the ash black colour of the cuts exposed to the oxidizing action of rainwater. The vegetation in this gully is exuberant, highlighting a large population of European Nettle Trees with large leaves growing in the shade, and quite a few elms. On the watercourse the reed beds occupy the more open areas, and oak forest that climbs up to the cliffs shelters a wide variety of species in its quality underbrush: Kermes oak, mastic, buckthorn, jasmine, *Osyris alba*, together with the fig tress and Portuguese Gall Oaks

You can cross the river on the medieval old bridge resting on bedrock on both sides for support. It is a beautiful infrastructure with one main arch and two sides ones to relieve



Bridge over the Río Burriana

the flow during significant floods. The blocks of sandstone rock bound together by mortar and brick arches have managed to resist the passage of water and time to be used today by the Great Malaga Path.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» El Río Burriana

Villanueva de Algaidas was founded as various scattered nuggets of separate farmsteads: El Albaicín, La Parilla, Grill, Zamorra, Solana, Barranco del Agua, the Atalaya, and Rincona. The trigger to consolidate

the population around the ravine was the Franciscan convent and the shaping of the terrain of the area: better location for defensive reasons, next to the course of water and with accessible sandstone as building material. This is the scenario of the two first kilometres of the stage.

Majestic ruins of the Franciscan convent of our Lady of the Consolation of the Algaidas



From the crossroads in the northern part of the village take a path that leads to the watchtower. The track fords a stream with the watercourse encased in sandstone and moves toward the ruins of the convent. The transit of horses and people has carved deep grooves in the calcareous rock; you can even see the spaced holes that horseshoes have left after so many years of passing by.

The convent and the Mozarabic Church are to the left, looking to the west, while the walk leads down to the right towards the river. The vegetation becomes denser and diverse



A great place from which to see the Valley of the Guadalquivir, the viewpoint of the Cedrón

in this stretch with railings which let you get close to the sandstone cliffs. Then cross the Burriana River by the Puente Viejo and go downhill to find La Atalaya, which gives you an interesting viewpoint to the path you have already walked. The GR-7 E-4 separates at this point (km 1.5) and still continues along its Moorish path.

» La Loma de La Cruz

Now it is time to climb a good-size slope heading north along the Camino de Aldaidas. Turn around few times to admire the panoramic views over the village with the Sierra de Arca behind, with the wind farm on top. You will pass through ruins half-way on the hill side where you can see many rabbit families and when the slope flattens out at km 4 you are on top of the hill. Here are the Loma Vieja farmhouses, with the threshing circle you walk across and the nearby Loma Nueva. Both have Palm trees planted at the entrance. The point where three village boundaries meet is on the side of the path, but the path itself passes by a water deposit on top of a small hill and starts taking you downhill.

Pay attention during this descent and you will notice the Chaparro Bolondro, a much-loved oak tree which even was granted its own information panel down at the Cedrón farm. The hamlet is very close, but before you get there, there is a must-do stop at the Mirador of the Cedrón at km 6, advertised by various regional, Andalucían and international institutions.

Few places can offer such a wide-ranging view, perfectly explained in a panoramic

Villanueva de Algaidas from GR-249 climbing Cerro de las Cruces



poster, in the countryside of Cordoba and Granada provinces, in a spot where, as they say around here.

In Cuevas Bajas, Malaga overlooks the Genil. The descent starts to make a turn to the west and will reach the hamlet of Cedrón, with its communal oven and very intense history. A dozen white houses cluster around the main street with its still-recognizable “empedrado” paving, which the path leads along. There is a detour nearby to the Moheda, but the GR opts to pass beside the farmhouse of the Molinas, and by the Paraje de Montecillo (km 7). Go down towards the asphalted track until you come to the road which leads to the village of Cuevas Bajas. You enter the village from the south-east via Calle Archidona. It passes through the main square by the Church of San Juan Bautista with its brick facade Baroque Clock Tower whose belfry contains three bells. The stage ends beside the river Burriana, almost where it reaches the Genil, in an Avenida lavishly dotted with panels suggesting hiking and kayaking. ○



Burriana river in Cuevas Bajas River, near its delta in Genil



The farmhouse of the El Cedrón contains some elements of traditional architecture as beautiful as this little corner

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

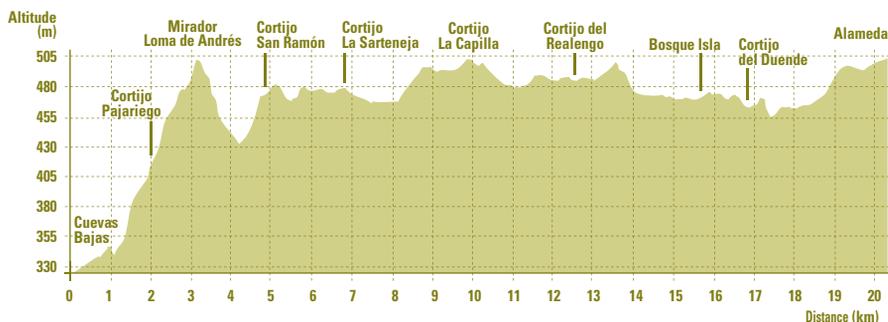
1 Villanueva de Algaidas, Industrial Estate	30S 0371418 4117081	530 m	2 Convento Franciscano y Ermita Mozárabe, convent and Mosarabic hermitage	30S 0371113 4117517	465 m
3 Puente sobre el Río Burriana, bridge	30S 0371267 4117658	447 m	4 Barriada de La Atalaya, neighbourhood	30S 0371125 4118002	510 m
5 Mirador de Villanueva de Algaidas, viewpoint	30S 0371355 4118976	570 m	6 Cortijo de la Loma Vieja, farmhouse	30S 0372013 4119804	700 m
7 Cerro de la Cruz (where three village districts meet)	30S 0371929 4120290	705 m	8 Mirador del Cedrón, viewpoint	30S 0371075 4121161	625 m
9 Alquería de El Cedrón, hamlet	30S 0370754 4121282	570 m	10 Carretera A-7300 Km 8, road	30S 0369280 4121799	415 m
11 Cuevas Bajas en el Río Burriana, caves	30S 0368027 4121945	325 m			

16 CUEVAS BAJAS • ALAMEDA

The sea of olives



ESTIMATED TIME
4 hours 45 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	21.2	Accumulated ascent	310	Final altitude	500
Ascent km	9.8	Accumulated descent	125	Maximum altitude	500
Descent km	7.3	Maximum difference	175	Minimum altitude	325
Flat km	4.1	Altitude at starting point	325	Average altitude	450

» Summary of this Stage «

Cuevas Bajas is at the level of the river Genil, so any route that is directed towards the plateau of Antequera you must climb. Stage 16 has done just, this to the south, up the hill that separates the two main water courses in the area, the river Burriana and Barranco Hondo. From a vantage point overlooking the previous stages, with Villanueva de Algaidas as protagonist of the landscape, the rest of the walk concentrates on the climb to Alameda

There is a long journey to Alameda through the vast sea of olive trees and dry crops of Antequera, with a string of spectacular cottages scattered around, vast estates, resembling a nerve centres of these large agricultural terrain where hunting is also practiced. Unexpected help for the long-distance hiker is having access to the main local place names of the stage just by reading the names on the doors of every farmstead.

Because of the maze of farm lanes, the walk does need to lead along roads but it will perform a few sharp turns, some of the quite sudden, in order to piece together a logical route between the two villages, between the fertile river plain (vegas) and the hilly cultivated countryside (campiña).

							
2	1	1	3	1.0	20.2	0	x 1

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The stage is quite long and in theory could be monotonous, but fortunately there are enough elements that stimulate the landscape, a couple of them really unique. Some of Andalusian farmhouses that are visited at the stage are even mentioned in specialized publications, given their architectural features, a stone's throw location to the main manors, the adaptation to the interior Malaga climate and functioning as the epicentre of the productive activity. In the past the number of workers who stayed (at least started the work off in heavy work-load seasons) was such that the houses resembled seemed small inns or industrial buildings. Some of them even have chapels and the cobbled courtyard is the element on which each farmstead was built.

Lagoons that are located in the vicinity of one of them, Sarteneja, constitute an oasis for countless birds and some amphibians, as well as a shelter for mammals and birds, (hunting species and not). Unexpected forest islands are found between the farmhouses of the Serafina and the Goblin. There are several which are good-sized and are close to the path, so it is easy to appreciate the life that thrives in them or the network of rabbit holes that tunnel under them.

- **Starting point:** Barranco Hondo, the ravine and riverbed of Burriana, after crossing the village of Cuevas Bajas, at the south-western tip of the village.
- **Access to starting point:** from Villanueva de Algaidas the MA-720.
- **Finish point:** junction of the Ventorrillo, in the vicinity of Alameda.
- **Access to finish point:** Alameda can be reached from La d de Andalucía (SE-775), Fuente de Piedra (MA-701), Molina (MA-703) or from the Autovía A-45 by the MA-708.
- **Possible "escape routes":** each of the large farmhouses can be reached by at least one main lane in very good condition which inevitably becomes a road at the end. You also walk above the A-45 up to km 83 and cross the road to Palenciana (MA-709).
- **No return point:** This long stage requires you to consider the possible escape routes mentioned above, considering that there are no pueblos which would be closer than the ones at the start (and at the end). In whichever case, starting from km 9 at the motorway it is best to continue towards Alameda.
- **Maps:** **1007-II** (Villanueva de Algaidas) at the start and **1006-IV** (Alameda) till the end of the section.
- **District boundaries:** The stage leads parallel to the border with the province of Córdoba, but obviously always passes through villages of Malaga. Burriana River marks the line between Cuevas Bajas and Córdoba at the beginning, but a few meters further the watercourse is the border between Villanueva de Algaidas and wedge-shaped Antequera. The stage takes you mostly through Antequera boundaries but shortly before Alameda it leads just between Antequera and Molina. The area of Ventorrillo is also present in this transition point.

• Enjoy the walk safely

A stage as long as this one, even without big elevation gain, must be planned carefully. There are no water points on the walk, at least with public access, and abandoning the walk in the event of problems could be a bit complicated.

Although the path is public for the most part, the properties are not, neither the buildings nor crops. We must try not to disturb the normal functioning of these farms.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Right at the kilometre 4 begins a stretch of asphalt where a double signal is located. It corresponds to the variant of the GR-7 E-4 between Antequera and Cuevas Bajas which it links with the north to Córdoba. This walk leads from Cartaojal at this point and is also used as the Camino Mozárabe de Málaga. Both of these walks lead in the opposite direction to the GR-249 till las Cuevas Bajas.

In terms of the traditional paths, from Cuevas Bajas up to the farmhouse of Pajariego you



Panoramic view of the spacious farmland where the dry farmland and olive groves alternating at the beginning

are on the Pajariego track approximately up to 2.5 km. From 13 to 17.5 kilometres is the path of Villanueva de Algaidas and from km 20 it is the Camino de Cuevas Bajas. These two last Caminos branch out to the east of the town of Alameda. Cuevas Bajas district is exactly on the border with Cordoba or gets into the neighbouring province at times and the Villanueva de Algaidas is located a little more towards the south.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

Burriana River has been regulated as it passes through the town of Cuevas Bajas, and just has some reeds, cattails and cane. There are some Poplar trees and Tamarisk. The watercourse has dragged in enough sediment from the nearby hills and you still see the effects of the floods of the 2012. The proximity to the plains of the river Genil provides the hiker with an occasional view of an ox-driven water wheel and systems of irrigation canals.

Barranco Hondo turns out to be an (often dry) streambed where Tamarisk groves persevere, adapted to saline soils. The walk leads through



The first hill overlooks the village of Villanueva de Algaidas and the valley of the river Burriana

them and it ascends along the slope which is also the watershed of the river basins. When you are at close to the finish you cross another stream

Already at the end you cross another watercourse, the Arroyo Gaen, that while in the area it looks a bit soulless, lower down and to the right it harbours areas of primeval scrub with local species of trees. From the environmental point of view the most outstanding are the lagoons of the Sarteneja. The first to see is also the biggest, opposite the farmhouse. It is very shallow but with a fairly extensive water surface allowing the visits of coots, herons and flamingos. At the junction to the left, there is access between an abandoned house and some hedges of pampas grass up to the dyke separating this lagoon from another, deeper one. This lagoon holds water longer as it is



El Cortijo de Camilla, one of the first large farmhouses, which you pass on your right

evident from a belt of reed beds, encouraging the presence of diving waterfowl such as the Grebe. There are some large eucalypts between both and a grove of tamarisk. A little later, beside the motorway; there is another area that is flooded, medium size between the earlier ones but interesting from the point of view of the vegetation.

In Sarteneja, deeper lagoon retains more stable water level, a belt of riparian plants



WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Loma de Andrés

Andrés Hill at the beginning take rambla above the Barranco Hondo, under the road bridge where bred wild pigeons, passing beside some livestock ships, until it crosses the river and begins to rise. This puts the traveller between the Burriana River, to the East and the Barranco Hondo to the West.

At the top of the Hill is the huge farmhouse Pajariego, the first of the day, among olive groves and dry. The hill can see both valleys and the town of Villanueva de Algaidas.

It descends a little and you reach kilometer 4, where ends the coincidence with the GR-7 E-4 and Camino Mozárabe.

Here is a break of 90° to the West and still roam the farmland.

A dense belt of reeds mark the perimeter of the deep lagoon



The great sheet of water of the greater Sarteneja lagoon suffers the summer heat and dries out sometimes



» Las Lagunas del Cortijo de la Sarteneja

The next farmhouse is San Ramón (or Casa del Conde on maps) with a wide esplanade, and next comes the Sarteneja. These lagoons are at kilometre 7, in a small depression between soft hills occupied by olive groves, somewhat away from the road, to the south. The track, goes by the third pond to the right a bit later; the lagoon, El Perezón, seems to have lent its name to the whole surrounding area. The access is on a service road of the A-45 to cross to the other side on a road bridge at km 83 of the road. Until there is another road, to Palenciana, you walk through the Cortijo de las Capillas and Cortijo Realengo

» The islands of forests

The walk climbs slightly up to a small farm with silos. In the area it is known as Vega Alta, and then the path descends to the farmhouse of the Serafina, at km 16. Right next to the house there are some pockets of Holm oak, as a souvenir left over from what the area used to be. Due to the high productivity of the land, it is probably one of the best Holm oak groves of



Next to Alameda tractors have deposited the olive leaves and left-over branches after olive-picking season

Andalusia. Some patches of mountains remain visible far away in the distance from the walk, especially the biggest north of the farmhouse. Almost immediately after coming upon it you ford the Arroyo Gaén (km 18) having passed the farmhouse called Duende (Goblin). You will have the bird's view over the rocky mountain tops covered in trees. After a short section through the Yedrecillo and you arrive comfortably at the Ventorrillo junction, east of the town of Alameda where stage 16 ends. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

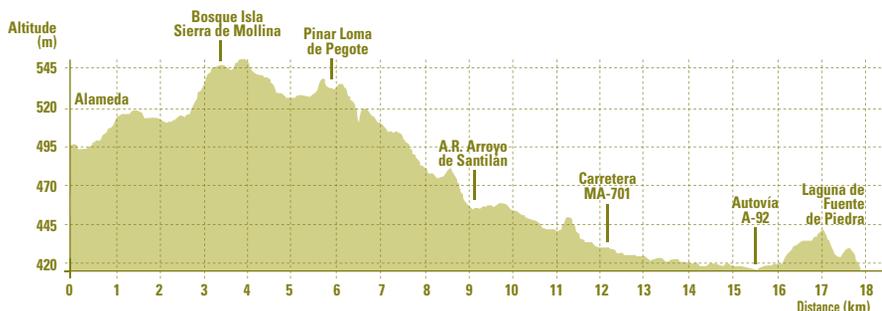
1 Cuevas Bajas in the Arroyo de Barranco Hondo	30S 0367918 4121742	325 m	2 Cortijo Pajariego, farmhouse	30S 0368327 4119370	460 m
3 Mirador de la Loma de Andrés, viewpoint	30S 0367969 4118850	500 m	4 Cortijo San Ramón, farmhouse	30S 0367050 4118803	470 m
5 Cortijo de la Sarteneja, farmhouse	30S 0364990 4118593	475 m	6 Cortijo de la Capilla, farmhouse	30S 0362809 4118142	500 m
7 Cortijo del Realengo, farmhouse	30S 0360742 4117174	487 m	8 Cortijo de la Serafina, farmhouse	30S 0358446 4116792	420 m
9 Arroyo de Gaén, stream	30S 0357037 4118105	455 m	10 Loma de El Ventorrillo (Alameda), hillside	30S 0354130 4118539	515 m

17

ALAMEDA • FUENTE DE PIEDRA

*La Sierra de la Camorra and
Arroyo de Santillán*

ESTIMATED TIME

3 hours 55 minutes

LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	18.6	Accumulated ascent	60	Final altitude	420
Ascent km	5.8	Accumulated descent	160	Maximum altitude	550
Descent km	7.9	Maximum difference	135	Minimum altitude	415
Flat km	4.9	Altitude at starting point	500	Average altitude	480

» Summary of this Stage «

Alameda and Fuente de Piedra, the beginning and the end of stage, are in a straight line north-east and south-west but separated by the mountain ranges of the Camorra or Molina. The itinerary is to skirt the sierra from the south to follow a gentle curve to the west. At the beginning you will walk along the road MA-702 then to take dirt tracks to the left and climb a small pass located in the mountainside of repopulated pine.

Bearing right gradually pass through a forested area until it becomes the countryside again and get to the source of the Arroyo Santillán and its recreational area. Once on the flat land, walk along a succession of tracks and then cross the AVE line, the MA-701 road and the Autovía, A-92. Enter from the north direction the village Fuente de Piedra, make a turn westwards and passing over the railway line arrive at the José Antonio Valverde visitor's centre.

							
1	1	1	3	3.9	14.7	-	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The Sierra de la Camorra is a too much of an obstacle to try climbing it, it is easier to skirt around its southern side, also to learn a little about some of its vegetation. You can visit the two larger forests located on the western and southern flanks.

There is a bit of holm oak, but it is the forest of Aleppo pine which dominates the forest. There is also a good view of the Vega de Antequera during the descent, near the caves. The Recreational Area of the source source of the Arroyo Santillán is an oasis of greenery in the surrounding landscape. It has an extensive area of public use and allows to learn about the origins of Laguna de Fuente de Piedra. There are some splendid panoramic views to the lagoon.

A few meters away there is the Castellum of Santillán located in the Caperuzón, Roman ruins dated back to 1st to 3rd centuries A, D., and the ruins are of a residential villa which was later walled. There is also recently built the chapel of Virgen de la Oliva.

- **Starting point:** the Ventorrillo junction, to the west of the village of Alameda.
- **Access to starting point:** Alameda can be reached from La Roda de Andalucía (SE-775), Fuente de Piedra (MA-701), Molina (MA-703) or from the Autovía A-45 on the MA-708.
- **Finish point:** José Antonio Valverde Visitor's Centre of the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra natural reserve.
- **Access to finish point:** from the A-92 Seville-Granada, at the exit form Fuente de Piedra village and following the signs to the visitor's centre.
- **Possible "escape routes":** there is a moment, when you go through the pine forest of the Sierra de Molina, where that town is closer than the point of origin or the destination, follow any of the tracks that go directly to the south. Later on, the road leads to the Recreational Area or the one you cross after that, are the best options.
- **No return point:** having limed the pass the best option is to follow to the Recreational Area, i.e., go ahead.
- **Maps:** The start of the stage southwards is on **1006-II** (Alameda). The turn is reflected on **1023-II** (Molina) and the stage ends at **1023-I** (Humilladero).
- **District boundaries:** Just as you start you leave the town boundaries of Alameda to Molina, and continue in the latter's boundaries until Arroyo Santillán (9 km) where you cross over to the boundaries of Fuente de Piedra.

• Enjoy the walk safely

Three large infrastructures are passed on flyovers, so the danger is minimal. The only crossing on the road level is the road MA-701. Other than that, this stage poses no problems, neither because of its length, difficulty level or isolation.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The inhabitants of the villages that surround the Sierra de Molina (798 m) and the Camorra (684 m) feel a strong attraction to the hills. In the middle of flat environment there are two hills making for excellent landscapes. It is very common to do the circular route of the Sierra de la Camorra, hiking or cycling. However, the walk it is not marked as officially adapted for leisure.

There are several options close to the track. The so-called red route begins at the farmhouse Cortijo de la Capuchina, at the mountain pass of this stage, and ends at the trig point on top of the hill after 6 kilometres of walking. The abundance of caves in the area is almost proverbial and during the walk you can see some of the major ones, including the Abrigo de los Porqueros. The green route leaves from Cordel de Santillán, the area between pine forests



The Sierra of the Camorra or Molina viewed from a nearby vineyard

south of the sierra, and climbs in search of a cave La Cueva de la Gotera plus a few others. The blue route is very interesting because it takes you, for example, to the Corralón limestone formation where special vegetation grows, with the outstanding beautiful European Nettle Tree. There are four more walks, along tracks, to Caperuzón (Roman ruins), the Verdun, Portiichelo and Capuchina, almost all of archaeological interest.

In the Natural Reserve of the Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra there are two paths prepared for visitors to the lagoon complex and they will be described in the next Stage.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The great protagonist of the walk in terms of water is the sierra itself, apparently dry but keeping the secret of many water sources inside and around it, the major one is the Arroyo Santillán. There are many caves explored in the limestone mass, witnesses to underground water circulation slowed and enclosed by the karstification of the ground. The Cueva de Organos must be mentioned because of its extensive size, la Sima del Soldado because of its depth and then the Cueva de la Goteras. Other caves constitute semi-open shelter, less

The walk leads almost entirely on a forest track which passes through olive groves and dry-farmed land



important form adventure sports point of view but more insignificant for the history of human species in the area.

The caves were used as shelter since ancient times or witnesses of the adventures of bandits, like the shelter of Almirez. In any case, all of them have something to do with the erosive action of water. And the water that penetrates into the sierra should come out again, due to the geological conditions of the terrain as it will push the water out away from the bedrock when the layers it encounters are impermeable and facing the right direction. This is what happens in the source of the Arroyo Santillan, on the border between the boundaries of Mollina and Fuente de Piedra. The sierra generates numerous creeks fanning out towards the south, like Berdún, Aceiteros or the very Santillan, the biggest watercourse. The walk accompanies the stream from its source almost to its delta in the lagoon at its northern end.



The Kermes oak is one of the shrubs that thrive under the pine forest or in thickets on limestone

The fascination or simple interest in these places where water flows has caused different cultures settled here throughout the history. Here it was especially the Romans, as it is evident, for example, in the adjacent archaeological site by a small inconspicuous water spring. Finally, wells were dug out for agriculture in the final part of the route, in the area of Las Albinas (salt marshes), a place name that is derived from temporary and frequent flooding of the land.

The dense shade of the forests of Aleppo pines hardly leaves room for flowers, but this humble bulb plant found an opening



WALK DESCRIPTION

» Las Sierras de la Camorra and Mollina

The first meters are walked on the road (which goes to Mollina) from the Ventorrillo (small Inn) whose name brings back the times when there was a business opportunity created by the new junction and village boundaries). Alameda is passed on the right the asphalt leads you south-west until you have travelled a mile and a half. Then the track turns south through the area of Buenavista, among olive trees and working fields, and the ground begins to be steep. Near a Buenavista farmhouse, José María, the bandit nicknamed El Tempranillo found his death at the hands of another José María, el Barberillo de Estepa.

The tracks are in good condition right up to the pass (550 metres of altitude, km 4) where a grove of Holm oaks and pine woods take over the landscape. The density of the wood allows little undergrowth, and there is only some scrub on the edges of the forest.

The Aleppo pine wood dominates, especially where the GR meets the sierra



At the foot of the sierras almonds have been the traditional crop, growing in the reddish clay



The road descends and the track becomes increasingly worse starting at the Cortijo de la Camorra. It passes then an almond grove, slightly abandoned (5 km), and a kilometre further the path enters between pine trees, bushes of Purple Phlomis, gorse, rockrose and some mastic. The little hills on the left are those of Vergara and the Loma de Pegote. Between them and the sierra, in the area with highest plant density of the area, la Colada de Santillan brook flows along the Great Path of Málaga. The rest of the sierra has suffered the consequences of forest fires to greater or lesser extent.

» From Nacimiento del Santillan to Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

As you walk by the Recreational Area at km 9, you are walking exactly westwards and the terrain becomes level. Although there are patches of olives, the dry fields take over. Now the track will pass by many infrastructures, some quite large and known at an international level, such as the AVE speed train tracks (km10) level. At km 12.3 cross carefully the MA-701 road. Now look



Olive-picking leaves branches and leaves around a farmhouse

for the south direction again along the train line and follow the motorway south to find the safe pedestrian crossing (km 15.5).

Fuente de Piedra is quite close, and you need to walk its streets and come out of the village again to find the overpass that leads to the parking lot Cerro del Palo at the superb Visitor's Centre José Antonio Valverde and one of the symbols of Malaga, a star natural reserve Laguna de la Fuente de Piedra. ◉

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Loma de El Ventorrillo (Alameda)	30S 0354130 4118539	515 m	2 Forest-Island of Sierra de Molina	30S 0353336 4115939	545 m
3 Replanted pine forest	30S 0353546 4115376	550 m	4 Mirador de Antequera, viewpoint	30S 0353824 4114904	540 m
5 Pinar de la Loma de Pegote, pine wood	30S 0353264 4113796	530 m	6 Área Recreativa Nacimiento del Arroyo de Millán	30S 0350503 4112829	457 m
7 AVE speed train line	30S 0349698 4112901	460 m	8 Crossing the MA-701	30S 0347427 4113241	430 m
9 Underground intersection of A-92	30S 0345763 4112559	420 m	10 Centro de Visitantes José Antonio Valverde	30S 0345220 4111022	420 m



La Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

The Great Malaga Path in a lake territory

It is not for the first time that The Great Malaga Path has brought you to a lake territory. You walked close to the Lakes of Archidona during the previous stage, got to know those of Hondonero at another stage and passed by Sarteneja two stages ago, then walked through the of Sarteneja two sections ago. However, during the stage of Fuente de Piedra to Campillos and eastwards towards the reservoirs, you are now entirely in the Malaga area where lakes and lagoons are very frequent, larger, environmentally better preserved or have superior tourist, scientific, and educational value. All the lagoons you will find next belong to the boundaries of Fuente de Piedra (1 lagoon)

and Campillos (the remaining 11). The ones you will see directly from the Great Path of Malaga are, in that order, Fuente de Piedra, Lobón, Dulce, del Cerero, Camuñas, Capacete and Panza. Along this stage you will pass them to the south very close to Campillos. They are easily accessible from the A-7286 road that leads to the reservoirs, the Laguna Salada and Redonda. The lagoon which is out of the way the most is las Salinas, quite far eastwards from Las Camuñas. Finally, there are the two smallest lagoons, at equal distance from the track, and quite far: Laguna del Toro on the left and de Marcela on the right, direction a little southwards from Capacete.

The Lakes take up a very particular position amongst the nature reserves of the province. They are compact and with well-defined boundaries, are usually small in size and, above all, there is a stark contrast between how a lagoon is used and perceived compared to its surroundings. In rural Malaga of the olive tree, vine and wheat, the endorheic (having a closed drainage system) lagoons have been traditionally considered as an unhealthy and somewhat mysterious body or as a place where resources such as salt, water, the reeds or animals for hunting were there to be used at will. For one reason or another, lagoons have been treated badly over time. The Laguna de Fuente de Piedra, today a leader as far as visible results of firm environmental conservation are concerned, still retains memories of threats to its waters: sewage spills, deforestation and mining.

It is difficult to imagine these lake environs as they originally were. Today we understand

very well the concentric circle distribution of halophytic vegetation, the cattails and reeds, and the tamarisk. We also realise that the hills which form the lagoon's watershed harboured Holm oak woods that must have been spectacular.

The traveller must fill in the gaps using their imagination: the variety of trees and the alluring effect the combination of such very different environments must have had on fauna. It is difficult to visualize the primitive landscape of the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra, but in any case it would have been a shrine of Malaga's biodiversity comparable only to its river estuaries.

From the point of view of conservation, it seems that the natural value of the lagoon was recognised internationally first and then on a national level.

It is also evident what role the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra played in the protection

Surrounding vegetation and the sheet of water in the background





An iron mural showing the fauna and flora, located in the visitor's centre José Antonio Valverde

of its smaller versions; not only because of sharing its famous wildlife between them but also because of the fact that a joint project of many close-by and similar habitats is much

easier to present. In 1982 the Icona Instituto para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (Nature Conservation Institute), bought the Fuente de Piedra Lagoon from its private owner and

Egrets and coots in Lobón lagoon





declared it national hunting reserve, a contradiction, to say the least, compared with the current approach. In 1983 it was included in the wetlands of international recognition by the Ramsar Convention and in 1988 the lagoon became a special protection area for birds (ZEPA, Spanish acronym) according to a specific directive of the EU. Since 1984, coinciding with the creation of the Agencia de Medio Ambiente (Environment Agency), it has been legally identified as Reserva Integral, a nature reserve in its entirety.

Currently, the legal structure that protects the lagoon is the Inventario de los Espacios Naturales Protegidos de Andalucía where it is listed as a Reserva Natural. This law recognises an area of intense protection at the lagoon and a peripheral zone where any actions harmful to the environment are controlled and restricted; a kind of cushion from threats coinciding with the belt around the lagoon's basin. The small lagoon of Lobón is included in the protected area. Currently the Ministry of Environment coordinates and supervises any actions effecting the lagoon's environment, also giving a voice

to others involved in conservation: universities, local governments, farmers, ranchers, hunters, conservation groups, etc.

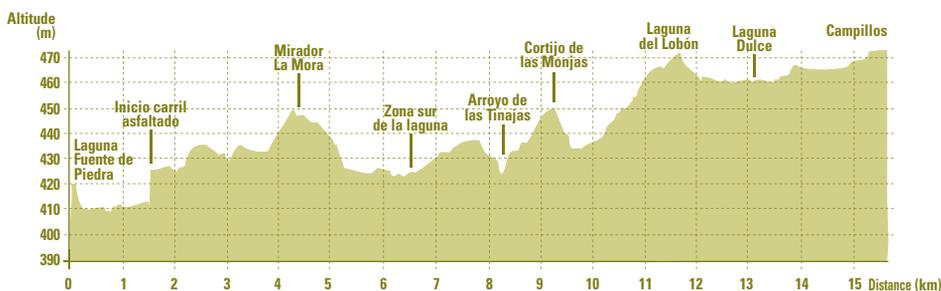
There is another protected area: Reserva Natural Lagunas de Campillos, covering the lagoons: Dulce, Salada, Redonda, de Capacete, de Camuñas and de Cerero. There are others, but they are much more isolated, small, might be dried out and they fall outside the 1,341 hectares of Natural Reserve.

The Laguna de Fuente de Piedra at lowest altitude, about 400 meters, compared to the rest. Others, at an average height of around 460 meters, are grouped in a circle around the Cerro del Romeroso, a hillock almost completely occupied by crops whose southern summit reaches 552 meters, presiding over the whole lake.

In order to complete the image of the lagoon environments of the stages to come, we must mention the Ratosa Lagoon, west of the village of Alameda, shared with the village of Humilladero, also declared a nature reserve, and quite close to the official itinerary of the Great Path of Málaga. ○

18

FUENTE DE PIEDRA • CAMPILLOS

*Laguna de Fuente de Piedra,
Lobón and Dulce*ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 20 minutes

LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	15.7	Accumulated ascent	125	Final altitude	475
Ascent km	6.7	Accumulated descent	50	Maximum altitude	475
Descent km	4.7	Maximum difference	85	Minimum altitude	390
Flat km	4.3	Altitude at starting point	390	Average altitude	435

» Summary of this Stage «

The walk follows a straight line between the two towns, north-east to south-west, leaving the large lake on the right. The walk leads along logical paths, which traditionally have been used between the neighbouring villages, many of which continue to have dirt surface. However, in the surroundings of the lagoon you will be walking on tarmac (in very poor condition).

It is a medium-length stage, mostly uphill but without serious climbs. The environment consists of dry-farmed fields of both olives and grain but livened up with the string of lagoons scattered along the way: Fuente de Piedra, the tiny Lobón and the deep Dulce. All of them enjoy the highest level of environmental protection given their natural value and the fragility of the ecosystems they sustain.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The stage is highly recommended to learn not only about the large lagoons accessible by vehicle and visit the surrounding public-use infrastructure at Laguna Fuente de Piedra and Laguna Dulce. The Great Path of Malaga lets the walker see a different perspective of both lagoons and passes by a lesser-known lagoon of Lobón. >

							
1	1	1	3	6.7	8.1	0.9	x 1

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

➤ This small, isolated twin of Fuente de Piedra Lagoon, in the middle dry farmland, is easily accessible and will allow the traveller get close to the water which is difficult in other areas. It is paramount to remember that causing any harm to wildlife is illegal, and contradicts the spirit of the GR-249.

- **Starting point:** José Antonio Valverde Visitor's Centre to the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra Nature Reserve.
- **Access to starting point:** from the A-92 Seville-Granada, at the Fuente de Piedra exit and following the signs to the visitor's centre.
- **Finish point:** Campillos, in the northeast, entering via Calle Alamo.
- **Access to finish point:** from Malaga on the road which crosses the reservoir of the Guadalteba, the A-357. From Antequera or Jerez, the A-384. From Sierra de Yeguas via the A-7279.
- **Possible "escape routes":** the only road you will cross is at kilometre 8.3, the A-6213, which comes from Sierra de Yeguas (on the right following the direction you will be walking) and connects with the A-384.
- **No return point:** at farmhouse of la Rábita you will have reached half-way point of the walk, but from that point onwards you are in little-travelled territory, inaccessible to vehicles. When get to the Laguna the Lobón (km 12) you get the first glimpse of Campillos. If you come across serious problems and do not reach Lobón lagoon, perhaps it is worthwhile returning to find the road.
- **Maps:** The beginning of the stage **1023-I** (Humilladero), then turn to **1023-III** (Bobadilla - Estación) for almost the entire remaining walk. Finish point **1022-IV** (Campillos).
- **District boundries:** Fuente de Piedra boundaries until Cortijo de la Rábita. Antequera boundaries until the Loma de Lobón (km 11) and then Campillos district until the end.

Birdwatchers at the José Antonio Valverde Visitor's Centre



• Enjoy the walk safely

It's quite a lonely path. Farmers pass by or not depending on the season, sometimes very frequently. Take care when farm vehicles pass by, and, on the stretch of asphalt, passenger cars. They never do so at very high speed though, given the state of the tarmac.

Be careful when crossing the road from Sierra de Yeguas and, starting from there, there are stretches of track built without ditches and this can make the surface very muddy.

There is no possibility of stocking up on water during this stage.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

In the Fuente de Piedra Lagoon Visitor's Centre there are two paths designed to let you explore the nature reserve. Both leave from the immediate vicinity of the viewpoint of the Cerro del Palo. One of them, Las Albinas, leads northwards, toward the flood plains of the delta of Arroyo Santillan. The other path, shorter and with wheel-chair access, leads to the viewpoints of Laguneto, Abejarucos and Laguna de las Palomas. This second route also visits the area which has been reforested with native species.



One of the birdwatching hides of the Visitor's Centre

The only way to circle the whole lagoon is on the tarmac road. The same happens at Laguna Dulce where there is a track circling the lake. Neither road is advertised as such.

As for the traditional rights of way, the asphalted track is the old Camino de Campillos a Fuente de Piedra. The Cortijo de la Rábita is located at the road junction between the old Vereda de Sierra de Yeguas to the north, the previously mentioned Camino, and Realenga of Carratraca which you will be walking along from this point. At the Laguna Dulce you will be walking the traditional Vereda del Pozuelo and Las Monjas.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The only major stream is Las Tinajas, which comes from the northwest as Arroyo del Boyero and flows into the Embalse de Guadalhorce. At the ford there is natural pool with some depth to it but it is not surrounded with as many trees as it should, with brambles and cattails taking over the spot. The endorheic lagoons are the aquatic stars of the day though. Their genesis is due to the existence of closed depressions which do not drain outside. The amount of water that they maintain is more

or less seasonal and is contributed to by streams, connections with the underlying aquifer and the dimensions of the basin.

There are two Nature Reserves, which are afforded greatest environmental protection: the Nature Reserva de Laguna de Fuente de Piedra, which includes the area and the lagoon of Lobón, and the Nature Reserve of Laguna of Campillos. The latter includes, among many others, La Laguna Dulce. Laguna de Fuente de Piedra is oblong in shape, located 400 metres above sea

level207 and stretches from northeast to southwest direction on its longest side of over 6.5 km. The width is 2.5 km on average, which creates the dimension of the water surface of about 16 square kilometres. The lake is very shallow. A space of such dimensions, whose protection is extended to the 1.365 has, has always attracted attention. In the past it was mostly the possibility of salt extraction and mining infrastructure has shaped the space, with a perimeter channel built to dry and drain the streams. It harbours now tamarisks, cattails and rushes in the less saline waters.

In the most extreme environments, vegetation is reduced to the typically saline species: saltwort, glasswort and grass with a very short life-cycle. Dikes and breakwaters used from the ancient times to compartmentalize the water and facilitate evaporation often stay above the water level, and are used by Flamingos for nesting, constituting the largest breeding colony of the Iberian Peninsula. The lake tends to dry out completely in summer, covered in a glistening layer of salt.

The landscapes enriched with smaller lakes (the Laguneto, Las Palomas and Abejarucos), patches of Holm oak and wild



Salt marsh of Fuente de Piedra

olive, and dry farmed crops that surround the strict reserve. Touring the reserve is made comfortable by the network of five viewpoints, two foot paths and the visitor's centre. There surroundings have been repopulated with oaks, hawthorns, mastic, black thorns, tree germander, carob trees, olive trees and other splendid species typical of the Mediterranean scrub.

The Lagoon of the Lobón, by contrast, is very small, just 150 meters in diameter and is located at a higher altitude, about 460 meters. Also, exposed to winds and sun, it harbours plenty of tamarisks on its shores, especially facing the track, and some reeds and cattails. It is not uncommon to see flamingos here, along with herons, ducks and various waders.

The Laguna Dulce, the second in size, is at 450 meters of altitude, the round-shaped surface covers 78 hectares with about 800 meters in diameter when full. At the opposite end of the track there is a small recreational area and a birdwatching hide which can be reached easily on the track that leaves eastward and then turns west. The composition of its waters, as suggested by its name ("Dulce" meaning "sweet"), is less saline. It holds a good population of diving ducks, gulls and waders. The track reaches an area with more abundant vegetation, tamarisk, reeds and cattails, which blocks the view to the banks and the water surface.

Visitors at the protected natural area walking along the GR



WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

After the recommended visit to the José Antonio Valverde Centre, leave from the Mirador Cerro del Palo viewpoint, ignoring the two sign-posted footpaths, heading south. Flanked by two fences and dense forests of tamarisk, the pedestrian path ends abruptly in a track with no car access. The landscape opens up and you discover the usual surroundings of a lagoon: olives, some almond trees and crops of wheat, barley, sunflower and safflower. Typically there are a few wells here and there, a refuge for newts and frogs, and tiny tool sheds with a fruit tree in front in each small garden plot.

This continues to km 1.5, to the end of the dirt track and a level crossing at the train line. Almost 7 km are covered on a (sometimes asphalted but not well maintained) track which follows the distant edges of the lagoon in the southwest direction. At the top of the Cerro de la Mora (4.4 km from the start and 450 meters above sea level) is an exceptional view to the wetland and the

Traditional crops and the reserve



surroundings of olive tree groves. There are a lot of side roads off the track to the left and to the right, the latter promising more viewpoints closer to the water however the sign-posting is insufficient.

» La Realenga de Carratraca

Having passed the turn-off to el Cortijo Santa Teresa you reach the point you are closest to the southern end of the Laguna de Fuente de Piedra, near the ruins of the Cortijo del Plata. Continue straight ahead leaving the reserve area behind and walking slightly uphill. At km 8.3 pass a farmhouse called la Rábita on the right and the road to Sierra de Yeguas. A slight zigzag leads to a ford across Arroyo de las Tinajas where you start walking uphill. There are some small Holm oak woods here where the land is not suitable for agriculture. The walk takes you through high areas, leaving the Valley of the Arroyo of the Boyero (or Tinajas) to the north, and keeps following the Realenga de Carratraca direction. To the south there is a large ruined farmstead on top of a hillock, el Cortijo de las Monjas (km 9.2). Further ahead ignore on your right Camino a la Casa de las Cruces, one of the major branches off

Immature Flamingos wading at the shore of a lagoon



the main track. The track becomes almost a path in the most desolate grassland and continues on a slight rise.

» The Lagoons of Campillos

The highest point of the walk (475 m) before Campillos, in the Lomas de Lobón, provides a good view of the village just before reaching the lagoon of Lobón (12 km), which is close to the right. Descend a little further, find the next landmark: the northern bank of Laguna Dulce (km 13.5).

Although its waters are far away, at times multitude of species of birds can be seen swimming or flying over to other surrounding wetlands and feeding areas.

The track connects with another one, in a better shape, westbound towards the village. Then it forks, close to a metal turret with a weather vane. Take the right fork, which passes by a pig farm and arrives at your destination, Campillos, at the Alamo Street. 



The Laguna Dulce and the outline of the Central Limestone Arch in the background

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

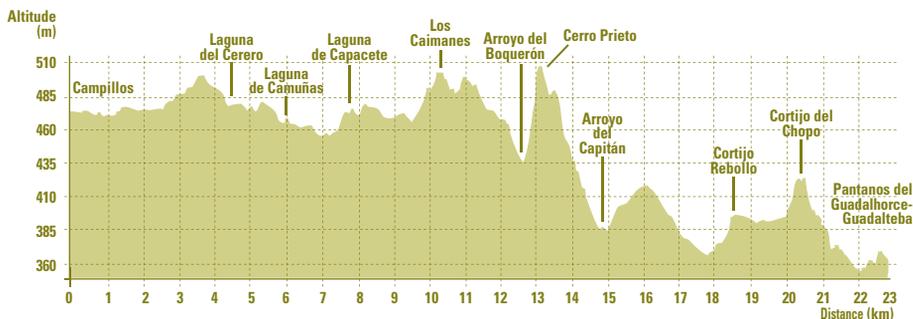
1 Centro de Visitantes José Antonio Valverde	30S 0345220 4111022	420 m	2 End of track, start of road	30S 0345455 4109713	415 m
3 Mirador en La Mata/ La Mora, viewpoint	30S 0343865 4107549	450 m	4 Extreme southern tip of the Laguna en Piquitillos	30S 0342546 4105787	425 m
5 Cortijo de la Rábita, farmhouse	30S 0341452 4104779	430 m	6 Cortijo de las Monjas, farmhouse	30S 0340580 4104381	450 m
7 Mirador de Campillos, viewpoint	30S 0338243 4103456	470 m	8 Laguna del Lobón	30S 0337983 4103280	460 m
9 Laguna Dulce	30S 0337135 4102727	460 m	10 Campillos C/ Álamo, street	30S 0334702 4102420	475 m

19 CAMPILLOS • CAMPILLOS (Embalses del Guadalhorce)

Lagunas de Campillos and the Embalses del Chorro



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 15 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	23	Accumulated ascent	255	Final altitude	360
Ascent km	7.8	Accumulated descent	360	Maximum altitude	515
Descent km	10.7	Maximum difference	160	Minimum altitude	355
Flat km	4.5	Altitude at starting point	475	Average altitude	435

» Summary of this Stage «

Water is the central character of this stage, either as the string of endorheic lakes in the Natural Reserve of Campillos Lagoons or the splendid area of wetlands, where the Guadalhorce, Guadalteba and Conde de Guadalhorce reservoirs are located.

The surroundings are quite flat, slightly inclined towards the water surface, and mainly composed of earthen hills with occasional limestone formations and outcrops, and a few spots of emerging gypsum. The walk heads south from Campillos, with some twists and turns to visit lagoons or avoid cultivated fields and some infrastructures towards the end.

There is a succession of ascents and descents during the long 23 kilometres especially at the end. There are a couple of fairly steep slopes and a stretch of road.

» Highlights of this Stage «

This stage adds to the previous ones by giving you an almost complete picture of the lagoons in the northern part of the province of Málaga. At this stage you will visit directly 3 of the lagoons which are protected as part of the Reserva Natural de las Lagunas de Campillos and a couple more, which are not included in the network of protected natural areas. The landscapes, colourful and unexpected amidst the dry fields, are well worth the effort. >

							
2	2	2	3	3.0	17.3	2.7	x 2

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

➤ Next you arrive at the reservoir area, walking through the hills that separate the basin of the river Guadalhorce from the Guadalteba, crossing tributaries of both Arroyo Boquerón and Capitán respectively. The sandstone ridge planted with pine trees, which separates the Guadalteba reservoir to the west, and the Guadalhorce to the east, offers really picturesque views over the latter reservoir. The end of the stage, at the bridge that separates and unites at the same time the two vast sheets of water, could not be any more spectacular.

- **Starting point:** the southeast area of Campillos, where Dr. Óscar Fernández and Baltasar Peña streets meet.
- **Access to starting point:** the roads A-384, from the A-92 up to the level of Antequera, and the A-357 which leads to Málaga via Carratraca.
- **Finish point:** Guadalhorce and Guadalteba reservoirs just before the shared dam.
- **Access to finish point:** from Málaga the MA - 5403 road connecting Ardales with Estación del Chorro. Then follow the directions for the reservoirs (Pantanos) along a service road. There is an access from Campillos off the A-357 along another reservoirs service road, the A-7286.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The A-7286 road that you cross at km 7.5 takes you to Campillos in a few kilometres to the right. Another easily identified point is the junction of the A-357 with the road mentioned earlier (as it makes a semi-circle which ends here). This point is reached when you cross the Arroyo del Capitán, near a farmhouse. Then, as you wander through the pine wood, there is always a tarmac road you can reach by walking westwards.
- **No return point:** from the pine forest of the hill Cerro de La Laguna de Panza onwards, turning back is not a good idea. It is best to continue even though there is a hard ascent followed by a long descent.
- **Maps: 1022-IV** (Campillos) to locate the starting point only, then turn to **1023-III** (Bobadilla-Estación). The remaining half is on map **1038-I** (Pantano del Chorro).
- **District boundaries:** you are within Campillos boundaries all day long.

Esparto grass fields and stony patches beside the Great Path of Málaga



• Enjoy the walk safely

There are a couple of fords across Arroyos del Boquerón and Capitán, which do not pose a serious obstacle, given their meagre flow. Another story is the level crossing lacking automated barriers across the Málaga-Seville train line. The section of the railroad tracks is completely straight, but in case of low visibility, it is advisable to look for an overpass towards the west which means a detour of about two kilometres. Follow the A-7286 as it passes over the railroad line and then follow the track which will take you back to the other side of the level crossing.

On the other hand, you will cross the A-7286 road just after the level crossing and, paradoxically, it is the same road you will be walking along for about two kilometres and a half until reaching the track to Pinares de Rebolo. In all these above-mentioned cases you should take extra precautions. There is not a single drinking water supply point during the whole stage, which, as you know, is quite long.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

There is a circular walk (not sign-posted) which enables you to get to know all of the sites of the



Flamingos swimming in deep waters

Natural Reserve of the Lagunas de Campillos, and it coincides in part with the GR.

In terms of traditional public roads, up to Cortijo de Cerero (km 5) you will be walking along the old Camino de Campillos to Antequera, eastward. The section leading south continues and connects later with Realenga de Carratraca, which leads up to Cortijo de Capacete (km 8.3). Earlier on, at the Laguna de Camuñas, there is a junction with the Cañada Real de Granada coming from the southwest, which then continues separately. From the point where you cross Arroyo del Boquerón until arriving at Arroyo del Capitán, the path is called Camino a Cerro Prieto.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Arroyo de Boquerón and the Arroyo de Capitán are the two sole watercourses of the stage, similar in a way, as both flow into the shallow ends of reservoirs; the first one flows into the Guadalhorce and the second into the Guadalteba. Neither of them harbour any well-preserved galleried woods, only some tamarisk and elm, and, above all, brambles, reeds and bulrushes.

The vegetation perimeter around the lakes which can be visited by tourists has been strengthening over time thanks to the lakes being protected. The vegetation belt is very narrow though, due to the

harsh environmental conditions that cause cycles of floods and drought, the relentless wind and the saline nature of the soil. In those lagoons with extensive water surface and little depth it is easy to observe thickets of tamarisk of varying density, a plant which is a real specialist in this type of habitat. The bulrush require deeper water, which they conquer with their thick runners, while the reeds colonize very extensive areas, at times reaching a tangled mass of stems which potentially offers a good hideout for wildlife.

Flamingos can be easily observed during the season when they turn into resident birds at the lagoons, as well as the Purple Heron, various Egrets, Coots and Moorhens with their dark plumage which are the most abundant along with ducks. Finally, the waders wander along muddy shores deploying a whole repertoire of hunting tactics.

The reservoirs on the other hand battle with the problem of considerable differences in water level so that the vegetation can become non-existent in many areas: at the dam end of the reservoirs, on steep inclines or on rocky ground, as you will see during this stage. At the tip of Guadalteba, Guadalhorce and Conde de Guadalhorce reservoirs (especially at the latter two) there are dense clusters of tamarisk at the deltas of the Guadalhorce and the Turón. The



Camuñas Lagoon seen from a hillock beside the road

reservoirs have settled as aquatic ecosystems as a result of human action which did not particularly aim for this result.

Although the track does not reach the Gaitanejo reservoir, which is located below the three dams, note that it maintains more constant water levels thanks to being regulated and thus it has managed to sustain a diverse galleried wood with the tamarisk being the dominant tree.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Las lagunas de Campillos

The walk follows the long street of Dr. Óscar Fernández direction southeast, passing on the left some industrial buildings and on the right recently built housing estates. As it becomes a track, it leads east, veers slightly to follow Camino de Antequera in the area called Velasco and passes the farmhouse de la Rondana on the right (km 2.7). The first lagoon, Laguna del Cerero, is passed on your right, and it is named after a nearby farm (km 5) where there is a major junction.

At the junction take the track southwards. Dry, reddish-coloured farmland harbours young olive groves, which are watered with a drip system during their first years of growth. The uncultivated patches called

Dry farmland and olive groves surround the Nature Reserve of Camuñas Lagoon



“herrizas” are frequent here in places where bedrock has emerged. There aren’t many large oaks, if anything you can encounter small woods of trees of the same size and age, scrub, or fields of esparto grass.

These islands of native vegetation on rocky crags lend greater diversity to the place and constitute a good refuge for many animals, some of them hunting species. Next the walker encounters the quite small basin of Camuñas lagoon. Then you reach two consecutive junctions, first with the train tracks and then the A-7286.

Next to the crossroads at the Cortijo de Capacete (km 7.5), to the west, there is the Capacete Lagoon, the last one of the protected lagoons within the nature reserve. It is a good sized one, similar in size to Cerero, so both are able to retain water well into the summer. Passing the Hoyo del la Alberca on the right and the Llano de Farfán on the left the track climbs a small hill (km 11), called Cerrete de los Caimanes which is planted with almond trees. After descending and leading along successive tracks the walk takes you to the plain where the Panza Lagoon is struggling to survive; it is one of the smallest and shallowest ones.

» Arroyos de Boquerón and Capitán

Following a little stony path along slopes of dense planted woods of Aleppo pine on the left, arrive at the first ford across the Boquerón Stream, which shouldn't pose too many problems. What comes next is a steep slope through an olive grove up the elongated summit of the Cerro Prieto (km 13.5), which you follow to the right until you reach a dirt track which turns westwards. This area must have

Clay soil of various colours with the Sierra in the background



boasted a productive olive grove some time ago, but now the trees are mixed with gorse, cistus, broom and thyme on a hill exposed to the winds. When you begin the descent, the landscape changes to mountains and farmland hills of different shades until you arrive at the Arroyo del Capitán, which flows on the side of a road again.

» Pine woods and Reservoirs

Follow the A-7286 road for about two and a half kilometres, ignoring two junctions on the left (the first goes to Parque de Guadalteba and the second is a small service road which leads to the dam end of the reservoirs, which are the final destination later in the stage). At the km marker 17.5 the tarmac ends. There are two farmsteads in this section; the first one is Cortijo de Rebolo on the right. Enter the pine forest, which keeps getting denser and the trees become more exuberant with every metre. Undergrowth appears little by little, however the best area to catch a glimpse of what the biodiversity must have been like here, is the sandstone rock which has not been reforested. As you ascend in a zigzag to the threshing circle and the ruins of El Chopo farm (km 20.5), note the interesting scrubland of thyme, buckthorn, Mediterranean

Guadalhorce reservoir, the distant view of your destination



Dwarf Palm and Esparto grass thriving in the shelter of a few rocks.

There are a couple of places from where you have a good panoramic view of the Reservoir of Guadalhorce; one of them is the threshing circle at the second farmhouse. Walk downhill by a prehistoric cave dwelling and reach a crossroads where you abandon the dirt track and take a path. Shortly before an area with broad views where the path twists there is another ruin which had been built in a natural hole in the ground, saving the labour of having to build higher walls. You can still see the various strata of lime and azulina. The path follows the contours and the level of the lake which is getting closer, but it is best to keep walking a few metres at this level until you reach the road again. Here you can abandon



Bridge joining the Guadalhorce and Guadalteba reservoirs

the hill which separates the Guadalhorce and the Guadalteba reservoirs and reach the end of the stage just at the point where two dams of these twin reservoirs meet. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Campillos Óscar Fernández street	30S 0334702 4102420	475 m	2 Mirador Laguna del Cerero, viewpoint	30S 0338496 4100896	486 m
3 Laguna de Camuñas	30S 0338764 4099889	465 m	4 Level crossing	30S 0338284 4099371	460 m
5 Detour to la Laguna de Capacete	30S 0337853 4098589	470 m	6 Cerro de los Caimanes, hill with almond trees	30S 0338479 4096537	500 m
7 Cerro de la Laguna de Panza, hill	30S 0338926 4095689	475 m	8 Arroyo del Boquerón, stream	30S 0338351 4095156	435 m
9 Puerto de Cerro Prieto, pass	30S 0337135 4102727	500 m	10 Arroyo del Capitán and the lake/reservoir road	30S 0336952 4093865	380 m
11 Inicio del Carril de Rebolo, start of the dirt track	30S 0338910 4093203	375 m	12 Cortijo de Rebolo, farmhouse	30S 0339495 4092600	400 m
13 Cortijo del Chopo, farmhouse	30S 0340005 4091555	425 m	14 Cave dwelling	30S 0340115 4091023	395 m
15 Bridge between two lakes	30S 0339499 4090191	360 m	16 Dam end of the Guadalhorce and Guadalteba Reservoirs	30S 0339794 4089821	360 m



The Gaitanejo reservoir, in the background the Guadalhorce and scattered tafonis holes and sandstone arches

La Gran Senda de Málaga in the Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes

Paraje Natural, the Natural Area of Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, was created in the year 1989 protecting 2016 hectares at the western end of the Central Limestone Arch. The limestone layers stacked vertically during the Alpine formation have become a major obstacle to the circulation of the rivers, which had to manage to avoid the two crags via two gorges. These are Gaitanes, two sections of gorges over 800 meters long with walls up to 350 metres high. In between, the valley widens into so-called La Hoya and the river twists until it meets the second rocky mass at 300 meters high and several hundred metres long. Although it is wider and shorter than the upper gorge, this second gorge's formations are much more spectacular as its strata are completely vertical. The Caminito del Rey walkway winds around to fit the protruding and recessing rock. The representative areas of the Tres Techos and el Recodo can be considered as synonyms of the name the Gaitanes. The Gaitanejo, on the other hand, is a small gorge excavated in a different set

of rocks: sandstone and calcareous conglomerate, located below the dams. It harbours remarkable riparian vegetation and there are cave dwellings below the ledge.

In this first section of the Paraje numerous plant and animal species exist, notably the large raptors and plants with limited distribution such as *Rupicapra africana*. But the Natural Area does not only consist of the gorges, accessible through the Caminito del Rey. The Great Path of Malaga is responsible for opening up other landscapes to the hiker.

The first section of the walk circles the great mass of las Sierras Llana, Valle Abdalajís and the Huma, the latter is the highest. Karstic modelling is the main attraction, with numerous cliffs, some of them very large. In general, the planted woods of Aleppo pine trees dominate the landscape at the beginning and at the end, near the dams, but summits and sierras hold a wide range of vegetation with the outstanding Phoenician Juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*) forming extensive thickets between the sinkholes and torcales.

The Griffon Vulture and the Spanish IbeX are the most easily observed animals in the rocky cliffs. In the northern part and, above all, in the west of the Paraje Natural you can find sandstone and calcareous conglomerate from the upper Miocene of the Tertiary era. These are straw-coloured sedimentary rocks which darken quite a bit as they weather, and show a soft modelling where fluvial cuts and different sized holes appear, forming caves, shelters, tafonis and alveoli. The susceptibility of the rocks to weathering and the inclusion of clay pebbles or other soft materials make the landscape of the Sierra de Almorchón an attraction on its own. It is this type of varied surroundings that stage 21 passes through; you walk among Aleppo pines, reservoirs, and superb archaeological findings such as the rock shrine and the walled town of Bobastro.

The main features of the upcoming two stages are the reservoirs, a total of 6, all very different yet very close to one another. In order

to understand the name El Chorro that refers to the entire area and the train station, one should go back to the 19th century, when the dam had not even been built. The river Guadalhorce from the north, Guadalteba from the west and Turón from the south converged at the entrance of the first gorge, Gaitanejo, carved out in the sandstone rock. During heavy rainfall, a common occurrence in the mountains of Málaga, the water accumulated in the narrow gully just before the first Gaitanes gorge and then the same thing happened at the second gorge, a kilometre and a half down the river. The output on the other side had such momentum and caused such uproar because of the released water pressure that the inhabitants of the area named the place El Chorro (The Jet) and it was much feared due to its devastating effects on crops and properties downstream.

This has all changed in a very short time period, given that the area was no longer inaccessible when the train line was built, connecting Malaga with Córdoba through the Bobadilla (Antequera) hub of train connections. The work was divided into three phases, the two close to both province capitals, quite easy to accomplish on level terrain, and then the phase located here, which took somewhat longer to complete. In 1865 the work was finished and next it required the construction of numerous bridges (some of them very beautiful) and many tunnels cutting through the entire sierra.

The two train stops, one located to the north, Gobantes, and to the south, El Chorro, are the results of a more expensive undertaking: crossing the Central Limestone Arch from both ends.

As for the reservoirs, the Conde de Guadalhorce was the first to be inaugurated by King Alfonso 13th, in the spring of 1921. The service road called Los Balconillos, the pipeline (1905) and reservoir itself (1917) made such an impression on the King that he established

La Hoya between upper and lower gorges (lower one in the photo) of los Gaitanes with the river Guadalhorce and the train line



Condado de Guadalhorce (county) in the name of the chief engineer Rafael Benjumea. In 2014 the Diputación de Málaga began the restoration of the so-called Caminito del Rey to make it accessible to the public safely. However the dam itself is not far behind as far as beautiful architecture is concerned, with its double arcade of masonry resulting from additional works done in 1944. Both constructions are very close to the beginning of stage 20 and a vantage point allows you to see the whole complex.

The reservoirs of the Guadalhorce and Guadalteba were finished in 1966 and are located at highest altitude of the complex before the gorge. As far as the waterfalls or spillways (saltos de agua) are concerned, Salto de El Chorro started working in the year 1904, at the outlet of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, and the project engineer himself, Rafael Benjumea, designed the Salto de Gaitanejo in 1924. The Contraembalse of Tajo de la Encantada, at lower altitude, and its complementary Villaverde reservoir began working in 1978. These last two are further down the gorge.

The afore-mentioned Gaitanejo reservoir collects water which circulates through a

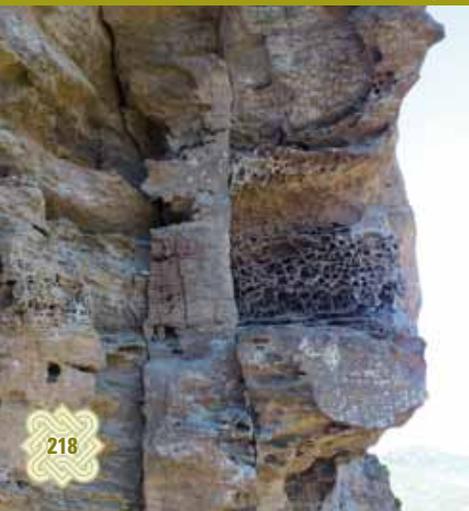


In the Gaitanes gorge

large gallery that perforates the rock of the first gorge along its right margin. Between the first and second gorge there is a spacious valley called La Hoya. A train tunnel used to come out to the outside of the rocks here and then ran along a deep disused channel. Then it penetrated the rock walls of the Cerro del Cristo. It is now completely underground and then comes out and must cross to the other side of los Gaitanes, given the location of the electricity plant at the eastern margin of the Guadalhorce. That is the bridge that can be seen from El Chorro passing through the thin air, an aqueduct which is accessed through los Balconillos, later renamed as Caminito del Rey. The water, after a significant fall of about 100 meters achieved using 2.6 kilometres long hydraulic conduct, enters the turbines of the Central Eléctrica Nuevo Chorro, at the end of the lower reservoir, called Contraembalse.

Another reservoir, and a really spectacular one, is responsible for the second waterfall, in the east, with the potential energy of 350 metres of altitude within a little over 1 kilometre of reinforced piping; a structure that the Great Path takes you to at the beginning of the ascent to the Mesas de Villaverde. In reality, the upper reservoir or Presa de

Curious shapes caused by alveolar (honeycomb) erosion on the sandstones of the Pico Capilla



Villaverde works as a battery, accumulating the energy generated by the water pressure to be used during peak demand periods and taking advantage of low demand time to release the pressure avoiding overloading. From the penstock you can perfectly see the central hydroelectric plant, La Central Hidroeléctrica del Tajo de la Encantada, entering the reservoir. The plant's turbines are 15 floors below the water level and always receive the same amount of flow. The large surge shaft placed where the pipeline runs underground, acts to balance and minimize the water hammer effect. This method had been needed before the use of reinforced high pressure pipelines.

The electric substation of the Tajo de la Encantada is located downstream at the lower reservoir, about two kilometres from the dam on the left bank of the Guadalhorce. From some points of the route, it is possible to have a good view of the reservoir and the substation which forms part of a set of 5 substations, two more in the Guadalhorce and two more in the Rio Grande; this substation is still the main hydroelectric resource of the province.

The other function of the reservoirs is to regulate the irrigation water in the



Erosion causes smooth wavy patterns in the sandstone rock and hollows used as temporary shelter

region of Guadalhorce. Under the dam of the Contraembalse of the Tajo de la Encantada there are some sand trap interceptors for the first irrigation channel which starts here, and then it is followed by many others downstream on both banks of the river. The capital of the province also receives drinking water from the hydraulic complex, which used to have a slightly salty taste due to a contributing water spring coming from a gypsum deposit, which was later sealed.

Sports, tourism, and environmental implications of the Paraje Natural began from the moment the area became accessible through the Caminito del Rey. It was the rock climbers from Málaga who have prepared a large number of climbing routes at all difficulty levels and hundreds of metres high in some cases. This gave El Chorro international recognition, with the added value of its good climate. The Great Malaga Path allows you to visit some of these places. Walking has been gaining new enthusiasts with the suggested itineraries along the GR-249; the ascent to the Huma and the Gaitanejo footpath as main features. But water sports and sport fishing in the three northernmost reservoirs are the most popular activities, along with increasingly significant birdwatching. ○

Rock-dwelling plants and people use the rock overhangs for shelter



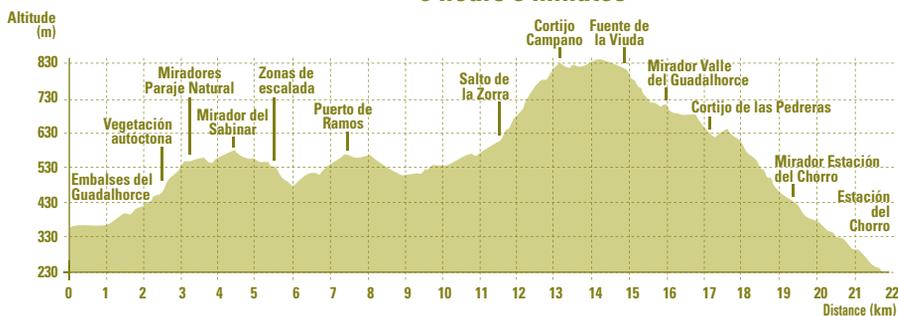
20 CAMPILLOS (Embalses del Guadalhorce)

• ALORA (Estación de El Chorro)

El Paraje Natural – the Natural Area of Desfiladero de los Gaitanes



ESTIMATED TIME
6 hours 5 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	22	Accumulated ascent	680	Final altitude	225
Ascent km	8.6	Accumulated descent	802	Maximum altitude	845
Descent km	9.6	Maximum difference	620	Minimum altitude	225
Flat km	3.8	Altitude at starting point	360	Average altitude	560

» Summary of this Stage «

Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes is a mid mountain area characterized by limestone sierras and hills of sandstone on both sides of the Guadalhorce river in the area known as El Chorro. The proposed route starts northwards from the meeting point of the Guadalteba and the Guadalhorce dams, ascends parallel to the latter and skirts the mass of the Sierra de Huma, culminating at a pass located at 845 metres above sea level, then gradually turning east.

During the descent you will keep veering gradually towards the south and then west, with the so-called Placas Frontales to your right, from which point the track leads in a precipitous descent to a forest of planted Aleppo Pine. The end of this stage is 140 metres lower than the start, at the train station of El Chorro, where train line infrastructures meet those of the reservoir and the central power station of the Tajo de la Encantada.

Throughout the walk, there are numerous cliffs where it is common to see climbers, some of the rock faces are quite large and close to the track. Both at the beginning and at the end of the stage you are very close to the famous Caminito del Rey, originally a service access to the electricity plant. Restoration works of the Caminito began in 2014 to adapt it for the public. Stage 20 is long and there are some major ascents and descents.

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
2	2	2	4	1.7	20.3	0	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The Sierra de Huma (place name perhaps deriving from Umar Ibn Haffsum, whose stronghold of Bobastro is very close to the protected Natural Area) is the western bastion of the Central Limestone Arch and stands out dramatically in the landscape, especially against the flat Guadalhorce Valley. This makes the walk, which flanks this entire sierra, almost a full circle and rich in numerous viewpoints which have been assigned GPS points. You have spectacular views over the area of the three reservoirs, the first gorge of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, the Vega de Antequera, the slopes of the Sierra de Huma, the Guadalhorce Valley and the area of El Chorro.

An important focal point here is the protection of an area such as the Paraje Natural. The other is certainly geology, with the diversity of limestone, dolomites, sandstones, and a geological modelling so powerful that it has resulted in the name of Desfiladero which means gorge. The abundance of gorges has made the area of El Chorro into the biggest climbing school in the South of Spain. In the north of the Paraje Natural note the exceptionally dense and extensive thickets of Savin juniper.

Very close to the maximum altitude of the route are the Roman ruins of Nescania, barely recognizable but of great strategic importance because of their location in the most obvious natural passage between the Guadalhorce Valley and the plains of Antequera.

- **Starting point:** reservoirs of the Guadalhorce and the Guadalteba, where both dams meet.
- **Access to starting point:** From A-357 road between Campillos and Ardales take the A-7286 then exit, following the signs to Pantanos on an unmarked road. Coming from Ardales take the MA-5403 to the Puerto de la Atalaya. There, the described service road leads to the reservoirs. Take the road leading downhill, the MA-4400, to get to El Chorro.
- **Finish point:** the train stop at the Estación de El Chorro.
- **Access to finish point:** from the Puerto de la Atalaya, access as described above. From Álora, take the A-343 and turn off at the Valle de Abdalajís to follow the MA-4401 or directly from the MA-3401.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** in the first section the “escape plan” is clear: down the network of tracks to the dam of Guadalhorce. There is a tarmac track along its left bank leading to the starting point. However, once you are at the highest point of the stage, the best option is walking down the track to kilometre marker 16 to the Valle de Abdalajís.
- **No return point:** from the Cortijo Campano it is best to keep moving forward.
- **Maps:** Virtually the entire route is on **1038-I** (Pantano del Chorro), except for the final stretch of the pine forest which you will find on the **1038-III** (Ardales).
- **District boundaries:** up to km 4.2 (at the transformer and electricity towers) you are in the district of Campillos. Then it is all Antequera to kilometre 16.2, along tracks which afford some view to the Valle de Abdalajís. You do not enter the boundaries of the latter village because Antequera district is shaped in a strange little wedge enveloping the district of Valle de Abdalajís entirely. The last part of the track of Cortijo de las Pedreras farmhouse and the pine forest belong to the district of Álora.

• Enjoy the walk safely

The total of ascents and descents, the length of the route, the walk's altitude and its solitude require planning this stage in detail. The road at the beginning of the stage has very little traffic but it is narrow and sometimes offers little visibility. There is no possibility of stocking up on drinking water. The water from the Fuente de la Viuda spring has not been treated for consumption. The area of pine forest is very dense. Also, here you must take extra precautions to prevent forest fires. You will cross the Arroyo del Chorro stream bed twice, but it is so unlikely that it will contain any water that there was no need to mark these crossings as fords on the corresponding icon of this stage.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Relatively close by, at the dam end of the Conde de Guadalhorce reservoir, there are a couple of paths which have been adapted for walking and which lead along the edge of Embalse del Gaitanejo reservoir and some sandstone areas. These paths are highly recommended and comfortable.

This stage has been designed using the network of service paths for the management of the protected Natural Area and livestock or forestry farms. These tracks coincide, most of the time, with the limits of the Paraje Natural and are well-known stomping grounds for cyclists attracted by the easily accessed, mountainous circular route.

Gaitanejo reservoir's stable water levels sustain well-preserved riparian vegetation



Views over the reservoirs Guadalhorce and Guadalteba during the first steps of the stage

At km 10, on the right, there is a junction with Camino de Sierra Llana which leads uphill to an area of dense Savin juniper and planted pine woods. Five hundred meters ahead you start walking along the very steep Camino del Cortijo del Madroño, until kilometre 12.5 where this Camino branches off to your right (the farmhouse is a little further up). Head for the Cortijo Campano.

From km 14.5 km you will be walking along the Vereda del Tajo de la Pedrera. Ignore the track which leads towards the Valle de Abdalajís, called Camino de los Peñascales, which doesn't belong to the Great Path of Málaga. The best known public path here is the Camino de las Pedreras, leading from the Cortijo under the same name up to the Estación de El Chorro. That route is also described on an information panel at the train stop as Haza del Río. One of the most frequented walks used to climb the Huma is called Escalera Árabe (Arab staircase). It splits off in the area of las Pedreras at kilometre 18, westwards and then northwards.

In this same section, between kilometre markers 16.2 and 22, our walk meets the GR-7 E-4 coming from the east. This is stage 7 of GR-7 E-4, slightly over 10 kilometres long and named El Chorro - Abdalajís.

The middle part of Stage 20, in any case, is certain to have coincided with the path that had been used from the Neolithic period to link the Guadalhorce Valley with the Vega de Antequera by the Puerto del Rosalejo pass.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

From the very start of the stage the reservoirs of the Embalse del Guadalhorce and Guadalteba are the main attraction. The reservoirs meet at the bridge which is also the finish point of the previous stage. The two dams can be seen from different points of the route, especially from the viewpoints at km 3, where you can also enjoy the view to the reservoir of the Conde del Guadalhorce and of the Turón river, located slightly further down (about 25 metres). The meeting of the three dams occurs in less than one kilometre in a straight line, which produces such a dramatic effect of amassed water that most visits to this natural expanse focus around this area.

Below the dams, you can also catch a glimpse of a sinuous, milky green river course. Its colour comes from the gypsum and clay sediments sifting into the water at the river source upstream. This is the river Guadalhorce, which engulfs the other two smaller rivers in the area of the reservoir of the Gaitanejo. The Embalse del Gaitanejo harbours prolific vegetation on its banks as its water level is more constant. There are some interesting patterns carved in the sandstone rock by the water, including a few cave dwellings.

Unusual shapes of Aleppo pines and slopes of the Huma with Savin juniper thickets, seen from the first vantage points of the walk



Planted pine woods envelop the dams of the two reservoirs



The main part of stage 20 takes you into heavily karstified landscape, which makes water circulation on the surface hardly possible, mainly occurring during heavy rain seasons. It is a phenomenon some authors have denominated karst desert, due to the harsh water conditions generated by these eroded calcareous rocks. The Savin juniper, forming extensive thickets here, must be recognised as a specialist plant in this type of environment which makes this species all the more important.

The only water spring along the way is at kilometre 14.750; you need to pay close attention to find it as it is a little remote. To get to the Fuente de la Viuda and nearby Cortijo de la Rejanada follow the main track for a few metres rather than following the walk which circles around the place. The reason why the water spring emerges here, are the impermeable clay layers at the mountain pass which expel the water circulating underground via drainage galleries formed by karst. The importance of this water source since time immemorial is confirmed by the existence of the nearby ruins of Nescania. At the end of the stage the walker is reunited with the Guadalhorce river at a new reservoir, Tajo de la Encantada, which regulates the flow but is also used to generate electricity.

WALK DESCRIPTION

»» The Viewpoints of the Paraje Natural reserve

After a kilometre and a half of service road leading along the banks of the Guadalhorce reservoir and quite near the quarries where aggregate composites were extracted for the construction of the reservoirs, the track turns right. Forest tracks are closed to car traffic as they lead uphill between Aleppo pines. In shady areas at high altitudes but also here and there amidst the pine trees, the native vegetation appears, struggling to regain its place. Good-sized Holm oaks, Junipers and Terebinth at times form small woods with the undergrowth of Mastic, Gorse, Buckthorn, Savin Juniper and Kermes oak, giving you an idea of the ancient splendour of the forest.

Soon you reach a part of the track that affords a broad view of the entire complex of El Chorro, the Sierras of western Málaga and the beginning of the first gorge of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes. Higher up, from an area with compelling underbrush of Esparto grass, Rosemary, and Cistus under the pine trees which have been contorted by the wind, you can see in all its grandeur the magnificent Savin Juniper forest of the Arroyo of Todosaires and the northern slopes of the Sierra de Huma.

One of the most interesting vegetation formations of the stage are the forests of Savin Juniper



The impressive los Gaitanes cliffs and in the background Mesa de Villaverde with a chimney on top



»» Los Tajos

Next you reach a great plain (km 4.5), la Cornicabra, with initial stages of reforestation and an extensive area of Thyme which is used by bees from the nearby hives. The road comes to a mountain pass which is a natural passage way between two rocky escarpments. It leads along a power line which you encounter first at the border of Antequera and Campillos districts. The lower cliff is facing north and the higher one west, and both are famous as climbing areas due to the excellent quality of the rock and the many overhangs. The place is known as Desplomilandía (Overhang land) and the rock face above is called El Triángulo after the shape of the rock with some cattle corrals at the base.

The walk has been taking you northwards so far. The track leads downhill now and you pass by a junction to your left (km 6). Then you begin a long climb eastwards across a seriously deforested hillside above the impressive Tajo del Cabrito. This rocky escarpment is a truly insurmountable obstacle both for people and animals, hundreds of meters high and two kilometres long. At the Puerto de Ramos, 7 and a half kilometres into the stage you can engage in an enjoyable exercise of

trying to imagine the tops of the high cliffs by examining the nearby karst formations on your left: rock pinnacles and piles of rock plates similar to the ones found at El Torcal de Antequera. The Savin Juniper grows in the narrow passages. In comparison, the slope on the right, a result of hillside landslides, has a less rugged appearance.

You start descending now, accompanied by the view to the plains of Antequera. The path is immersed in a very dense thicket of Savin Junipers, which has an appearance of a forest but is composed of shrub-sized plants. Pass by two junctions on the left and a flat area which is sometimes ploughed to be sown. (km 9.5). The path gradually veers southwest. A few meters ahead there is a detour that leads in a zigzag to the Sierra Llana.

»» Across limits of the Paraje Natural

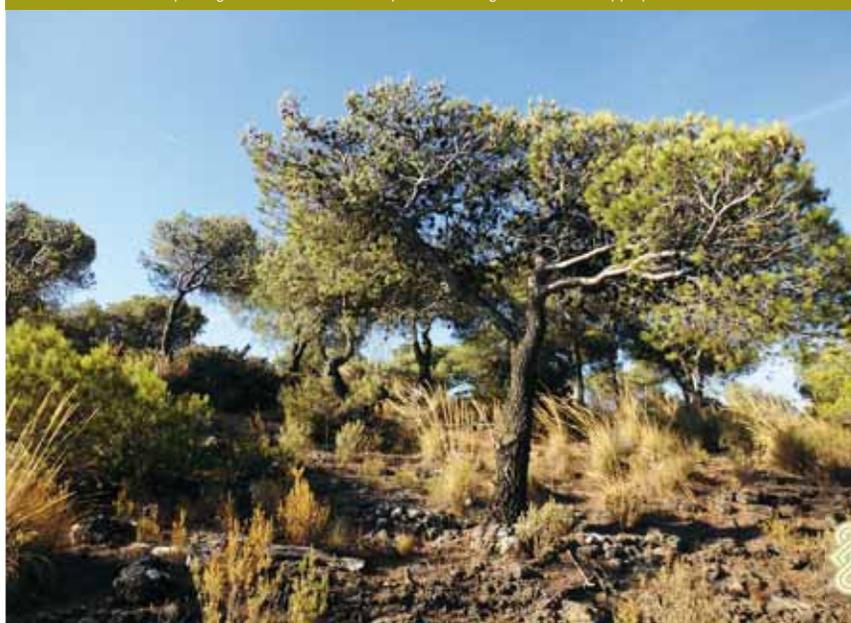
Here the most physically demanding section of stage 20 starts. From kilometre 10 to 13 you need to conquer a continuous 300 meter climb. You will pass a junction on the left,



A flat area replanted with conifers and overtaken by herbs

Camino del Cortijo el Madroño, which goes through a rocky valley floor with another cliff to the right, the Salto de la Zorra. The climb becomes easier and takes you eastwards by the Cortijo de Campano farmhouse, located in a cultivated area, contrasting strangely with the wild surroundings. Ahead, there are excellent views of the gorse-covered 1186 metre high Pico Capilla.

Around the summit Esparto grass and cistus bushes prevail, amongst scattered Aleppo pines





Oaks and Savin junipers in the nooks of the karstic relief of limestone cliffs

The maximum altitude reached during the stage is at the Puerto del Rosalejo pass, where the Roman city of Nescania was founded, at kilometre 14 and 845 metres above sea level. From here the walk descends turning gradually southwards. On the left, away from the path, there are the Fuente de la Viuda natural spring and the Cortijo de la Rujanada farmhouse. The maximum altitude of these mountains is at the grey limestone summit of Huma (1,191 m) which the walk skirts around. In the area there are a few farmhouses below the path: Tajo del Palmito, Castillo and the Peñascales, which lends its name to the road that comes from the Valle de Abdalajís, from the MA-4401 road.

The inlet (tail end) of the Guadalhorce reservoir dominates the landscape to the north of the walk



» El Camino de los Pedregales

As the path arrives at the district boundaries of Álora (km 16.2), it connects with the GR-7 E-4 and assumes a south-west direction. La Pedrera farmstead, a group of houses between olive groves at the foot of the sierra, has a network of dirt tracks which you keep following up to the pine forest of the Arroyo del Chorro. Similarly to other reforested areas, the purpose of the pine wood is to prevent the siltation process of wetlands by strengthening the rocky slopes. Now, and virtually until the end of the stage, the track enters the limits of the protected Natural Area, the Paraje Natural.

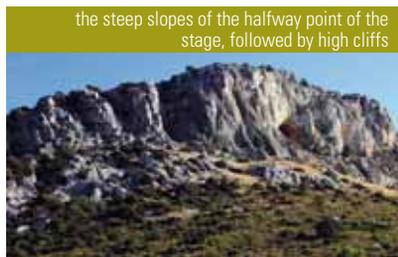
The track is steep and it levels out with the first bends at the beginning of Escalera Árabe (km 18) and a second more pronounced zigzag where you have a broad view of the area of El Chorro settlement, Las Mesas de Villaverde and the first part of the next stage. There are remarkable sheer cliffs that the track passes to the right. Aid (sport) climbing and classic climbing are done on the rock faces. The sector is known among climbers as the

low, medium and high Frontales (Bajas, Medias and Altas and contains a legendary cave route called Poema Roca (The Rock Poem).

The track enters pine woods almost devoid of any shrub vegetation due to its density, and then crosses the ravine twice in areas protected by retaining walls. First houses appear, then you arrive at the little neighbourhood where you can wander a while through its streets and arrive at the end of Stage 20. ○



Puerto de Ramos; a Savin juniper forest developing in the passage ways of the "little El Torcal"



the steep slopes of the halfway point of the stage, followed by high cliffs



during the ascent to the highest point of the walk, looking east to the Pico Capilla summit

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Reservoirs of Guadalhorce and Guadalteba	30S 0339794 4089821	360 m	2 Turn off the service road	30S 0340796 4090311	400 m
3 Native vegetation and shelter zone	30S 0340910 4089905	505 m	4 Three reservoirs viewpoint	30S 0340736 4089750	530 m
5 Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, viewpoint	30S 0340769 4089713	555 m	6 Viewpoint to Savin Junipers at Tajo de Ballesteros	30S 0341778 4089926	575 m
7 Puerto and climbing area of Desplomilandia	30S 0341894 4090899	535 m	8 Puerto de Ramos and "Torcal" karst formations	30S 0343355 4091694	570 m
9 Salto de la Zorra	30S 0345130 4090215	600 m	10 Mirador del Pico Convento y Antequera, viewpoint	30S 0344600 4089518	835 m
11 Cortijo Campano, farmhouse	30S 0344804 4089326	830 m	12 Puerto del Rosalejo and the detour to Nescania Roman ruins	30S 0345437 4089277	845 m
13 Fuente de la Viuda spring and Cortijo de la Rejanada farm	30S 0346196 4088985	805 m	14 Cortijo de las Pedreras, farmhouse	30S 0345379 4087512	640 m
15 Junction to Escalereta Árabe, Arab staircase	30S 034641 4087023	560 m	16 Ford across Arroyo del Chorro	30S 0343731 4086436	330 m
17 Estación de El Chorro, station	30S 033261 4086029	255 m			

21 ÁLORA (Estación de El Chorro) • ARDALES

The sandstones of the Sierra de Almorchón, Bobastro and Ardales Cave



ESTIMATED TIME
4 hours 30 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	16.5	Accumulated ascent	635	Final altitude	385
Ascent km	6.5	Accumulated descent	485	Maximum altitude	595
Descent km	7.3	Maximum difference	375	Minimum altitude	220
Flat km	2.7	Altitude at starting point	255	Average altitude	470

» Summary of this Stage «

This stage has a very comfortable length and it leads direction south-west to north-east. It is marked by an initial uphill section of over 375 meters of elevation along 3 kilometres along a somewhat stony path that leads to the Mesas de Villaverde, the highest point of the stage. Then the walk takes you downhill along the road to the area of Las Viñas which is hilly with hardly any vegetation, peppered with fish farm buildings and holiday homes; it is solely altered by the conical calcareous hill where the Cueva de Ardales cave is located. These hills constitute the right bank of the river Guadalhorce, which runs 350 metres below and the track keeps leading away from it at an altitude oscillating around 500 meters. Half of the stage's walk uses dirt tracks in good walking condition; there are three sections of tarmac. Mesas de Villaverde is climbed along a footpath.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The diversity of landscape during the walk is astounding, as the path takes you to various vantage points overlooking the Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, El Chorro, el Valle del Guadalhorce, La Sierra del Agua and Ardales plus the Turón river valley.

The hydroelectric power station of Contraembalse del Tajo de la Encantada and the Presa de Villaverde are worth the effort you will need to get from one to the other walking along a reinforced pipe which connects them. >

							
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Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

➤ Very few walks present a similar opportunity to interact with two historical and archaeological sites of such importance as the Mozarabic ruins of Bobastro, founded by the ineffable Umar Ibn Hafsún, and the Ardales cave (also called Doña Trinidad Grund's cave who was the person responsible for preparing the cave for visitors as an addition to the thermal baths of Carratraca). The cave had been occupied from the upper Palaeolithic, was subsequently blocked off and then rediscovered in 1821 as a result of an earthquake which uncovered the entrance again. More than 50 cave paintings and engravings it contains represent figures of animals, abstract motifs and symbols, even the silhouette of human hands depicted using an airbrush technique.

- **Starting point:** station of El Chorro.
- **Access to starting point:** from Ardales, along a paved track off the MA-4401 road. From Álora and Ardales, the MA-5403.
- **Finish point:** Municipal Museum of the Village of Ardales.
- **Access to finish point:** Ardales is on a detour from the A-357 Málaga-Campillos road. From El Burgo it is reachable by the mountain roads that follow the Turón river: the MA-5401 and MA-5402.
- **Possible "escape routes":** the best place would be the Mesas de Villaverde, where there are the Contraembalse de la Encantada and a Venta (an inn).
- **No return point:** once you have forded the Arroyo del Granado it is better to continue until Ardales, since with every step there are more houses and the track becomes gradually more accessible to any vehicle.
- **Maps:** The entire route is mapped on **1038-III** (Ardales) sheet.
- **District boundaries:** the district of Álora reaches the kilometre point 1.2, at the end of the initial stretch of road. Then you are walking in Ardales district until the end of this stage.

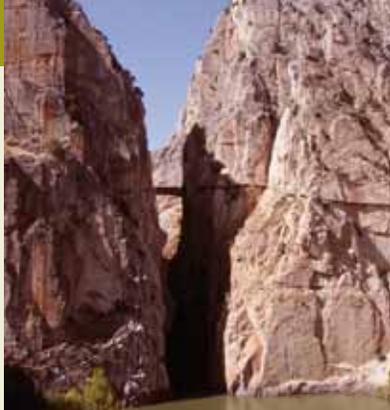
The walkway known as Caminito del Rey entering the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, as seen in 2014 before renovation works began



• Enjoy the walk safely

The viewpoint placed along the penstock (reinforced high-pressure pipe structure) does not have any railings to prevent falls, and potentially could be the most dangerous spot of the whole stage. Take great care looking out if you do walk along it.

Roads at the beginning and at the end of the stage usually do not have much traffic, but the hard shoulder is narrow or lacking. The entrance to Ardales does have much more traffic. The rest of the asphalt or concrete sections are actually paved country tracks. If you look at the icon representing type of surface at this stage, roads as such do not cover as much of the itinerary as it may suggest. The ford across the Arroyo del Algarrobo, at km 10.5, normally poses no problem, since here it is a dry stream bed, but be careful in rainy season just in case. The water spring of the Fuenfría is the only water source, which hasn't, of course, been treated for human consumption, and in addition it is difficult to locate. Finally, at kilometre 4 there is the Embalse de Villaverde. It is forbidden to walk along the highest perimeter



The outlet of the Gorge of Guadalhorce river out of the Desfiladero had been known before it was dammed and regulated at El Chorro

track at the top edge of the reservoir and any fall into the reservoir's basin is very dangerous.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-249 y the GR-7 E-4 coincide entirely along this itinerary however in opposite directions. In case of the other GR it is its stage 6, Ardales to El Chorro, 15.5 km long.

At the Mirador de Ardales, almost at the end of the stage, the walk intersects with Camino de los Azulejos, and, and the asphalted track is known in the area as the track to Cueva de Ardales.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

In the previous stages you got to know the three Embalses, although from afar, plus the flood control reservoir Embalse del Gaitanejo. You will discover the other two during the current stage.

The walk allows for very different views of the Contraembalse del Tajo de la Encantada, the one located at lowest height (the top of the dam is at the lowest altitude of the day, 200 metres above the sea level). From El Chorro you will see the reinforced pipes shaped to adapt to the changing terrain of the eastern flank of Mesas de Villaverde and Chimenea de Presión. During the ascent the walk comes in contact with the pipe and gives you an exclusive view of its section



The back view of the penstock seen from a bend in the path, on a slope leading towards the Embalse de la Encantada

below, the steepest, and of the power plant. Beside the great sandstone cliff there are a few half-hidden constructions which are annexed to the pipeline and some remains of anchorage nailed to the ground which hold in place the pipe that supplies water for maintenance and

construction work. You can also gaze south-east from the climbing ramps of the electric substation Tajo de la Encantada and, a little higher up, you can have a closer view of the Chimenea de Presión. But certainly the most unexpected experience is being able to admire the upper dam, occupying the entire length of the Mesas de Villaverde, with three peaks which together give the basin a Y-shape of a pointy mushroom.

In comparison with the earlier water displays, the rest of the walk presents devastating dryness. The only stream you will wade across is the Arroyo del Granado. Around the halfway point of the walk there is, on your right, (until you ford the stream) a sort of a dry stream bed, northbound and enclosed between two walls of clay and sandstone. But, a little further down, where the path twists to the east, a little away from the walk, this streambed starts carrying water permanently towards the Hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Villaverde and flowing into the reservoir at the level of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes outlet. In this section it coincides approximately with the limits of the Natural Area.

Though generally of insufficient flow, the water of the Fuente de la Fuenfría has been



The cliffs known as Placas Frontales and one of the most beautiful railroad bridges

very important for the inhabitants of the area, Las Viñas farmers and shepherds of the surrounding hills. As they were far from any other source of water, it was completely forbidden to water cattle at the Fuente. This water spring is somewhat famous among the Ardales inhabitants. Perhaps the most striking feature though is the compelling riparian wood the Fuente sustains and the waterfall that flows into a trough carved out in the tufa deposits (the water contains a lot of lime) a few metres below the source. There is maidenhair fern here, Blue Throatwort and numerous climbing plants. From the pool there comes out an irrigation ditch surrounded by tall white and black poplars and elms.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Between two Embalses, the Lower and Higher reservoir

El Chorro train station marks the beginning of the stage, along a service road that passes over the dam of the Contraembalse del Tajo de la Encantada and turns right along the road. Just at the km marker 11 of the MA-5403 road, a dirt track splits off westwards (km 1.2) that quickly changes into a path. After a couple of bends you reach the penstock (reinforced pipes) viewpoint where you have to take extra precautions and then continue

Train stop at El Chorro, Placas Frontales and the pine forest you walked during the previous stage



climbing through a clear pine wood sometimes interspersed with olives, where Mediterranean Dwarf Palm, Broom-like Kidney Vetch, Retama and Osyris quadripartita have started to thrive as of late. Passing under a rocky cliff you have the opportunity to see the composition of this peculiar mix of yellowish-coloured sandstone and conglomerates, predominantly calcareous rock, but also you can see slate, shale and peroditite boulders. In the cliffs of the upper zone there is opportunity to locate the vaults and holes left by soft clay inclusions as the rocks eroded, some of great dimensions. Such a hole is technically called a tafone. Smaller holes tend to clump forming panels due to alveolar erosion.

All around here there are spectacular views of El Chorro, Valle del Guadalhorce, the Placas Frontales and the pine forest of the previous stage. The track widens whilst it leads through a pine wood with larger size trees and some Savin junipers. Suddenly, the track encounters the concrete wall of Presa Superior, the upper dam. Take a junction to the right which eventually leads to the top edge of the dam at its northeast end (km 4), where transit is restricted but then continue along the perimeter track circling the base of the dam. A clearing among

The sandstone cliff shows a different granulometry



pine trees allows you to gaze now and then at one of the best views of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes. The two gorges are visible, the Sierra of the Huma on the right and some of the mountains of the Almorchón with the sharp silhouette of the Pico del Convento. In the north-west corner of the reservoir's Y shape you will note a prominent hilltop observatory called Observatorio de Vigilancia del Chorro, belonging to the plan "Infoca" to prevent forest fires. The track then turns south and passes through a natural pool surrounded by many tamarisks.

A guided tour of the ruins of Bobastro, in a quarry of masonry blocks



»» The ruins of Bobastro

At 5.6 kilometre marker you will access the MA-4400 service road of the reservoir, which optionally you could follow to the left to reach an area of viewpoints in the Mesas de Villaverde, close to the excavated site of the Bobastro ruins and a ledge containing cave dwellings and Mozarabic quarries (which are difficult to access), known as the Casa de la Reina Mora. Our walk, however, descends to the right along the road and in less than a kilometre arrives at the information point of the Ermita Rupestre de Bobastro. During the Pulgarín Alto to Alfarnate stage you passed

by the Cortijo de Auta farmhouse, which some quote as the birth place of Umar Ibn Hafsún (Omar Ben Hafsun in Spanish historiography); now it is time to see the capital of his rebellion against the Caliphate of Córdoba and the Umayyad dynasty, which is what Bobastro was. The fortified town is located on top of las Mesas. The construction of the dam in the seventies of the last century has resulted in the loss of some of the site. From this 6.6 kilometre marker of the stage you can access (during the opening hours) the ruins of the Iglesia Rupestre de Bobastro, of Mozarabic origin, located in a strategic place protected from the winds and looking towards the west. The construction of a church by this Andalusí leader corresponds with his conversion to Christianity after a long journey during which he had been looking for strategies to conquer the capital of Al-Andalus and overthrow the dynasty in power.

» Las Viñas and la Cueva de Ardales

The pine forest ends just as you take a left junction off the road, having walked



Watercourse of Arroyo del Granado surrounded by dry farmed crops and sparse scrub

along the road for a kilometre. The track is in good condition, leading along the watershed line between the basins of Arroyo de los Granados and the river Guadalhorce, which flow in opposite directions at this point. There is a succession of clay and rocky hills and sandstone crags dotted with farmhouses

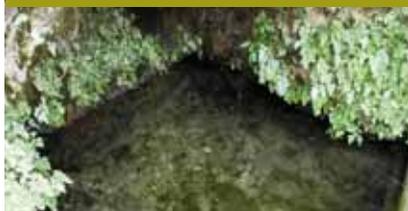
The slopes of Las Viñas which you have already travelled along, and the ridge of the Huma mountains in the background



The beautiful endemic *Rupicapnos africana* on the sheltered sandstone face



Maidenhair fern surrounding the Fuenfría water spring



and sheds with farming implements. You will pass one by one the Casa Bolero, Zamarrilla, Merchano and the Rancho del Boina. The old vineyards lost during the phylloxera epidemic have been replaced by dry farmed crops, predominantly almond trees, and uncultivated areas dedicated to the grazing of goats and sheep between retama and hedgehog vegetation.

There are numerous junctions left and right, always choose the track that goes up and along

La Casa de la Reina Mora, out of the way but accessible from the Mesa de Villaverde (not sign-posted)



the slope. If you turn around and look back, you will be awarded with an excellent view to the Sierra de Huma, Central Limestone Arch with Torcal de Antequera, and the Guadalorce Valley with the infrastructure of the Ave speed train. Looking ahead you will see the Sierra del Agua and its row of wind turbines.

At kilometre 9 the footpath of Arroyo del Granado approaches our path, with a few little houses scattered on its slopes and some groves of pine trees. A kilometre and half later cross a watercourse where the track narrows and another climb starts adding on to all the previous twists and turns. You are now back in the Monte Público, the common land. You will thus reach El Puerto de la Riela pass, and la Alamedilla area, where, having crossed a little stream and before passing by gravel quarries, you will find Fuente de Fuenfría. Here the terrain undergoes a radical change as limestone and dolomite of the Sierra Blanquilla of Ardales appear.

Up to the natural spring you were headed south-west, from here you turn progressively north-westerly until reaching an incline (km 13.2 up to the main track. Following the left fork you reach Cueva de Ardales cave. A pyramidal construction of brick at the end of the road, to the West, locates this significant prehistoric site which was the first tourism-oriented cave in Spain. It is possible to tour it contacting the officials of Ardales. What is left to do now is to admire the landscape of the Valley of the Turón River from comfortable downhill track to the village of Ardales, which can be accessed after passing below the road A-357. The proposed end of the stage is the interesting Museum of Ardales, at the northern end of the village crossing the Arroyo de la Torre. ○



Campanula mollis flowering in the vicinity of Bobastro

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Estación de El Chorro	30S 033261 4086029	255 m	2 Embalse del Tajo de la Encantada, reservoir	30S 0343149 4085798	220 m
3 End of road MA-5403 at Km 11	30S 0342821 4086023	220 m	4 Mirador de la Tubería Forzada, viewpoint	30S 0342744 4086150	275 m
5 Sandstone cliff	30S 0342382 4085926	375 m	6 Mirador de las Placas Frontales y El Chorro, viewpoint	30S 0342140 4085801	410 m
7 Mirador del Contraembalse de la Encantada, viewpoint	30S 0341805 4085912	575 m	8 Mirador del Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, viewpoint	30S 0341860 4086067	560 m
9 Access to ruins of la Iglesia Rupestre de Bobastro	30S 0341343 4085227	485 m	10 Mirador de la Sierra del Huma, viewpoint	30S 0340667 4083946	510 m
11 Mirador del Arroyo del Granado and El Búho, viewpoint	30S 0340329 4083356	460 m	12 Vado del Arroyo del Granado, ford across the Arroyo	30S 0339371 4082768	470 m
13 Fuente de la Fuenfría, natural spring	30S 0337961 404082369	540 m	14 Access to la Cueva de Ardales	30S 0337579 4082564	565 m
15 Mirador de Ardales, viewpoint	30S 0337187 4083069	525 m	16 End of Stage at Museo Municipal de Ardales	30S 0335521 4083209	380 m



The retaining wall of the unfinished dam of Río Turón, in la Laja

The Gran Senda de Málaga along Río Turón and the Biosphere Reserve of the Sierra de las Nieves

The Great Malaga Path uses the Turón River Trail in stages 22 and 23 to connect El Burgo with Ardales and then Ronda through 47 kilometres of roads, which pass partly through the Natural Park and biosphere reserve of the Sierra de las Nieves.

El Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves occupies a privileged position in the province of Malaga defining regions as emblematic as the Guadalteba northwards, the Guadalhorca Valley to the east, the Costa del Sol to the south and the Serranía de Ronda to the west. In each one of them the mountain area of Sierra de las Nieves generates one or several river headwaters. In its area major watercourses of Malaga are born, such as the Guadalteba in the north, and, in the clockwise direction the Turón and Río Verde (and others that flow into the Mediterranean Sea) plus the Guadiaro.

The Natural Park, declared as such in 1989, is characterized by a high altitude plateau. At its southern end rises the cone-shaped peak

of the Torecilla, (1,919 m) which works as a recipient of abundant precipitation, sometimes in the form of snow. Here are located the most important potholes of the southern peninsula, such as the Sima Gesm Sima de la Luz system (1.101- m) and the Sima del Aire (- 640 m), both still being discovered, that drain water to the various springs at the foot of the sierra. On the Meseta de Quejigales (Plateau of Gall Oaks) there is a high altitude version of this *Quercus* species, and in the hillsides surrounding it, especially to the north and to the west, you will find the most extensive Andalusian Spanish Fir forests, the Pinsapar. The Great Path of Málaga takes you through it by the municipal district of El Burgo, the last piece of land which had been annexed to create the current 20.163 hectares. In fact, the GR-249 runs along the entire Río Turón Valley, from one of the sources in the Lifa Valley to its delta at the reservoir Conde de Guadalhorca. The walk however follows the river direction upstream.

The Río Turón has two main tributaries. The Arroyo de la Higuera is born in the fir forest of Ronda, in the Cañada de las Animas, and by the Cuesta de Gazpacho it reaches the area where The Great Málaga Path crosses the watercourse immediately after its union with Arroyo de Lifa (or the Sabinal). Both streams dry out in summer. Further down, from the farmhouse Cortijo de Hierbabuena, the stream gets the name of Río del Burgo and acquires its status of a permanent river. The successive retaining walls and re-planted pines attempt to stabilize the sheer drops of easily eroded rocks with high contents of clay. There are also some course-changing dams with irrigation ditches meant for orchards which, already near El Burgo, begin to settle on river banks.

The river surrounds the town of El Burgo from the south creating an escarpment on which the Castle used to reside, and then it continues down already carrying the name of Turón between Prieta and Alcaparain mountains to the south and Ortegicar in the north. A few kilometres before being dammed at the old El Chorro reservoir (today called Conde de Guadalhorce) it passes under a Roman bridge and passes Ardales by on the right. If not for the Aleppo pine forests the valley would be

mostly composed of dry agricultural landscape. There are some other dams between these two villages, and an unfinished work in the area known as la Laja which is worth mentioning. It is a reservoir placed in the narrow space between two gray limestone escarpments which close the watercourse halfway between Ardales and El Burgo. It was designed by the same engineer who created the Conde de Guadalhorce, Rafael Benjumea. From the road that joins both towns and from the stage 22 the reservoir is accessible. It is possible to see the huge unfinished dyke, quarry area and service buildings.

The Great Path of Málaga helps the traveller discover this important river in the two stages of the walk, walking up to the hills with pine forest planted for public use and seeing the watercourse at different points, with its lush vegetation, finally visiting one of the most curious forests of Andalusia, the Lifa Cornicabral (Terebinth Tree).

These stages also invite you to do any additional walks through the protected site in order to catch a glimpse what the heart of the Park has to offer as it climbs the vast mountain pass where there are examples of Spanish Fir in close proximity, mountain maples and spiny scrub close to the summit. ○

One of the Río Turón "acequia" channels covered with Maidenhair fern



22

ARDALES • EL BURGO

Public Mountain Land in Ortegícar and the Río Turón



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 35 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	22.8	Accumulated ascent	570	Final altitude	560
Ascent km	10.4	Accumulated descent	360	Maximum altitude	815
Descent km	8.9	Maximum difference	465	Minimum altitude	348
Flat km	3,5	Altitude at starting point	370	Average altitude	630

» Summary of this Stage «

Stage 22 starts and ends at the Río Turón as it passes through the towns of Ardales and El Burgo respectively. In the absence of an itinerary that follows the straight line between two points along the valley, the approved path leads up for more than 800 metres above sea level to three public mountain areas with managed forests and the marly limestone Sierra de Ortegícar.

Therefore the outline of the Stage shows major ups and downs along the demanding route. Approximately halfway into the walk you head west, and then turn south from Los Márquez.

At all times the walk uses dirt forest tracks in good condition. This is because in the centre of the area there are service access roads to public mountain land and at the beginning and at the end there are several well-known farmhouses and numerous fields. Almost half of the walk is in the shade of the forests of Aleppo Pine covering the clay hills.

» Highlights of this Stage «

This Stage takes the hiker to a sierra which is quite unknown, located in the triangle of Ardales, El Burgo and Serrato between the limestone Sierra de Ortegícar to the north, and the Río Turón to the south. >

							
1	1	1	3	3.1	19.7	--	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

► The area is quite popular with walkers and mountain bikers, with the famous circular route called Espinazo de Perro and a network of forest trails that allow planning diverse circulars including the GR-7 E-4 in his fifth leg.

It is the first time that the GR-249 follows such a huge area of marly limestone covered with a repopulated forest, rather dense in some spots with Oaks, junipers and savins.

The departure and arrival, in turn, let you meet the Río Turón, just before the dam of the Conde Guadalhorce, which can be seen from various points, as in two previous stages.

- **Starting point:** junction of the street Calle Mancerilla with the Calle Huelva, in the northwest area of Ardales.
- **Access to starting point:** Ardales is accessed by the A-357 Málaga-Campillos. The area is also reached by the MA-5402, which can be linked with Casarabonela (by the A-7275) and El Burgo (the MA-5401) which is also linked to the previous points).
- **Finish point:** Calle Fuente Nueva Street, in the northern part of the town of El Burgo, right on the road to Ardales.
- **Access to finish point:** MA-5401 or Ardales road. El Burgo is connected to the Serranía de Ronda and the Guadalhorce Valley via the A-366 (Ronda-Alozaina).
- **Possible "escape routes":** MA-5400 motorway links the towns of Serrato and El Burgo. Although it is not visible from the walk, it is very close, always to the right, starting from the highest point of the stage at Los Márquez.
- **No return point:** from Los Márquez, it is best to follow the GR and go down to El Burgo. It is an easily found point in the field: the highest part of the walk as you are leaving pine forest before entering another one.
- **Maps:** Begin with the **1038-I** (Ardales) but only a few metres. The tree-lined main part is located at **1037-IV** (Serrato) and ends on the **1051-I** (El Burgo).
- **District boundries:** up to km 8.2 it is Ardales. You walk for more than 2.5 km on the edge of this town bordering with El Burgo and afterwards, from Los Márquez, you are in El Burgo boundaries.

The outcrop known as la Laja stays to the left of the road, but out of sight, and it lends its name to a whole mountain area



• Enjoy the walk safely

The trail does not pass through any permanently inhabited places, although it is common to see people passing by at the beginning and at the end of the stage, coinciding with the work areas. Since there are no water supply points, it is necessary to plan this long and physically demanding route very well. Although this stage follows tarmac surfaces, it's not roads we are talking about rather than paved lanes on the steepest slopes. The circulation of vehicles is very scarce in the area.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Stage 5 of the GR-7 E-4 (Serrato-Ardales), 13.6 km long, coincides with our GR from the beginning up to the bridge of la Molina, but veers northwest at the first major intersection just as you cross the Río Turón.

Ardales Town Council has prepared five walks to promote a healthy lifestyle; the walks depart from the town. They are the routes of Cortijo Simon, Carretera EL Burgo, Los Llanos de Belén, Carretera de Badén and a climb called Subida al Calvario; all are between 2 and 8 km long.

The first part of our walk is known in the village as El Camino de los Jiménez, an area named for the huge land belonging to the farm of the same name. The same happens in the



A dense tapestry of *Potamogeton* covers areas of lower current Turón River

higher area which is called Los Márquez and there are roads with that very name leading through it.

Within the cycling network in the Sierra de las Nieves there is an adapted route El Burgo to Espinazo del Perro, a 19.3 kilometre circular which coincides with The Great Path of Málaga in the final section. At the Puerto de Herradura pass an alternative branches off to the left, towards the farmhouse of la Herradura (250 metres from the junction), and that is the traditional path of Puerto del Cumbre. Another old road is the one to Teba, which leads through the Arroyo de los Niños in north direction coinciding with the path at the end of the stage. Finally, in the area of village gardens there is a tarmac lane to the left is known as the Camino de los Membrillos.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The walk at this stage allows little contact with streams and springs. However, the hills of marly limestone you visit are the watershed basin between two rivers of quite a magnitude in the province of Malaga. To the south, and you can have a quick glance at it in the beginning, is the Río Turón, few kilometres before the reservoir in the Conde de Guadalhorce. The Turón as it passes through the bridge of la Molina has little vegetation on its banks: a thick belt of Oleander and some

The Turón around the bridge of la Molina just at the start of Stage 22



bulrushes, with an interesting population of an aquatic plant of the genus *Potamogeton* which covers the surface of the water with lanceolate leaves and a few erect flowers.

Northwards, several temporary streams have their source in these summits and flow into the river Guadalteba, which earns that name in the village of Serrato, in the old town where the Arroyo de las Cuevas converges with the tiny stream of Serrato. It is, therefore, a dividing watershed (especially remarkable in the Cerro de Márquez) that carries water to two different reservoirs, the aforementioned Conde del Guadalhorce and the Guadalteba, joining at the entrance of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes.

In the north-eastern end of the Loma del Castillo there is the Fuente Techada, however it is not on our itinerary. At the end you do cross a locally important spring, which is called Fuente Nueva and has been recently improved. Before reaching it, you will be walking through an area rich in minor water springs. Having walked downhill on the steep path from the Puerto de



A Perez's frog sunning itself on leaves of aquatic plants

la Herradura you reach a fairly wide and damp spot, full of Brambles, Wild Roses and Rushes, called Eagle Meadow (Prado de Aguila), where there is a barely recognizable well among the vegetation. From here there flows a stream that gets bigger when it goes through Fuente Cepero (which hasn't been adapted for drinking water); a place with large eucalyptus trees, where the stream starts being called Arroyo de los Niños. You will cross this Arroyo several times in the shelter of a beautiful forest with black poplars, willows and white poplars. Finally, very close to El Burgo there is El Molino Polo, which used to be fed by an acequia that now supplies water to the surrounding orchards.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Los Jiménez and the Castillo of Turón

From Ardales you must find the bridge of la Molina, of Roman origin, with three of its five original arches and in good condition. The Río Turón and then the Guadalteba in the north constituted two water barriers to cross on the road to Roman-time Málaga to Acinipo or Antequera, and Ardales was in a strategic position. Considering its 21 centuries of antiquity it is a privilege to be able to use this bridge on the Great Path of Málaga, with its embankments and arches of Ashlar sandstone. You ascend gently by the bank of Río Turón and pass on the right a track used by the E-4 GR-7 coming from Serrato. Cross a stream in

the area of Aguar and begin an ascent along a paved lane that leaves aside a few low industrial buildings and allows us to admire to the east the village of Ardales. Notice northwards a solar farm at the farmhouse of la Aguada. When you come to a vantage point you have the Umbria de Fuente Techada on your left, and the Loma de Castillo, crowned by an Arabic fortress. The Castillo of the Río Turón has a privileged location over the river valley, with craggy grey limestone cliffs which made the construction of walls to the east quite unnecessary. On the other side, which can be seen from the walk, walls had to be built, the Barbican and several towers among which stands out the Alcazar of military commanders, facing the Peña of Ardales.

This fortress aimed to provide support to another castle, the Ardales, during the Nasrid border wars, when the nearby Castillo de Teba was Christian. At this point, at kilometre 4, pass a major track on your left that goes to the Cortijo de la Laja and the Turón river, an area where a reservoir was attempted to be built. You can also follow a twist of that track northwards towards Cortijo de los Jiménez. This property, which is on the left, was in its times large enough to lend its name to the entire area and through which you have been walking so far, between the working fields and livestock.

» Monte Público de la Laja, Los Romerales and El Cerro del Rey

The entire area of pine forest which you walk through climbing towards Los Márquez and during the subsequent descent is managed as public forest land. Pine trees that top the hills of pink limestone are there to settle the land prone to erosion, with the consequent danger of silt settling in the reservoirs. The three areas of public forests are named after three places which you pass by on your left. Laja is a climbing area which is at the western end of the Cerro del Castillo, El Cerro del Rey is west of Jiménez farm and the Romerales is the high area. The 400 hectares are privately owned but the forest use syndicated.

From the Jiménez farm the toughest ascent begins but it allows good views over the

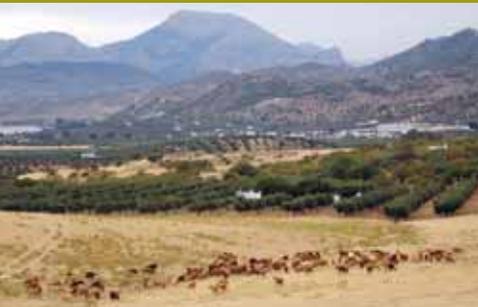
reservoirs of the Guadalhorce, with Río Turón in the foreground, and the Paraje Natural reserve Desfiladero de los Gaitanes eastward. Looking south, notice the mountain contours of Sierra de Alcaparaín and the Valley of the Río Turón. And to the northwest, the grey flat profile of the Sierra de Ortegaícar where the GR is headed. Next you cross another mountain, area, the Sierra del Burgo, which belongs to the autonomous community of Andalucía and has more than 2,000 hectares.

Having seen the sign Monte Público at a major intersection you will arrive at Cerro Redondo (km 7) and continue skirting the hillside follow a firebreak until km 10 you will reach a new junction where you veer left. So far the Aleppo Pine has had very low undergrowth, mainly Esparto grass. However, in the shady parts there are junipers, savins and Terebinth. There are copses of Holm Oaks in some parts mixed with Kermes Oak, Mastic trees and Mediterranean Dwarf Palm.

» Los Márquez and the Cortijo de la Herradura

The landscape changes dramatically at the maximum altitude of the route. There is a wide strip occupied by olives, almonds and fields that separates the previous pine wood from another, quite extensive one another fairly extensive, called the Rompedizos and the Madroño, with thousand hectares belonging to the old Andalusian water agency. A sign indicates that this field is also a hunting reserve due to the presence of the Spanish Ibex which roam the slopes of the Cerro Almorchón de Gutiérrez that stands out in the middle of the forest like a rocky tower to the west. In general the walk is headed for that mountain, with the road Serrato-El Burgo at its base, but it gradually turns right towards the south before reaching the mountain. From km 15 onwards you will start noticing signs of the bike route Espinazo del

Malaga breed of goats in a field with stubble, Ardales, and the Huma in the background



Perro, which will keep you company to the end of this stage.

When you reach the Puerto de la Herradura that cycling route comes to a junction (km 17.5), where it can be made a circular, following direction left to the farmhouse of la Herradura and a place that gives the striking name to the bike route Espinazo de Perro meaning Dog's Backbone.

The GR-249, all that is left to do is to keep walking downhill southward on a steep slope, to the Prado de Aguila (km 19), following the incipient Arroyo de los Niños up to the eucalyptus trees around Fuente Cepero, passing by the country houses Farol and La Viña Calderon and arriving to the area of Tejar. Here you need to turn south-west at the Molino Polo amongst pretty gardens on the right bank of the Río Turón, pass by the Fuente Nueva and arrive at the town of El Burgo. ○



El Castillo of the Río Turón cuts against the sky seen from the walk



First ascent reveals the dark limestone of the Sierra de Alcaparaín

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

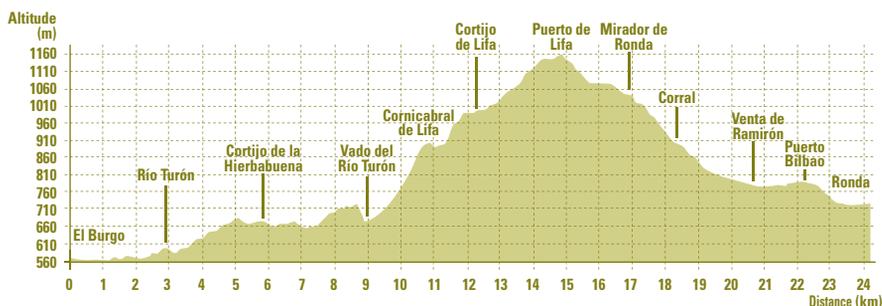
1 Ardales, C/ Mancerilla with C/ Huelva, streets	30S 0335237 4083279	370 m	2 Puente Romano de la Molina, Roman bridge	30S 0335051 4083450	350 m
3 Mirador de Ardales, viewpoint	30S 0334357 4083441	370 m	4 Castillo del Turón, castle	30S 0332281 4082331	500 m
5 Cortijo de los Jiménez, farmhouse	30S 0331963 4082369	210 m	6 Mirador de los pantanos, viewpoint to the reservoirs	30S 0331687 4082819	565 m
7 Cortafuegos del Puerto del Mirador, firebreak close to viewpoint	30S 0330155 4081974	687 m	8 Los Márquez and Puerto de las Cruces	30S 0328269 4082603	790 m
9 Possible detour to MA-5400	30S 0326528 4080003	770 m	10 Junction to Cortijo de la Herradura and Espinazo del Perro	30S 0326977 4078087	735 m
11 Prado del Águila, meadow	30S 0326983 4077096	645 m	12 Eucalyptus groves at Fuente Cepero spring	30S 0326679 40766348	605 m
13 Molino Polo, mill	30S 0326904 4073944	545 m	14 End of Stage 22 at Calle Fuente Nueva de El Burgo	30S 0326509 4073451	560 m

23 EL BURGO • RONDA

The Río Turón and the Cornicabral of Lifa



ESTIMATED TIME
7 hours 25 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	24.2	Accumulated ascent	720	Final altitude	730
Ascent km	9.9	Accumulated descent	515	Maximum altitude	1.160
Descent km	9.2	Maximum difference	605	Minimum altitude	550
Flat km	5.1	Altitude at starting point	565	Average altitude	840

» Summary of this Stage «

It is a long stage which passes through an area of sierra with quite a high altitude in Lifa, which is the Sierra de las Nieves high mountain pass. The route oscillates gently between east and west, first leading along a track in very good condition parallel to the Río Turón, surrounded by pine forests, and then on paths crossing the Lifa Cornicabral to Cortijo de Lifa.

From there the GR takes you along a forest track that ascends to 1,160 meters in the Puerto de Lifa, a place which combines its altitude with strategic geographic situation to create a truly mountainous landscape. The long descent to Ronda through the town's agricultural area par excellence, the plains of Aguaya and through the valley of the Arroyo del Lancero stream, which contains more water as the sierra ends.

» Highlights of this Stage «

The river Turón itself and the dams and dykes built along the watercourse make the views worthwhile, not only because of the landscapes created by water but also the interesting green belt of vegetation of river forests which blanket the area. There are several sign-posted footpaths which can be used additionally to the GR.

The Gran Senda enters the mountains of the Parque Natural de la Sierra de las Nieves via the valley and mountain pass of Lifa, which harbours one of the most extensive cornicabrales, >

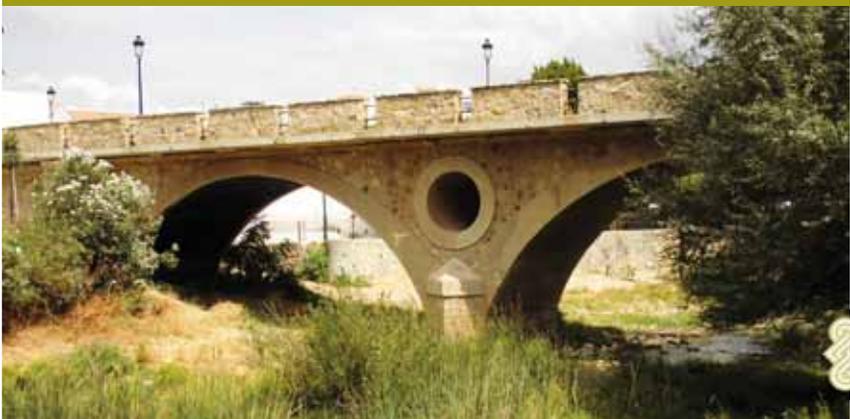
							
3	2	2	4	3.7	17	3.5	x 1

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

› forests of Mastic Tree (or Turpentine Tree) in the province, looked over by an old abandoned watchtower and the Cortijo de Lifa, a place which is special as it was the witness to the death of the last bandolero (bandit) of the Serranía de Ronda, the unparalleled Pasos Largos. You arrive in Ronda from the well-known Puerto de Lifa skirting the Sierra Hidalga with its Holm Oak woods and single Pinsapos.

- **Starting point:** the square with the monument to Pasos Largos, at the intersection of the A-366 with roads to Serrato (MA - 5400) and Ardales (MA-5401).
- **Access to starting point:** from Alozaina and the Valle del Guadalhorce A-366, also from Ronda, Serrato or Ardales, as mentioned above.
- **Finish point:** Ronda fairground, next to Pasarela de Libertad, in the north-eastern part of the town.
- **Access to finish point:** the end of route coincides with the intersection of the A-397 to the Costa del Sol, A-374 to Seville, the A-367 to Malaga and the A-366 to Alozaina.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** there is no possibility of leaving the path other than on the tracks of the beginning or the end of the stage route, following them or retracing your steps.
- **No return point:** as soon as you reach the Cornicabral and you see Cortijo de Lifa which is inhabited, it is a better idea to keep going. In case of very bad weather it is not advisable to continue uphill as weather conditions in Puerto de Lifa can be even more dire.
- **Maps:** Beginning of the stage **1051-II** (El Burgo) up to Lifa then go to **1051-I** (Arriate) and **1051-III** (Ronda).
- **District boundries:** About km 9 when you wade across the Río Turón (or Río del Burgo) you enter the district of El Burgo and continue within these boundaries till the end of the stage.

Starting point of stage 23, A-366 road bridge over El Burgo river





Llamativos estratos de margocaliza, la principal roca sobre la que se transita

• Enjoy the walk safely

During the short section of road, beware of the traffic, above all to cross the bridge over the river. Upstream, when you need to ford the Río Turón, it is normally a dry riverbed. However, this river course comes from the Sierra de las Nieves, and a storm can turn the ford into very dangerous one, although this happens rarely.

The stage is hard because of its length, the steep slopes and the solitude of landscapes that it spans. As there are no water supply points, the advance planning of all the details of the trip is essential. The Lifa pass is a place with enough altitude where weather conditions can be extreme. It is not uncommon for it to snow here. The good news is that you walking along a track in good condition where there is no possibility of getting lost.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-243 Sierra de las Nieves, with a length of 94.28 km and adapted in 2009 by the Walking Association Pasos Largos and the Malaga Provincial Council, coincides with this stage of our GR. The description of its first stage (Ronda - El Burgo, of 23.49 km) is done in opposite direction to the itinerary of The Great Malaga Path. From El Burgo it heads south passing through Yunquera, with two alternative sections and ending in Istán.

In the same area where the stage starts,

there are two well-advertised urban walks, the promenade El Paseo de la Acequia del Molino and El Puente Romano.

Once you are on the track leading to the dams, there are some options in the Natural Park. The Park likes the marly limestone hills that separate the Turón River from its tributary, Arroyo de la Fuensanta, running parallel in the s. Public Footpath of Puerto de la Mujer (5.8 km) is on the dividing line of the mentioned watersheds. The Fuensanta walk (2.2 km) shares the same path with the previous walk up to the Puerto del Lobo and the third walk, which is also the longest (18 km), uses the track leading from the Puerto de la Mujer, coinciding with the GR-249 for almost 9 km, and leads down the track to la Fuensanta and to El Burgo again. The latter is highly recommended for mountain biking.

Moreover, the trail is one of the two old roads that connected El Burgo with Ronda, both leading through mountain passes well above 1,000 meters in height. Our road used to lead to Yunquera through El Puerto de la Mujer.

Finally, close to your destination point, Ronda inhabitants use roads which lead through the plains of Aguaya for long walks towards the Pilar of Coca from the Venta Ramirón, to the area of the Guadalquivir River. In fact, the famous race of the 101 kilometres organised by the Legion always passes through the Puerto Bilbao pass. In addition, it is described as PR-A71 (Ronda-Pilar de Coca), a trail of 9.1 kilometres certified by the Andalucían Mountain Federation. The last element in this network of routes is the Puerta Verde de Marbella, a walk equal in length to a marathon, which leads to Marbella from Ronda by the Pilar de Coca and crosses our GR at the Venta of Ramirón restaurant.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves is the origin of numerous rivers. One of the most important from the socio-economic point of view is the Turón, which empties its waters into the reservoir of Conde de Guadalhorce, a high quality infrastructure generating electricity and supplying water to the capital of the province.

The “pampering” that the precious liquid receives during the stage of the walk consists in protecting of river banks by planting Aleppo pines, where vines and other crops used to grow. Then there is the succession of dams both upstream and downstream from the pueblo which regulates the river flow trying to avoid excess accumulation of sediment or the river gaining too much momentum. In spite of these actions that alter the river, the views are spectacular, with long and deep pools of turquoise water surrounded by patches of green, providing a stark contrast to the somewhat dry landscape.

If the riparian vegetation is spectacular, with willow, basket willow, black and white poplars and elms wrestling with the masses of oleanders and vines, the fauna doesn’t fall far behind. The Otter is the main predator of the river, thanks to the abundant fish such as barbel, nase and chub. This river also harbours a flourishing population of the native crayfish, since very recently in decline. Terrapins, snakes, kingfishers and amphibians are easy to observe vertebrates, while damselflies and dragonflies are also abundant in summer.

Dykes and dams which you can see along the walk are called: De La Presa (used by the youths of the town for spectacular jumps), El Azud Largo which feeds a very sizeable irrigation channel and has an area popular with locals for a swim, next is the Del Nacimiento at the foot of the Monument of

the Forest ranger and then the Hierbabuena close to a farm with the same name. The river upstream from the last dams usually dries out in summer. The vegetation that surrounds the watercourse is typically Mediterranean, with Holm Oak, Lentisc, Terebinth, Brambles and Roses among their main species. In the area where you can ford the Turón river, two streams meet: the Arroyo de la Higuera, which is born in the Pinsapar de Cañada de las Animas, and the Lifa stream (or the Sabinal), whose bank you can walk on.

The rest of the walk takes you through limestone mountains, and circulation of water on limestone surface is not possible. You don’t come across water until you reach the plains of Aguaya. When you pass through the last gate and a cattle grid you can hear down below the Arroyo de Lancero, which has its source here, although it had suffered serious damage due to water supply probing.

When you arrive at Ronda fairgrounds you cross over one of the better known streams here, the Arroyo de la Toma, which has a source in the plains of Aguaya and is a tributary of the Guadalevín river, then they enter the famous Tajo de Ronda gorge together.

A damselfly rescued from the water at one of the dams over Turón river



WALK DESCRIPTION

» The Dams over Turón River

From the roundabout where three roads of El Burgo intersect, beside the monument to Juan José Gallardo Mingolla (known as Pasos Largos) and the fuel station, take the shady road towards Yunquera for 250 meters and after crossing the Turón river bear right taking a dirt track towards Puerto de la Mujer and Los Diques.

At the beginning there are signs for a circular walk, then a side-road to the left towards the trails of Fuensanta and the Puerto de la Mujer (which share the first stretch of the path). The track continues as the river valley becomes denser with more species of plants; tall poplars, and an abundance of ash trees; however the deep pool banks are perfect places for willows. Often you will see fish in the clean waters.

At kilometre 1.2 there is a water source on the right and at km 2.7 you come to an outcrop of pink marly limestone at a vantage point. From here you can see the dam De la Presa, there is a track that descends to the prepared swimming area at the Azud largo dam, a recommended short stroll.

At kilometre 4.5, with the Nacimiento dam across a river bend, on the other side you can

One of few monuments erected to commemorate a bandit, this one dedicated to Pasos largos in El Burgo



see the huge escarpment of the Viewpoint of the Forest Guard with the Ronda road above. You are already in the Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves. The pine forest is now much more dense, you passed by a spring and the only house in this part of the walk, Cortijo de la Hierbabuena farmhouse, dedicated to goat and sheep farming (km 6.3). The track ascends a little more decisively until km 8.6, very close to Puerto de la Mujer, and here you must leave it and find a path which goes down steeply towards Río del Burgo riverbed, just where its tributaries unite. In the wedge between the river tributaries there is a ruin of the Cortijo de la Troncha where the path used to lead originally.

The first dam of Río del Burgo following the direction of the path



» Cornicabral or Terebinth Forest of Lifa

Rising along the banks of the Arroyo de Lifa, which is on the left, the pine wood is enriched with Holm Oaks, Kermes Oaks, Olive trees, Mastic, Terebinth, Roses and other shrubs of the Mediterranean maquis, especially near the watercourse. The path ascends through an area conquered by the native vegetation not long ago. Still can see the piles of boulders and cleared fields of ancient dry farming crops and some olive trees, although the path does not pass through the ruins of the Cortijo de Buenavista, nerve centre of this agricultural activity. Next to park limit signs of the Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves, the Terebinth is gaining prominence to become a forest. Specimens growing along the first steep climb are especially large at the foot of a limestone pit (km 10.3).

Pass on your right the steep gully of the Cañada de Sopalmi, which witnessed the final bloody episodes of the bandit, Pasos Largo's life. The path crosses the slope of Sierra Blanquilla in the middle. The rocky landslides on the slope, sometimes compacted into limestone breccias, and cliffs with visible



The Azud Largo is used by locals for water sports and a summer swim

strata are on the right, while on the left of the path there is in all its splendour the Lifa Cornicabral, Terebinth wood, (truly superb when it turns red in the fall), at its western end topped by the rocky mass on which the Atalaya de Lifa tower sits, a structure which has been quite badly affected by the passage of time. Looking south you will note against the horizon the contours of the Sierra de las Nieves (Peñon de Ronda Rock, Peñon de los Enamorados as well as some Spanish Fir trees) while in front, on an imposing hill, stands out the tree that gives its name to the Puerto del Pinsapo. Even higher you will notice the "torcal" limestone formations blanketed with maples growing in the Riscos de Lirios crags.

» El Cortijo y el Puerto de Lifa

As the Lifa Tower gets close and suddenly the terrain becomes easier. The path leads through the area influenced by Cortijo Lifa, which is located on a large clay flatland sheltered by high mountains that surround it, there even is a well. The walk passes through working fields and pastures. All gates must be closed after you pass through, to help manage the livestock. The houses fall behind on your left (km 12.3), while the GR uses the track that begins to rise again, slightly to the southwest. The vegetation changes substantially due to human activity, but also due to the altitude.



Various striped Shieldbugs on fennel flowers on the side of the path

There is a scrub here of Hawthorn, Gorse and Wide-leaved Daphne with some specimens of Montpellier Maple. In the limestone cliffs to the south some dark solitary fir survives in the rugged slopes of the Carramolo de Queso. After some bends you reach a hillock (km 14.3) from which it is worth look back at how far you have walked and admire the flat Cortijo de Lifa, Sierra Blanquilla behind and the Sierras Cabrilla and Alcaparaín completing the landscape. The two GRs arrive at the Puerto de Lifa from different directions at the altitude of 1,160 meters and there are some hedgehog brooms in the surrounding area. So far the track constitute the limit of the protected natural area, here the Natural Park is passed by on the left. The Great Path of Malaga comes to kilometre 14.9 where it starts to go down. The valley is squeezed between the Puerto Frío pass to the south and Los Peñoncillos to the north while the path again twists to the west again. There is a lime kiln at the foot of the path and at km 17, before going through ruins and corrals; it is the best place to see the flat landscape ahead of the walk, with the backdrop of Ronda and Cadiz limestone sierras.

» Los Llanos de Aguaya

The imposing mountain to the south is the Sierra Hidalga. Also note some dark, very high trees in the distance, which are centuries-old firs left over from the primeval forests. The Oaks of the northern slope of the sierra stand out against the gray of the limestone in a dense wood where young specimens of firs are scattered. Across the valley the terrain is being colonized by the Oaks little by little, also since the introduction of managed hunting, especially for deer. This is also why getting in and out of the area you cross some cattle grids. The ruins of the Cortijo del Lirio and Peñon Verde ahead tell a recent story of a very different lifestyle, more closely related to agriculture and animal husbandry.

Passing through the second gate with a cattle grid, now closer to the Arroyo del Lancero, the descent becomes easier (km 18.8) and you enter the Llanos de Aguaya plains, which are vast working fields with numerous cottages. The major junction in this area is also where the tarmac starts.



Valle de Lifa from the dirt track climbing to the pass

Here the Venta Ramirón restaurant is located at the crossroads of Yunquera road (the GR) with the Cordel de los Pescadores. Following this right-of-way track brings you to the already mentioned Pilar de Coca. To the left there is an airfield and the Guadalquivir river on its way toward the Fuenfría and the Costa del Sol.

The GR, on the other hand, continues straight and climbs a small vantage point known as the Puerto Bilbao (km 22), from which you can see once again the small town of Ronda. A downhill stroll and a few turns take the walker to a bridge across the Arroyo de la Toma which lends its name to the nearby building material shops. After a short walk that passes the fairground enclosure of Ronda on your left you arrive at the end of Stage 23 at the so-called Pasarela de la Libertad. ○



Lifa farm is surrounded by wide pastures and fields



The Lifa Tower and the Terebinth forest seen from the walk

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Jardines de Pasos Largos en El Burgo, gardens	30S 0326006 4073414	565 m	2 Detour of the walk to Fuensanta	30S 0325873 4073075	555 m
3 Presa del Dique y Azud Largo, dams	30S 0324119 4072869	585 m	4 Dique de nacimiento, dam	30S 0323190 4072042	660 m
5 Dique y Cortijo de la Hierbabuena, dam and farmhouse	30S 0322127 4071479	665 m	6 Start of the path	30S 0321109 4070297	725 m
7 Ford across Río Turón (de El Burgo)	30S 0320975 4070316	670 m	8 Cornicabral (Terebinth wood) of Lifa and crags	30S 0320029 4070271	830 m
9 Mirador del Cornicabral and Torre de Lifa, viewpoint	30S 0319379 4070033	890 m	10 Cortijo de Lifa farm	30S 0318364 4069621	995 m
11 Mirador del Valle de Lifa, viewpoint	30S 0317167 4068913	1.140 m	12 Puerto de Lifa, mountain pass	30S 0316706 4068651	1.160 m
13 Mirador de los Llanos de Aguaya and Ronda, viewpoint	30S 0314754 4068366	1.040 m	14 Junction of the Venta Ramirón and an airfield	30S 0311301 4068403	780 m
15 Puerto Bilbao, vantage point	30S 0309984 4068763	790 m	16 Recinto Ferial de Ronda, Ronda fairgrounds	30S 0308315 4069625	725 m



A group of walkers enjoying la Laguna Honda or Florida, with Sierra de Líbar in the background

La Gran Senda de Málaga and the Valle del Guadiaro de la Serranía de Ronda

» La Hoya del Tajo

La Gran Senda de Málaga initiates here a series of stages which lead through one of the areas of la Serranía de Ronda called el Valle del Guadiaro, which is full of character. The river starts in the vicinity of la Indiana. One of its tributaries is el Guadalcobacín, which starts at the Puerto del Viento and flows through la Ventilla, Arriate and los Prados, runs to the north of the Serranía de Ronda region, passing through the nearby excellent cultivated land of Llano de la Cruz. The other tributary is Río Guadalevín, which carves the famous Tajo de Ronda and it comes from many sources in the Sierra de las Nieves, at Cañada del Cuerno, under the name of Arroyo Carboneras. At the point called los Manaderos it gains its River Guadalevín name and as this river it keeps Gran Senda company from the town suburbs in the flat clay landscape of los Llanos de Aguaya.

The landscape of la Hoya del Tajo is marked by the fluvial valley of Río Guadalevín, with fairly steep slopes which come down towards the River from the many escarpments surrounding it and either reason behind the name Tajo, (gorge). The La Hoya itself (which is sometimes called Caldera) has been excavated in this sandstone

and limestone conglomerates of the Meseta de Ronda plateau, with the strata dipping towards the west and forming a cirque 1.500 metres wide which follows the river's direction for about 2.500 metros towards north-south. Its walls are up to 120 metres high even in Ronda itself.

Currently preserved as climbing landscape with vines interspersed with serial and dry-farmed fruit trees reclaiming the ancient and long-lost role. In the vegas (fertile plains) of Guadalevín you can still find various family gardens irrigated using "acequias del río", the river aqueducts, or the local spring sources.

» The beginning of Río Guadiaro

You leave this quiet landscape along the GR- 249 via Puerto de la Muela, leaving the sandstones and conglomerate rock of the Meseta de Ronda gradually behind to find clay which makes up the base of the river now finally called the Guadiaro. With the change of the name the River takes a direction north-east and south-east and it will continue so until it leaves Serranía de Ronda almost 40 kilometres further in El Colmenar.

The Gran Senda de Málaga passes than over an internationally famous karstic formation. The

Hundidero-Gato is one of the most unique cave systems of Andalucía. It has two entrances, one in the north, called Hundidero, and the other one in the south, which is also the one close to the GR, called Cueva del Gato. The system has been produced because of the obstacle created by Sierra del Algarrobo blocking the flow of Gaduares River which comes from Cádiz province, and which needs to carve through the rock to be able to continue flowing.

The entrance of the Cueva del Gato is 17 m wide by 26 m high. It is a natural drainage basin of the complex where Río Gaduares (also called Guadares or Campobuche) resurfaces again and joins the Guadiaro. This system consists of a main gallery more than 4 km long. However, the sum of all the galleries amounts to more than 8 km, with the level difference between the entrance of Hundidero and el Gato of 112 m. In 2014 there have been new studies conducted in order to explore and map the system; already the studies are uncovering some surprises. In order to have a general idea of these geological phenomena and formations you can visit the caving museum Centro de Interpretación de la Espeleología in Montejaque.

This cave system is not the only attraction in the area as there are river sources named Los Cascajales, La Fresnedilla and el Arroyo del Agua, which are very close to Estación de Benaoján. In Jimera de Líbar village there is a major water spring abundant in winter called Las Artezuelas.

» Las Angosturas del Guadiaro

Las Angosturas are a perfect example of landscape elements which are V-shaped valleys found in mid-size mountains. Here they are fairly squeezed in between two rocky outcrops facing each other, standing at 1.400 metres high, called las Sierras del Conio and del Palo. Elevations of over 1.000 metres appear within only 2 km entering la Sierra de Líbar and a little further than 2 km in the Sierra facing it. This difference of altitude (50% and 40% respectively) quite certainly influenced the location of la Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar drover's track which leads along the east side of the valley even though this way you need to ford the River twice, at the Pasada del Retamal and then Pasada de Gibraltar upstream. The River serves as a mirror for the two almost identical

La Cueva del Gato during one of the high water seasons.

PHOTO: Pepe Sierra



mountain slopes with oak forests blanketing the limestone at their base and bare peaks of karstic landscape based on grey limestone and dolomite. One of the first obstacles encountered by the train line coming from Ronda were precisely the Las Angosturas rock formations. The final location of the stations in Benaolán and Jimera de Líbar on top of the opposite River banks and the complicated terrain where the reason behind the construction of two bridges (one over the Guadiaro and another over Arroyo del Águila) and two consecutive tunnels around halfway along the train line. Also, trenches and to be build and escarpments resulting from the construction and restoration work at the beginning of the century had to be adapted and protected with protective wire mesh and screens.

El Guadiaro which you can explore thanks to the Gran Senda de Málaga is a turbulent river in winter, it's walked areas can unexpectedly rise with the rainfall filling its anonymous basin which retains a good flow in summer especially that it is not regulated by reservoirs and it only generates some electricity along a couple of river branches. The River harbours a great diversity of flora in its double tree belt which continuously covers its banks. The native crayfish has disappeared at their and of 20th-century, fish population however are healthier than ever caused by the water been treated in Ronda, which little by little should benefit of the other riverside villages.



La Laguna Florida takes its name after the crowfoot flowers appearing in spring

The most common finish and really easy to see are the Andalusian Barbel, a Southern species which reach quite a considerable size here. There also are eel, nase, chub; frequently you can observe Spanish Pond Terrapins, Herons and Mallards, plus, recently, Cormorants. The European Otter has a stable population here as well. This section of Las Angosturas is a good place to practice abseiling into the river valleys especially when the high waters subside and are more manageable.

» The Valley opens up

From Las Angosturas onwards the Forest landscape turns into farmland and animal husbandry. Although the rocky ridges on the right, las Sierras Blanquilla and de los Pinos, continue being at 1.400 metres, the ones on the left are only at 1.100. Moreover, the distance between the peaks of the two mountain chains grows up to 7 kilometres. This has repercussions for their lower mountains. Sandstone and Flysch clay appear, numerous water springs at medium height generate a tremendously diverse landscape but still heavily influenced by humans with settlements and houses connected by a dense network of paths.

It was in this landscape that the villages of Cortes de la Frontera and Jimera de Líbar were built in front of each other, between the rocks and the hills taking advantage of the

A climber at Puente de Monos of the Vía Ferrata in Benalauria



multiple resources of these two very different environments, spreading into the Valley along the Guadiaro River, completing this way the full spectrum of natural resources. Since its opening in 1892, the train permanently established the settlements called Estaciones, the train stations. The GR-141 can guide the traveller to explore this landscape taking them to another incredibly wild area called Paraje Natural de las Buitreras, and to both Centrales Hidroeléctricas which use the high flow of the watercourse and the major altitude differences which I accumulated downstream to produce hydraulic electricity.

» El Parque Natural and Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de Grazalema

The GR-249 takes you along three stages which lead along the border of the natural Park of Sierra de Grazalema, considering that a great part of the Park limit is constituted by the very Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar drover's track; a great axis for walkers in the Valley. The date when the biosphere reserve was declared is earlier than other similar declarations, on 22 January 1977. The area is also declared as Zona de Especial Protección para las Aves (ZEPA), a special protected area for birds and Lugar de Importancia Comunitaria (LIC), protected area recognised by the European Union.

The massifs of Grazalema and la Sierra de Líbar offer an impressive landscape of contrasting contours of limestone rocks as a result of violent geological history: enclosed valleys in form of canyons, caves, rock faces and cliffs and a wide variety of formations originating in the process of limestone surface having been dissolved in remote geological eras. El Parque Natural is located between the provinces of Cádiz and Málaga, covering 51.695 ha of the most easterly part of Cordillera Bética. The frontier between the Muslim kingdom of Granada and Castile between the 13th and 14th centuries, this mountainous region witnessed many struggles. This resulted in the very compact human habitat where villages are pressed against the rocks and slopes and as a result are completely integrated into the landscape. This cultural characteristic is unique to many mountain civilisations around the Mediterranean, and it continues until today despite the many centuries which have passed.

A total of 14 villages and towns have been included, to smaller or bigger extent, in the Park area; nine in Cádiz province and in Málaga province the villages of Benaoján, Montejaque, Cortes de la Frontera, Jimera de Líbar and the town of Ronda. ○

A group of climbers against the grey limestone with Benaoján in the background and the promenade used by the Great path below



24 RONDA • ESTACIÓN DE BENAJOJÁN

Río Guadiaro Begins



ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 55 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	12.8	Accumulated ascent	225	Final altitude	420
Ascent km	3.5	Accumulated descent	515	Maximum altitude	715
Descent km	6	Maximum difference	295	Minimum altitude	420
Flat km	3.3	Altitude at starting point	715	Average altitude	525

» Summary of this Stage «

The walk leads along very diverse surfaces: tarmac tracks, dirt tracks, paths and paved pedestrian lanes. It has a very manageable length and a contour of “saw teeth” with a few longish ups and downs.

The Great Malaga Path uses the existing walks of Camino de los Molinos and el Camino Viejo de Ronda to connect the starting and finish point. The first walk leads through la Hoya del Tajo, a depression situated at the base of Tajo de Ronda, where the Río Guadalevín flows. The walk starts at a rocky outcrop and leads directly north until km 2 where it turns west in order to ascend an escarpment located on the other side of the valley el Puerto de la Muela. From this point onwards the walk coincides with a traditional “camino” to Benaoján and another to Montejaque (both descend toward the river) but the latter splits off past an (unprotected by barriers) and then the GR-249 take the direction south-west, at km 5.

El GR follows during the next stretch a section of the newly improved Río Guadiaro walk but in order to reach Benaoján the walk takes you up along a pretty path paved in some sections to the Puerto de Ronda. Underneath these grey rocks there is the Hundidero Gato cave system. Before arriving at your destination, the settlement of the Estación, you walk through Benaoján village, where you follow footpaths downhill to reach anew the level of río Guadiaro.

							
1	2	2	3	6.1	4.5	2.2	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The GR-249 allows the walker explore the Hoya del Tajo, a valley carved out by Río Guadalevín, and its imposing Tajo with the famous Puente Nuevo across the riverbed; this is one of most recognisable image of Andalucía. Los Molinos del Tajo, the traditional gardens and Parque Periurbano de la Dehesa del Mercadillo are gradually left behind on the side of the path.

The itinerary follows Río Guadalevín through the Hoya and then it gets close to water again when Río Guadalquivir and Guadalevín join to become Guadiaro. Both the fluvial plains and the landscapes are outstanding.

You will pass by very close to the famous Cueva del Gato, however there is no direct approved access from the walk to it, though you can reach it at the end using a PR walk. The mountain section is included in the area of the Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema.

The travertine Tajos de Ronda house two equipped vías ferrata and there are two more in the limestone of Benaoján, plus a climbing school, all this thanks to a very rugged landscape as it should be in las Sierras Béticas.

The area of Estación de Benaoján is characterised by the abundance of flower and olive mills, by its fertile gardens and by the train line Algeciras Bobadilla which passes on the side of Río Guadiaro.

- **Starting point:** Plaza de María Auxiliadora or del Campillo, in the old part of Ronda known as La Ciudad, very close to Puente Nuevo.
- **Access to starting point:** Ronda can be reached from Málaga on A-367, from Costa del Sol on the A-366, on the A-374 from Sevilla and from Algeciras on the A-369. You reach the old town in Ronda on the Calle Armiñán, which connects Puente Nuevo with the Barrio de San Francisco. In order to reach Plaza del Campillo you must follow the streets direction west.
- **Finish point:** Estación de Benaoján, in the square close to the train station.
- **Access to finish point:** Access road to Estación de Benaoján from MA-7401.
- **Possible "escape routes":** Up to kilometre 4.5 you can reach the MA-7401 at the level of the La Indiana settlement, but actually the road is very close to the left of the walk, from km 3. On the other hand Benaoján is a very good place to stop walking, even though it is very close to the finish.
- **No return point:** From la Pasada de Gibraltar onwards it is best to continue to Benaoján.
- **Maps:** First kilometres are covered by **1051-III** (Ronda) and **1050-II** (Montejaque), with the **1051-I** (Arriate) as complementary. Next you continue on a long stretch shown on the **1050-IV** (Benaoján).
- **District boundaries:** You are in Ronda boundaries till km 8, when you arrive at Pasada de Gibraltar, where the track gives way to a path. Here Benaoján district starts and you stay within it till the end of the stage.

• Enjoy the walk safely

From km 4.6 walk about 300 metres along the road connecting Benaolán and Ronda, the MA-7401, passing by the houses of La Indiana on either side. There is no hard shoulder in some sections. A little further you must cross the train line Algeciras-Bobadilla on an unprotected level crossing without automated barriers. This section of train tracks is straight and well visible but you must take extreme precautions in case of fog or rain and get information on the times of passing trains beforehand. Between Benaolán and la Estación there is a comfortable paved path but access to it, as you leave the village on the road, is still pending improvement (year 2014), the road has no hard shoulder and there are a few bends; this means walking must be done with extreme care. It wouldn't be a bad idea to make yourselves highly visible with reflective clothing and lights.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-249 and the GR-141 Gran Senda de la Serranía de Ronda join here and coincide both with their itineraries and their described walking direction. Amongst the Local Footpaths which leave from Ronda, the SL-A 38 (Ronda, Molinos del Tajo, Ronda) coincides almost entirely with the GR and separates from it at the Puerto de la Muela, where it turns back to Ronda through El Pinar de la Dehesa. Right at this point two PR footpaths join the Gran Senda de Málaga, heading for Montejaque (PR-A 251) and Benaolán (PR-A 253). The first one branches off the GR just past the level crossing and leads uphill. The second footpath shares the



Puerta del Viento and Albacara walls

long track parallel to the Guadiaro river up to a point where at the Pasada de Gibraltar it splits off, crosses the river and then continues on its own, downstream. It's a good option to get to the cave Cueva del Gato. Your good old friend the GR-7 E-4 makes another appearance during this stage coinciding with the PR-A 251. It is the second stage of the GR 7 in Malaga area, called Montejaque - Ronda, in other words, leading in opposite walking direction to the other two Gran Senda walks. At the Estación de Benaolán there is a Local Footpath of Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema to the Cueva Del Gato, the SL-A 139, which reaches the well-known cave just past the bridge. At the same starting point as the aforementioned walk there is another one leading in the opposite direction, downstream, the SL-A 138 Río Guadiaro, which also belongs to the footpath network of Espacio Natural Protegido.

As far as traditional right of way paths are concerned, you will walk, in that order, along the El Camino de los Molinos, Camino del Puerto de la Muela, Camino de Montejaque, Camino Viejo de Ronda and Camino del Río. Perhaps the most important one is the Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar, which coincides with the Gran Senda de Málaga between km 4 and 8, through La Indiana and with the long parallel track to the Guadiaro. This drover's track lends its name to the Pasada de Gibraltar, a place surrounded by tall poplars where shepherds would cross the river with their flocks.

A few via ferrata climbers with the picturesque Puente Nuevo in the background



THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The Great Málaga path has already shown you the two tributaries which make up the Guadalevín, namely the Arroyo de la Toma and del Lancero. Originally called Arroyo Carboneras from its source in the pinsapar woods of Ronda, el Río Guadalevín or Río Chico gets its name around the Llanos de Aguaya and is joined by one more tributary, el Arroyo de las Culebras, just as it divides in two the plateau on which Ronda was built. When it appears on the other side of the canyon topped with the three surviving historical bridges, a great oval cauldron appears, surrounded by huge cliffs, the Tajo de Ronda.

The vegetable gardens and orchards on the river banks have always been quite famous in the town and these are the few spots where Pero de Ronda is cultivated, a local variety of apple. There used to be various flower mills at the gorge's outlet and an electricity station which nowadays is located in a new spot on the right side of the walk. The excess water expelled from the station flows into the Guadalevín at the bridge, which the Gran Senda crosses.

Residual water in Ronda is directed into an underground tunnel which the walk crosses just before El Puerto de la Muela. The tunnel can be seen as it comes out of the Tajo wall direction eastwards. The waste water is carried to the Estación Depuradora de Aguas Residuales, visible at km 4 approximately, just before La Indiana and looking west. The new station has allowed the river to recover after a long period of El Río Guadalevín having been contaminated.

The Gran Senda passes by the exact spot where the Guadiaro river gets its name, at the confluence of Río Guadalevín with the Guadalcobacín, a special place of the Ronda region. The recovery of fish and aquatic fauna species is quite evident here. You can



Puente de Fortuna at the Pasada de Gibraltar, which you do not cross

easily observe sizable Barbels from the little bridge over the second river, also Spanish Pond Terrapins and various wading birds. There is an information panel explaining the local birdlife.

The thickets of vegetation around the rivers are quite well preserved at the points where you access the river both at Hoya del Tajo and Estación de la Indiana. There are abundant poplars, ash, willow, and basket willow and in the clearings there is oleander and bulrushes.

The development of Río Guadiaro with its straight line north-east to south-west can be seen from various vantage points when climbing up to the Puerto de Ronda. It is here where the river connects with its first major tributary Río Gaduares or Campobuche as the latter emerges from Cueva del Gato. Approximately under the Puerto de Ronda, 150 metres below the calcareous rock there is one of the most famous cave systems, Hundidero-Gato.

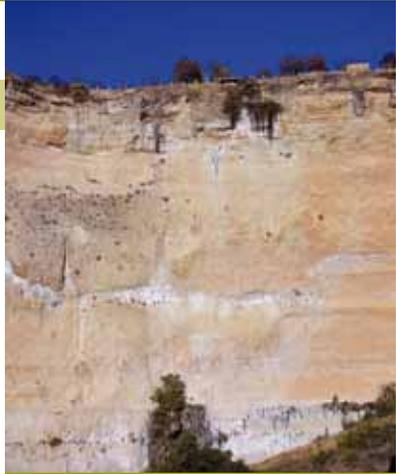
The second important tributary to the newly recuperated Guadiaro is the Nacimiento de los Cascajales or del Molino del Santo. This emergence drains from la Sierra de Líbar to the west of Benaoján and constitutes one of the most spectacular nature shows in the Serranía de Ronda when it carries a lot of water after heavy rains. There are two ditches coming out of the source used for irrigation in summer and a third one a little lower down. The Nacimiento, as it is simply called, can be accessed easily from the end of La Trocha, however the paved footpath adapted by the Benaoján town hall gives you good views of the entire place.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Hoya del Tajo

The Hoya del Tajo (hoya meaning “a pot”) has been naturally excavated in the calcareous sandstones and conglomerates of the plateau of Ronda. They form an oval, wider in the north-south direction, with about 4 km² of surface, slightly inclined towards the west. The fluvial erosion of the Guadalquivir river built the landscape of La Hoya hollowing out the soft clays and letting the unstable compact sandstone collapse to create over 100 metre high walls. The path uses the old Camino del Campillos to walk down from Ronda. Lined with almond trees and paved with the sandstone from the Tajo, the path makes a sharp turn to the right, passing by the traditional access to the base of the Puente Nuevo, which hasn't, however, been suitably improved though. Also it passes by the exit of two via ferrata of the Tajo, but it would be dangerous to venture out there without proper equipment.

At the next nearby junction you reach the Muralla de Albacara, walls made of rammed

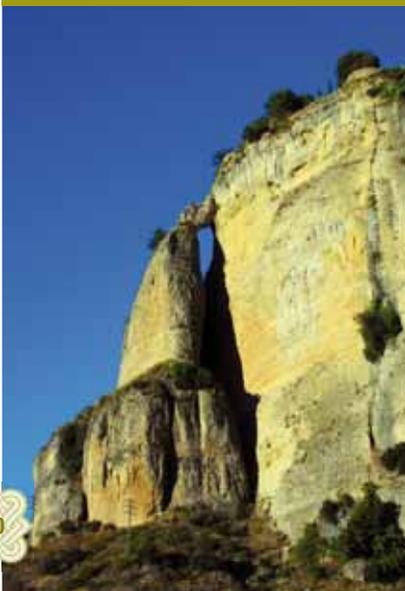


The balconies of the Alameda del Tajo and a rocky escarpment

earth mixed with lime, from Moorish times, erected in order to accommodate livestock outside the walls of the city. There were two gates in these walls, Del Cristo (or Los Molinos), to the right, and Del Viento to the left, which is where the Gran Senda is headed. In a collapsed section of the wall you pass on one side you can see perfectly the layers of earth and putlog holes left in the wall by the wooden structure used to build it.

Beside the restored Puerta del Viento note the high monolith made of conglomerate rock rising towards the sky, showing a texture that is much thicker than the usual calcarenite limestone of the Tajo. Here, exactly in 500 metres, you enter the camino de los Molinos. This road was paved with the characteristic stones during the construction of the hydroelectric power of Ronda in the 1940's, and this is where you are headed. The round stones that have been making up the walls on the way are now seen piled up on the side of the road and lining the sides of the path known as la Cuesta de Cachondeo (Joking Path). There are some of the best views of the Puente Nuevo bridge and the walls of the Tajo gorge. Next you reach a junction on your left which leads to two restored mills of the 11 documented

The characteristic shape of the Asa de la Caldera (pot handle)



ones, which were abandoned in the first half of the 20th century due to some serious accidents and the new energy generating plant on the river. The proximity of the irrigation channels of the Guadalevín is noted by the presence of the first gardens, once you pass by the paved road that goes to the station and walk steeply down along the concrete track where you reach the watercourse of the Guadalevín river. There are certain times when the flow is so impressive that it may even discourage walkers from crossing the bridge. The river carries water directly from the Sierra de las Nieves.

The immediate ascent leads between orchards and walnut trees to a very particular house where a medieval tower has been preserved without having been plastered; a building model that recurs in many other properties along river valleys in Ronda. Then the walk ascends through vineyards, farmhouses and horse riding facilities until you reach one of the natural exits of la Hoya del Tajo called El Puerto de la Muela pass, where you get the best views over the path you have walked so far (km 3) and where the surface changes from concrete to gravel.

» La Dehesa del Mercadillo and La Indiana

El Puerto de la Muella is an important intersection of many paths. Among others, two PR footpaths which come down from the north-western end of Ronda through Dehesa del Mercadillo, a wooded area of about 138 hectares of Stone pine with some Holm oak, which has been declared a suburban park.

The predominant direction is now westwards, leaving the park behind and reaching some old quarries and disused landfills in the vicinity of the Central de Transferencia de Residuos Sólidos de Ronda which you pass on a behind on your right. This is the right of way track called Cañada Real del Campo de



Rock-dwelling vegetation in travertine rock of Tajo de Ronda

Gibraltar which descends to La Indiana between livestock farms and the conspicuous chimney of an old distillery. Just before reaching the MA-7401 road, pass by on your right the old school Ermita Escuela; a modern construction which was built thanks to the education projects of the Bishop Herrera Oria. Now the school also serves as the headquarters of the very active Neighbours Association of La Indiana. The small group of village houses flanks the road. At kilometre 5 you leave the road behind to get back to the banks of the Guadalevín again.

» El Río Guadiaro and the Camino Viejo

At the meeting of the rivers the walk starts veering south-west. The ruins of the railway station of La Indiana precede the level crossing (without barriers) of the Algeciras-Bobadilla train line. Once on the other side, you abandon the E-4 GR-7 ignoring the track to Montejaque. The walk leads parallel to the railway, the river and the edge of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. Cultivated farmland on a slope belongs to the Cortijo Grande and Cortijo de la Mimbre; the landscape seems to duplicate on the other side of the valley, topped with escarpments of sandstone and oak dehesa.



The walk passes right on top of the meeting point Guadalevín and Guadalcobacín where they form the Guadiaro river

There is a tall ash tree near a water source which almost serves as a kilometre mark 7. Just 1,000 m ahead you should leave the track and take a scenic path. This begins at the famous Pasada de Gibraltar, a traditional transit place where it is easy to reach the river, only a few meters away beneath tall poplars. The river twists and turns a little to accommodate a ford which usually is equipped with a small rickety bridge thanks to the Legion who is the organiser of the annual race of 101 kilometres.

The first major climb starts here at the foot Sierra del Algarrobo, along a slope known as Los Pajarejos, covered with a dense scrub of retama, palm, olive trees and some Holm oaks. Lower down with every step, the ribbon of the river follows tightly the rocky walls while it is joined by the tributary flowing from the Cueva del Gato, which you can make out ahead and below the path. The path passes an unofficial and not adapted access to the cave on the left. Along the steepest escarpments the path is paved with stones and is supported by dry stone retaining walls. When you reach El Puerto de Ronda through olive groves, you will have walked 10 kilometres..

» Benaoján, between the sierra and the river

Walk down to the Vega de Benaoján along a wide track with the old stone pavement buried under the concrete. There is a metal cover at a bend on your left, which is the protective cover of a small pit. Passing by the old landfill of Benaoján, almost disused now, come to La Vega, a recognizable karst uvala sinkhole crossed by the Arroyo de la Vega. The broad fields perpendicular to this track and old village barns have been replaced by new housing and some factories making Benaoján's famous cold cuts. As you arrive at the cemetery the track is asphalted again while it crosses the village from north to south, between kilometre 11 and 12 of the walk. Entering the long Avenida ignore the access roads to Montejaque and Cortes de la Frontera (MA-8401) on your right. The Avenida runs along both sides of the Plaza de la Constitución. Benaoján station can be accessed following the MA-7401. As you arrive at the Benaoján climbing school (Escuela de escalada) at the sign welcoming you to the village, on the other side of the road there is a pedestrian walkway, its access has not been finished as of 2014 in the time of writing.

Once you are on the landscaped and tiled walkway, you have a good view of the gray rocks which is now accessible not only to rock climbers, thanks to a via ferrata, a result of the Plan de Dinamización del Producto Turístico de la Serranía de Ronda, a project of la Diputación de Málaga. Right at the viewpoint above the Nacimiento de los Cascajales there is a finish point of another ferrata, in this case designed for children, starting at the river. The scenic pedestrian walkway ends in a second viewpoint where there is a drinking water fountain, with excellent views of the neighbourhood of Benaoján station. The GR takes a small path known as La Trocha to go down to the second in size village of the district. Just as you start walking down there is a small cottage which in the past was used to store coffins. Now it marks the turn off to the right which is the starting point of the children's via ferrata. You arrive at the small square of the Estación de Benaoján between the buildings of the former central



Murallas Nazaries de la Albacara, and the starting point of the stage on top

hydroelectric plant of the Serranía (whose reinforced pipeline you may have noticed coming down) and a sausage factory, as you walk along the train line. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Ronda, Plaza de María Auxiliadora	30S 0306528 4068038	770 m	2 Mirador del Tajo de Ronda at the Murallas de la Albacara, viewpoint	30S 0306373 4068048	700 m
3 Mirador del Puente Nuevo en el Camino de los Molinos, viewpoint	30S 0306226 4068113	620 m	4 Molinos del Tajo, the mills at the gorge	30S 0306216 4068334	575 m
5 Río Guadalévín	30S 0306152 4068538	555 m	6 Puerto de la Muela	30S 0304933 4069058	600 m
7 Meeting point of the rivers where Guadiaro river starts	30S 0303167 4069874	470 m	8 Unprotected level crossing	30S 0302859 4069745	475 m
9 Pasada de Gibraltar, start of the footpath	30S 0301275 4068176	465 m	10 Puerto de Ronda along the Camino Viejo	30S 0299729 4067200	630 m
11 Benaoján Plaza de la Constitución	30S 0298992 404066376	560 m	12 Start of la Trocha	30S 0299124 4065494	500 m
13 Estación de Benaoján	30S 0299301 4065449	425 m			

25 STATION BENAJOJÁN • JIMERA DE LÍBAR

Las Angosturas del Guadiaro



ESTIMATED TIME
2 hours 55 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	9.7	Accumulated ascent	190	Final altitude	520
Descent km	4.2	Accumulated descent	280	Maximum altitude	520
Flat km	2.7	Maximum difference	135	Minimum altitude	390
	2.8	Altitude at starting point	420	Average altitude	425

» Summary of this Stage «

This is accessible and highly recommended stage because it is one of the routes in high demand with groups of walkers. The possibility of using the train for the return journey, few inclines, and the landscapes of the Angosturas Guadiaro make it ideal for family groups.

Following mainly the south-west direction the walk connects Benaoján Station and Jimera Libar, located on opposite banks of the River Guadiaro, and then takes you up the road adapted for walking by the town hall to reach the end of stage at the village.

At first the walk passes through a wooded footpath that climbs amongst the oaks of Monte de las Viñas and then descends to the Arroyo del Agua, turns into a narrow path and passes by an old ruined inn. From this point the walk leads up and down repeatedly to access the river banks or the river tributaries. This occurs at the mouth of the Fuente Enrique and Arroyo Seco. The last time this happens is at Jimera Station, at the bathing area and a pier used for canoes.

You will cross the railway line Algeciras-Bobadilla three times, first at the beginning on a level crossing with barriers and twice on a pathway without barriers.

							
1	2	2	2	2.2	2.0	5.5	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

At least two different settlements have grown around the train stops; there are many orchards and irrigated farmed land with trees, mainly in the right bank and with irrigation ditches coming from the tributaries and not the river itself. In Benaoján this would be the Cascajales river and in Jimera the Artezuelas. The horticultural and fruit varieties of each place are significant, Jimera growing those requiring a much milder climate and little frost.

In fact, the mild climate of Jimera Station should be considered an incentive for walkers; it is small wonder there used to be a spa in the area.

At the beginning of the stage there were numerous mills, eleven in total. Some of them are at the foot of the path, and others are equally distributed on both sides, sometimes between orchards. The star feature of the day is Guadiaro Valley, which runs through the area known as Las Angosturas (narrow gullies) with the characterised V shape. The landscape consists of gray ridges reaching over 1,000 meters, Holm and Portuguese gall oak woods on the sides and a sizeable belt of riparian wood makes one want to look around at every possible vantage point which there are many of along the path. Another attraction is the plentiful tributaries on either side of the river; some of them carry water year round.

Permanent human presence in las Angosturas, the southern boundary of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park, could be described as non-existent. Only if you pay close attention you will find farmsteads immersed in the forest, and the only feasible access is to the ruins of the Venta del Arroyo del Agua, with its threshing circle and paved front yard.

- **Starting point:** The small square in Benaoján Station.
- **Access to starting point:** There is a short stretch of road linking the MA-7401 access road from Ronda to Benaoján, very close to the village. It can also be reached by train, using the Bobadilla-Algeciras line.
- **Finish point:** Southern part of Jimera de Líbar at the junction of the MA-8307, where the Fuente de Jimera and the old wash house are located.
- **Access to finish point:** Jimera Líbar is reached using MA-8307 road Ronda to Algeciras (A-369) that connects with the Cortes de la Frontera-Benaoján road (MA-8401).
- **Possible "escape routes":** It is impossible to get out of Las Angosturas, keep going until the Jimera station or go back to Benaoján station.
- **No return point:** It's hard to pin-point, but a good benchmark is Arroyo Seco, recognizable because of the location at the second railway bridge. This watercourse is halfway between the two stations and it is recommended to keep going from this point as going back would mean a steep climb.
- **Maps:** Practically the first 7 kilometres are on the **1050-IV** (Benaoján). The rest is mapped on sheet **1064-II** (Cortes de la Frontera).
- **District boundaries:** you will cross the districts of two villages: Benaoján up to km 4.2 (shortly before Arroyo Seco) and Jimera Líbar during the rest of the walk.



Benaoján and its Estación seen from the first hill of the stage

• Enjoy the walk safely

Just at start there is the level crossing with barriers over the railway. You have to follow the signs and use the pedestrian crossing section.

Towards km 2.5 the walk gets very close to the Guadiaro riverbed. Although it isn't common, when there is major flooding water can reach an area of about 100 meters. In these circumstances it is best to retrace your steps, and do not expose yourself to potentially violent waters.

The embankments created during construction of the railway line have been secured with metal nets and guardrails have been provided for the dangerous sections. However, there are some places where this hasn't happened, particularly at the Cuesta de los Recoveros, where there is a concrete channel running on the side. In addition, the terrain along that stretch of the walk is very rocky and there is a possibility you could slip.

At Jimera Líbar station you have to cross the road twice, and of course, this must be done at the designated pedestrian crossings.

Finally, to go up to Jimera de Líbar village you will walk along a paved path, however there are some sections along the road. Take precautions, but the traffic is not too heavy here.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Once you cross the River Guadiaro at Benaoján Station you are on the Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar, which is the main right of way in the area. This drover's road is used by two PR paths of Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park, namely the SL A-139 to the Cueva del Gato (linear, 2.2 km one way) and A-139 SL Guadiaro River (with the length of 7.3 km).

The Cordel del Monte de las Viñas joins the Cañada Real at the Descansadero (livestock rest area) de la Erilla Blanca (800 meters from the start) and it used to be an important link with Gibraltar from Ronda without having to go via the Benaoján Station. It has no current use and is barely recognizable, although it is way-marked.

Past the Mirador del Charco de Tunél there is a junction with a path going off to the left, barely visible, which is a locally significant path to Alpandeire, leading through the most important property of Las Angosturas, the Cortijo del Quejigal, which is not visible from the GR.

Jimera Líbar and its station are connected by numerous walks that fan out towards the fertile fluvial plains (vegas) from the village entrance. The most commonly used were those from Huertas Nuevas and the paths chosen for the Great Path of Malaga, known as the Colada del Olivar. There are three or four other paths as options, advertised by the village and in perfect condition.

Finally, the Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar continues downward and parallel to Guadiaro River without crossing the railroad except once, over the green bridge. It is perfectly passable, and has been approved and designated the number PR A-255 and it joins the GR -249 again in next stage at Laguna Honda.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

It is in Las Angosturas where the Guadiaro river, whose birth you had witnessed previously along the Great Path, acquires its true dimension of a major river. This is because in Benaoján it is joined on its right bank by the important contributions of the Cueva del Gato, the Nacimiento of Cascajales and The Fresnedilla water source (visible from the walk) in just over two kilometres. Furthermore, on the left side there is the permanent stream Arroyo del Agua. This important stream emerges a few meters from the Venta in ruins. It was one of the last streams which harboured the native, non-invasive crayfish. Note the black rubber pipeline before crossing the stream; these were used to pump water from La Fresnedilla up to Benaoján and Montejaque for drinking water.

The Arroyo Seco or del Aguila streams do not contribute much to the main river flow but in the rainy season they can gain a lot of water level.

The Nacimiento de las Arzuelas is important. In summer it is not too big but with enough rain you can see its white cascades across the river, as you are reaching Jimera. This village and Cortes de la Frontera source their drinking water here and the excess is channelled for irrigation of Jimera orchards and gardens.

It is noteworthy how good the state of conservation of Guadiaro river is, especially since the town of Ronda has started providing the full cycle of water purification. However, there is still some village and industrial waste going into the river. The fish population is remarkable, the most conspicuous being the Andalusian barbel but also there is nase, chub and eel. This attracts herons in summer and cormorants in winter, and they are pretty easy to see. You can also find freshwater Spanish Pond Terrapins, and, though not as easily, the

quintessential mammalian river predator, the otter. The Guadiaro thickets of vegetation contain heterogeneous species, depending on the width of the vegetation belt, the type of current and how open the valley is. There are clumps of willow in all sections, including basket willow, also elm, mulberry, white and black poplars and tamarisk. Cattails and brambles are also common around the pools at the more open river beaches.

The Guadiaro river course along the relevant section described here is perfectly straight (40° northeast direction) and very compact, 8 kilometres long and with a continuous vertical drop of the current at 100 m exactly (from 415 m to 315 m), i.e.: with an average slope of 1.25%. This, plus the magnificent scenery composed of riparian forests, the absence of major dams and good water flow make this section of Guadiaro ideal for white water rafting. Jimera Canoeing Centre called Jimera Vagones has been built for that very purpose, close to the railway facilities in Jimera Station, following the tourism development project Plan de Dinamización del Producto Turístico Serranía de Ronda.

Flock of mallards floating by along the Guadiaro River



WALK DESCRIPTION

» Las Ventas of the Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar

The exit to the east from the Station in Benaoján requires walking across a level crossing with barriers and then a bridge over the Guadiaro. These two obstacles, one of them natural and the other one carrying a long history, will be accompanying the hiker for much of the stage. On the other side of the river a path offers the possibility to go to the Cueva del Gato along the nearby Charco de la Barranca, or following the opposite direction, to the right, which is the GR selected option. Pass by olive grove on the left and then on the right the restored mill Molino de Cecilio.

The half-hidden stone paving of the path gives you an idea of the importance of the path for livestock transit, which is corroborated by the next house, Venta de María Joaquina, one of the former service stations where food and shelter was offered to the travellers of the drover's road.

Where the walk touches the river you can see this bridge support



The footpath and the river Guadiaro run parallel throughout Las Angosturas



A dirt track leads up to a wide area where you ignore a path to your right. This is the Erilla Blanca rest stop, at a slope populated with Holm and Portuguese oaks of Monte de las Viñas estate. A little further on there is a good general view of Benaoján and surroundings, facing north. From the first high point you can make out the white houses of Cortijo de la Fresnedilla and the drinking water pumping station on the other side of the tracks. A steep descent ends at the bridge over the Arroyo del Agua and the Venta built on travertine rock; the rock is a result of an old waterfall existing here at another time and in another climate. Among the vegetation that surrounds the Venta there are some fig trees, still surviving, and even a laurel bush; the silent witnesses to the catering business in a building that had remained standing until the early 1990.

» Las Angosturas del Guadiaro

Now the path really welcomes the walker, it rises again to a hill of pink marlstone, which is also an excellent viewpoint over the Guadiaro and the first railroad tunnel, a little over two kilometres into the walk. Passing on the left the Camino de Alpandrethe the walk

descends back to the level of the river in the area where it sometimes overflows. This is the best place to admire the aquatic fauna, particularly when walking quietly. Here the short stream coming from Fuente Enrique (also rich in travertine) flows into the river. At the narrowest part of the watercourse there had been a bridge, now only the two supports remain.

Another climb to the grove of Cortijo del Quejigal farmhouse gives the path a privileged position to see one of the most expensive railway construction areas. Along a very short section there had to be built two tunnels and a large trench plus a new bridge to cross to the other side of the river, (the side you are walking on).

Always following south-west direction, walk downhill again, skirting the hill which rises above the train line. The vegetation is more typical of sunny areas but soon the Portuguese gall oaks make another appearance. You will easily find gorse, white cistus, mastic, spiny



Walkers under the oaks at Las Angosturas

broom, terebinth, wild roses, hawthorn, and so on. There are a couple of pink marlstone rocks which make a potential shelter from the rain. Having passed the guardrails you arrive (at km 4.5) at Arroyo Seco or Aguila; usually the first name is used. La Cancha de Conio Mountain with its steep cliff closes the valley off to the east, and then the valley is spanned by another railway bridge.

Another walk uphill lets you observe the road Benaoján-Cortes de la Frontera ahead leading

The first iron railway bridge over the Guadiaro as seen from the walk



The summit of Cono in the Arroyo Seco marks the middle of the path through las Angosturas



along the gray limestone where the famous Cueva de la Pileta is located. At the level of the walk but across the river there are the ruins of Cortijo del Parral. This means that you will soon be at the Cortijo del Palmero, hidden from the walk by another farm in the front. This section of narrow path witnessed an accident which resulted in several wounded when an escaped bull charged two groups of walkers in 2003.

And so you arrive at the Roza de María where there was a fire and its remains can still be seen, for example a few dead fruit trees. Next, you will be passing the site where an express train derailed in 1979, fortunately there were no fatalities but a very complicated and expensive rescue of the train engine submerged in the water followed the dangerous accident, which has been registered and described on the Internet.

» Jimera Líbar and its farmland

La Cuesta de Recoveros (beware of the embankment of the train on the right) and the drainage ditch lead to where the valley

opens up again, having to cross the road on a spectacular iron bridge painted in green, built in 2013 to facilitate the transit of the drover's road. The river Guadiaro envelopes

Fruit of the "mad broom" *Osiris alba* and the railway below



the path again in its dense riparian wood and walnut trees which give way to the almost completely gone chapel Ermita de la Virgen de Salud. The canoe pier is at the foot of the path.

Then you reach the train stop itself where three train cars have been converted into offices and storage for the white-water descents in canoes.

A newly built junction on the road leads to the roundabout where you find the path paved with locally sourced sandstone slabs that the town hall built along one of the roads of the Station; it is the the Cañada del Olivar. The cañada repeatedly cuts across the road between Jimera Station and Jimera village, amongst olives, almonds and dry farmed crops. The entrance to the village is past the public swimming pool and at the source Fuente de Jimera with its inscription dating back to 1789, in the middle of the MA-8307, where stage 25 ends. ○



Jimera de Líbar and view of El Palo in the background



The Guadiaro passing through Jimera Líbar

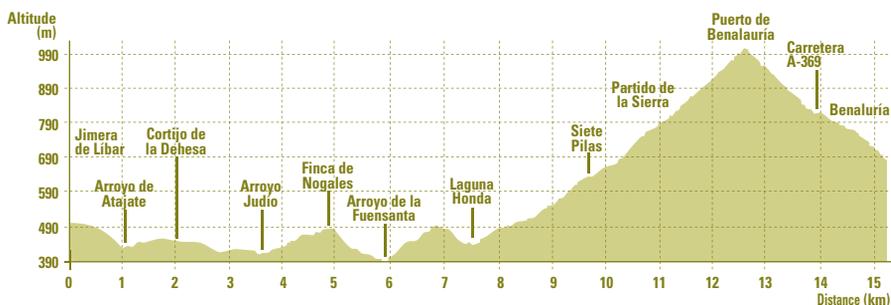
LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Benaoján Station	30S 0299301 4065449	425 m	2 Bridge over the River Guadiaro	30S 0299371 4065323	435 m
3 Mirador de Benaoján and la Estación, viewpoint	30S 0299196 4064812	465 m	4 Arroyo del Agua and Venta (ruined inn)	30S 0298829 4064102	425 m
5 Mirador del Charco Túnel, viewpoint	30S 02 98692 4063777	440 m	6 Vereda towards the farmhouse of Quejigal	30S 0298780 4063685	428 m
7 Mouth of Arroyo de la Fuente Enrique	30S 0298707 4063453	415 m	8 Rock shelter	30S 0298011 4062402	442 m
9 Arroyo Seco	30S 0297834 4062125	408 m	10 Location of the famous train accident	30S 0296563 4060569	415 m
11 Pedestrian bridge of the right of way path over the railway track	30S 0296218 4060113	400 m	12 Canoeing Centre "Vagones de Jimera"	30S 0296106 4059762	390 m
13 Fuente de Jimera Líbar, water spring	30S 0296633 4058399	520 m			

26 JIMERA DE LÍBAR • BENALAURÍA

Connecting Valle del Guadiaro and Genal

 **ESTIMATED TIME**
4 hours 30 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	15.3	Accumulated ascent	750	Final altitude	675
Ascent km	6.7	Accumulated descent	560	Maximum altitude	1.008
Descent km	5.6	Maximum difference	620	Minimum altitude	385
Flat km	3	Altitude at starting point	500	Average altitude	620

» Summary of this Stage «

This stage takes you along a beautiful tour halfway up the slope of the left flank of Valle del Guadiaro, through Cork oak and Holm oak woods and farmland, until you reach Siete Pilas, an intersection where there is a natural spring unparalleled in the area. Then the walk changes over to another important valley of the Serranía de Ronda, the Valle del Genal.

Up to la Laguna Honda the walk shares itineraries with the GR-141. The path goes up and down busily, crossing many water courses; some of these are permanent and all of them are the river Guadiaro tributaries. Here the valley is very open, with the pueblos Jimera de Líbar and Cortes de la Frontera at mid-height between the mountains and working fields. Having entered the Montes Públicos of Benadalid and Benalauría, you begin a long ascent until you reach el Puerto de Benalauría, situated between the limestone rise of Peñón de Benadalid and Loma de la Sierra.

The large number of houses, farmsteads and hamlets along this section is due to an abundance of natural springs and the vast expanse of land suitable for farming. The walk keeps connecting the network of footpaths and tracks until it ends up at the top of the pass at maximum altitude of the stage.

The downhill slope is where the two mountain GRs meet again but the province GR then continues downhill towards Benalauría village, and it reaches the pueblo along a section of tarmac with very little traffic.

							
2	2	2	3	2.5	9.8	3.0	x 3

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The stage is a good example of the identifying feature of Serranía de Ronda, the natural diversity, mainly geological: marlstone, sandstone, clay-limestone based farmland, limestone, dolomite, and chalk. These in turn are occupied by different woods (Cork and Holm oaks with Portuguese gall oak and pine woods) and human use of the terrain (olive and walnut groves, dry farming, dehesa, irrigated farming, chestnut groves) The many streams which come down from the sierras also liven up the landscape with their seasonal or year-round waters and surroundings composed of dense riparian vegetation where scrub prevails.

The hamlet of Siete Pilas is an example of harmony with nature where there are gardens and corrals for livestock between the houses next to the cultivated fields and dehesas of Holm and Portuguese gall oaks.

El Puerto is the natural passage way between this land of Benalauría district and the main part of the village. The landscape suffers a drastic change, first because of the proximity of Peñón de Benadalid and Tajo de los Avionicos, two limestone escarpments with a climbing school and two visa ferrata. Then, it changes due to the overwhelming schist and chalk rocks further up which make up for a hilly and densely wooded terrain, where the mountain white villages are nestled. Amongst these villages, the pueblo which is one most representative and preserved is precisely the destination of this stage, Benalauría.

- **Starting point:** Jimera de Líbar, Fuente and Lavadero in the village.
- **Access to starting point:** from the A-369 between Ronda and y Algeciras, crossroads with the MA- 8307. Another connection with the same road starts from MA-8401 between Cortes de la Frontera and Benaoján.
- **Finish point:** Plaza del Teniente Viñas, in the pueblo of Benalauría.
- **Access to finish point:** Benalauría can be accessed only on one road, the MA-8306, which connects with the A-369 between Ronda and Gaucín.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** Your main strategic point for any emergencies is Siete Pilas, located more or less half-way through the walk. It is also feasible to go back to Estación de Cortes using the alternative walk, the GR-141.
- **No return point:** Keeping in mind the two previous options, from the walnut country house onwards it is best to continue. Once you are close to Puerto de Benalauría it makes more sense to continue towards Benalauría or the Ronda road before the village.
- **Maps:** you will only need the **1064-II** (Cortes de la Frontera).
- **District boundaries:** Jimera de Líbar boundaries stretch to the old Venta Alfacara, with the walnut trees, at km 4.7. the boundaries between Benadalid and Benalauría, whose village centres are on the other side of the sierra, have been involved in territorial disputes over irrigation rights and use of village dehesas. Anyway, you will be walking through the distinct of Benadalid and then a little fence marks the change over to Benalauría at km 8.4, before coming up to Siete Pilas. You stay within these boundaries till the end of the stage though you get close to the previous district again as you climb to the pass.



Grazing sheep and Sierra del Palo in the background

• Enjoy the walk safely

The main streams can be crossed using the light-weight makeshift bridges but there are a few you have to ford. However, in no case we are talking about long or dangerous watercourses, even in rainy season.

There could be cattle grazing in some extensive farming areas (Andalucían breeds: pajunas, retintas or berrendas). They do not pose a particular danger but neither are they characterised by any special geniality. It is best to keep your distance, same with the bee hives which are at km 6.5.

The worse section of the day is the junction with A-369, which must be crossed at a place with best possible visibility. The section along Benalauría road must be walked according to the usual rules even though the traffic is not heavy. In order to get to the village you will be using the old tarmac track with no apparent assigned road number but used by the tough young locals as a short-cut to get directly to the village square.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The GR-141 Gran Senda de la Serranía de Ronda matches our GR up to la Laguna Honda (where there is an option) and then up to Siete Pilas where the other GR heads for Valle del Guadiaro below, to the settlement called El Colmenar and passing through La Garganta de las Buitreras.

The PR A-255 (from Jimera de Líbar to Cortes de la Frontera) is 12 km long. It crosses La Estación de Cortes and connects only for a few metres with our GR in the vicinity of Laguna Honda. The PR A-255 uses a path parallel to the river, the Cañada Real del Campo de Gibraltar, coming from Estación de Jimera until the junction of the station at Río Guadiaro called Pasada del Retamal.

The PR A-237 (from la Cañada del Real Tesoro to Benalauría) coincides with Gran Senda de Málaga from Siete Pilas till the end of stage 26.

These two PR footpaths are good alternatives if you want to do a circular walk between Estación de Cortes, Jimera de Líbar and even Siete Pilas, combining the two GRs coming from the river.

There are two other officially approved walks which are described in next stage: PR A-238 (from Benalauría to Algatocín) and PR A-291 (from Jubrique to Benalauría).

In any case, the natural passage between the valleys from Puerto de Benalauría results in existence of many traditional public paths connecting the village to that area, which, lets not forget, also belongs to Benalauría.

El Camino from Gaucín to Jimera is a traditional path which, as mentioned is used by GR-249 until the close vicinity of Siete Pilas, and Venta de la Alfacara (whose ruins are at the border of the property with walnut trees). This Venta catered to the public at the intersection of the Camino with Cordel del Guadiaro to Fuente del Espino and Camino de la Fuensanta.

Paved stony path and the summit of Martín Gil



THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

La Fuente de Jimera de Libar, the starting point of this stage, is also known as del Lavadero. After the Christian conquest of the Serranía region, the village changed its original Arabic name of Inz-Almaraz (lady's castle) to Ximera de Libar, and it was on a stone at this fuente where one of the earliest recorded mentions of the origins of the old name was found. La Fuente, which dates back to 1789 according to the inscription, has constituted, until recently, one of the key infrastructures of Jimera de Libar either to stock up on water or socialise with the neighbours.

Comparing this side of the valley with the one in front, you will note that the number of streams is much bigger and their water level more constant and significant. You will cross the Atajate and Judíos streams first, both being the longest and carrying most water. They come from the district of Atajate. After that, there is the Alfacara and its tributary the Fuensanta, in the district boundaries of Benadalid. Before Siete Pilas and at the change of district boundaries there are the Paliche (or la Vega) and Bovedilla (or Peñoncillo), of smaller size. In the Dehesa de Jimera, in front of the Cortijo, there is a seasonally flooding area which should have ended up being a natural pool similar to one you will be visiting later on. However, the place has been degraded by the silting process and passing farm animals. Amphibians, which are present but hidden away under the water surface, do not survive well in the dry years here. The Laguna Honda, (del Quemado or Florida according to locals) is a complete opposite. It fills up every year and is covered with flowering crowfoot, with outstanding amphibian species such as newts and Mediterranean Tree Frogs.

Fuente de Siete Pilas is located at the Camino de Benalauría. We do not know its origins however the old name was Pilas de Calabrina or Calabrinca, after a rest area for live stock which existed near the watering hole. The fuente used to have originally seven

troughs or (pilas) which gave name not only to the water spring but also its immediate area of Benalauría district. The abundance of water here in the meeting point of limestone escarpments of the watershed between Genal and y Guadiaro valleys and clay terrain, has made these places very popular since ancient times.

The proof of the value of this important agricultural and animal farming area has been the existence of "alcalde de agua", literally "mayor of the waters" dealing specifically with water issues in the village, until not long ago. Also, note the curious shape of the village boundaries of Benadalid, Algotocín or Benalauría which, starting from Valle del Genal, extend their territories up to the side of Guadiaro in search of the water springs of Fuensanta, Salitre, Almargen or Siete Pilas, among others. A recent remodelling has added six more "pilas" to the Fuente, giving it its actual look. As you walk up from the village you are accompanied for a while by one of the irrigation channels which carry water down from the highest springs to irrigate the plots of land below. There are still in existence a couple of tiny "fuentecitas" along the way, which are worth a mention: la Fuente de los Garbanzos (Chickpea Spring, its water is famous for its properties for cooking) before Siete Pilas and la Fuentezuela on the incline to Puerto de Benalauría, almost at the very top.

Jimera de Libar from the walk



WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Dehesa de Jimera

You must leave Jimera along a side road heading for Atajate which you turn off almost immediately in favour of a tarmac track to the right which then leads along dry farmed fields. This is the track to la Dehesa, but the GR abandons it to follow the old camino, still paved with stones and quite wide, lined with Holm oaks. At km 1 this camino connects again with the previous one at the level of Arroyo de Atajate. A gate leads to Monte Público la Dehesa, which belongs to the town hall (Ayuntamiento de Jimera de Líbar) with an excellent dehesa-type wooded area of mixed Cork, Holm and Portuguese gall oaks. This is located on top of an isolated island which generates this acidic soil. The wood has 257 hectares. It contains an old sealed landfill 8a few metres away from the gate) an industrial building dedicated to snail keeping and the Cortijo de la Dehesa which manages livestock such as goats, sheep and cows.

The best views of Jimera de Líbar, north-east, and la Sierra del Palo to the west are at the beginning, at the only sharp bend. Next you will

View to Montes and Siete Pilas



be passing by the facilities of the snail farm and some houses and a disused rickety Área Recreativa picnic area on the side. Having passed by an animal enclosure and a majestic Cork oak you can imagine the area on your right where the natural pool should have formed, in reality just a puddle forms after it has been raining.

The gravel track passes on the right el Cortijo del Pastor and goes down a little towards the Arroyo Judío or de los Judíos (km 3.5), which can be waded through or you can use if necessary the nearby farm bridge named after the stream. The current direction south-west is now changed to a decidedly southwards direction.

» Between farmland and scrubland

You enter a much more open area now, with clay terrain where the walk ascends leading through many gates you must close behind you. On your right pass the Cortijo de Bernardito, with the eucalyptus trees, a broad view to Sierra Blanquilla ahead and Cortes de la Frontera in the middle. There is a hill where the walnut grove starts. This is where the old Venta de la Alfacara used to be, now no more than a pile of rubble. As you cross the upper part of the walnut grove you arrive at a watering deposit and then descend and find the footpath. Now the Mediterranean scrubland is replacing the olive groves and

Recreational area at the Dehesa de Jimera



farmland while the fence along the path marks the borders between large houses and gardens. As a souvenir left behind the still recent agricultural past there is a threshing circle you cross just before a few bends which lead to the Arroyo de la Alfacara. At the banks of this stream Oleander is mixed with creepers and deciduous bushes forming a dense tangle. The water deposit you see on the side of the path takes water from the stream, uses the needed amount and returns the excess lower downstream.

The walk leads slightly uphill and at the level of Cortijo Nuevo with its turret, you need to ford Arroyo de la Fuensanta (km 5.9). The stream is equipped with a couple of wooden bridges; however, they are located at the lowest point of the whole itinerary. Thus you must climb along the substantial copse of Holm oaks, the forerunners of the closed scrubland and woods which cover the slopes on the left. To your right, as before, there are clearings composed of the clay soil typical of the "bujeos" type of farmland characteristic to here, and belonging to Cortijo Lobato.

Cortes de la Frontera and Sierra Blanquilla at its back



Cynara baetica is a type of thistle, not very widespread and typical of the Dehesa

This sort of open landscape awaits you from now; sometimes through olive groves or wild olive copses and sometimes crossing farmland, grazing land or fallow land. Keep going through gates in the fences dividing the different parts of livestock areas and pass by bee hives at the Cortijo de los Capitanes. A slight descent takes you to Arroyo del Paliche (or de la Vega) which is very closed-in and covered in thick brushwood.

» Las Dehesas de Benadalid and Benalauría and la Alquería de Siete Pilas

Lla Laguna Florida (or Honda) is a small natural pool; an inland endorheic lagoon situated a few metres from the main track. The vegetation on its banks is limited to a few clumps of rushes as the pool always dries out in the summer; however during rainy season the lagoon recovers and is adorned with the white crowsfoot flowers which are the reason behind one of the pool's names (Florida meaning flowery). The lagoon affords good views to Cortes de la Frontera and its sierras and makes an excellent rest stop. There are two walks branching off from here: the GR-141 which leads to Estación de Cortes and the PR A-255.

Now the real uphill section begins. First you pass through la Dehesa de Benadalid and Benalauría (which covers the most terrain in this Monte Público) of about 248 hectares of Holm and Portuguese gall oaks. As you arrive at the network of wide tracks, cross Arroyo del Peñoncillo (or de la Bovedilla) and bear right ignoring the track which goes up to the Sierra.



Cortes de la Frontera from la Laguna Florida in autumn

Along the track you are following note the flow of excess water coming from the fuente where the Gran Senda is headed. You are changing district boundaries as well marked by one of the fences close to the concealed Fuente de los Garbanzos.

As you arrive at the hamlet of Siete Pilas you will discover a great flat area, the Descansadero (km 9) where there is the Ermita Escuela school similar to the one at La Indiana. This Chapel-School is the only one in all of the Serranía which still performs its original function, basic education, forming part of the rural primary school system called Colegio Público Rural Asociado Sierra del Espino, whose other centres are in Benarrabá and Algotocín. The walk makes an abrupt turn off the GR-141 (which continues on to Estación de Cortes) and changes direction to the east. First, it passes by Fuente de Siete Pilas and then takes one of the traditional paths lined with scattered houses.

» Las Sierras de Almargen and del Espino

El Camino de Benalauría climbs from Siete Pilas parallel to irrigation channel which, higher up, runs through a pipe. It carries the water from Fuensanta. Sometimes it crosses a track but most of the time it runs through the uncultivated land. At the Cortijo Maja (or de los Bujeos) the walk intersects with a new track. This was built to connect with the other side of the mountains, but, most of all, with a quarry in mind or maybe drilling for water. Continue as you were, now on a smaller secondary track and undertake the long last climb.

The two rock masses you pass on both sides of the track as you set off to attack the steep slope are very different as far as their composition (more dolomite contents on the right) but mainly regarding the type of vegetation they support. On the left, covering limestone rock is the Monte del Cortijo de Almargen y Frontón, with planted pine wood of almost 200 privately owned hectáreas but managed by the local government. On the other side is La Cancha, with predominantly prime Holm oak woods extending over 73 hectares which belong to district of Benalauría, however in this spot the latter shares part of the land and, separately, part of the forest with Benadalid. This phenomenon is known in the local forestry language, quite poetically, as "el suelo y el vuelo" (land and flight) when the land belongs to one entity and what's on it to another. ☞ Puerto de Benalauría (km 12.6) is an excellent place to enjoy the broad views of Valle del Guadiaro to the west and Genal to the east; each one with its own idiosyncrasies; one of them broad, steep and wild and the other hilly, varied and wooded. Just as you start walking downhill with the cliffs of Tajo de los Aviones on the left, pass by a faint path to your left marked with a "home-made" cairn. This path leads to a rock climbing school and the two *vias ferrata* installed thanks to the tourism project Plan de Dinamización del Producto Turístico de la Diputación Provincial de Málaga.

Andalucían barbel feeding at the Guadiaro surface



The GR leads down between sunny oak woods towards the A-369 road, just before it meets up with the Gran Senda de la Serranía again, coming from Gaucín and on its way to Ronda. Crossing the road carefully, arrive at the old Venta de los Pavos (km 13.9), at the junction with Benalauría road. A widening in the road, a little lower down, houses some of the leading artisanal companies of the area selling food and agricultural products, plus the public sports centre. The lack of even minimally level terrain around the town centre (which you will be able to see for yourself soon) has caused many facilities to relocate here, close to the main road of the Genal Valley, even though some infrastructures and equipment would normally need more space.

Despite your having to walk on tarmac, the stroll along the shady chestnut grove and the picturesque landscape are rewarding and you will be leaving the MA-8306 soon behind (at the Punto Limpio) and will continue along the

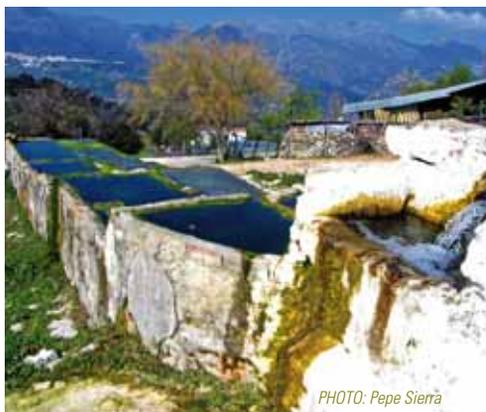


PHOTO: Pepe Sierra

La Fuente de Siete Pilas at a hamlet under the same name

second access to the village which becomes Calle Fuente. Benalauría welcomes the GR-249 with its white-washed houses and the atmosphere of a pueblo which has managed to stay faithful to its roots whilst looking into the future with a good understanding of what rural development means. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Fuente and washhouse at Jimera de Líbar	30S 0296631 4058399	500 m	2 End of stone-paved path and Arroyo de Atajatee	30S 0295772 4058000	432 m
3 Cortijo de la Dehesa de Jimera	30S 0294936 4057849	450 m	4 Ford across Arroyo Judío	30S 0294290 4056783	415 m
5 Arroyo de la Alfacara	30S 0293939 4055522	427 m	6 Arroyo de la Fuensanta	30S 0293663 4055049	388 m
7 Laguna Honda or del Quemado	30S 0293512 4053824	440 m	8 Junction of the tracks of la Sierra and de Siete Pilas in the Monte Público	30S 0293697 4053536	490 m
9 End of shared itineraries of the GR-249 y GR-141 en Siete Pilas	30S 0293524 4052743	560 m	10 Fuente del Puerto de Benalauría	30S 0295803 4052738	934 m
11 Puerto de Benalauría	30S 0296094 4052758	1.007 m	12 Crossroads of the A-369 and Benalauría road (MA-8306)	30S 0296699 4052361	820 m
13 Detour to access Benalauría	30S 0297364 4052409	757 m	14 Benalauría, Plaza del Teniente Viñas	30S 0297720 4052261	670 m



Algatocín seen from the starting point of stage 27

La Gran Senda de Málaga and el Valle del Genal

The sector which acts as a hinge between the two rivers of the Serranía de Ronda, the Guadiaro and the Genal, shows quite a homogenous landscape with prevailing woods of *Quercus* species (Cork oak groves and Holm oaks mixed with Portuguese gall oaks). These are interspersed with pastures for livestock. The use of these wooded areas is mainly for forestry and hunting. There are a few large private estates, but also Montes Públicos. During the previous stage 26, the GR-249 took you along this “jump” between the two valleys and placed you in the so-called Bajo Genal, Lower Genal Valley: Benadalid, Algatocín, Benalauría, Benarrabá, Jubrique, Genalguacil, Gaucín and Casares.

Between Cartajima, Parauta, Igualeja and Pujerra you will find the basin of Río Genal, with numerous streams draining into it from Sierra del Oreganal, el Puerto de la Ventilla and Sierra Blanca. Nevertheless, its main tributaries are the Nacimiento del Genal itself, in Igualeja, and Río Seco, which comes down from Sierra de las

Trincheruelas. All the other streams display the behaviour typical of seasonal torrents. They can sometimes overflow considerably but normally they contain a low flow. There are, however, many of these seasonal streams and they make up for the lack of flow with their number.

River Genal has some unique characteristics which differentiate it from its “older brother” the Guadiaro, which is also the river it flows into close to its mouth. It comes down meandering first in the direction east and then it veers off to the south at the height of Alpandeire. It continues flowing south when it joins the Gran Senda de Málaga at the level of Benalauría. Immediately before that point it is joined by two tributaries from the north which compete with the main river as far as the water volume is concerned. These are the Río de las Zúas and Río Gorgote.

The villages in the valley are divided between the two sides of the river but principally occupy the right bank, quite high up from the river bed. The exception is Igualeja due to its location at a “nacimiento”, a water source. This

phenomenon of occupying similar altitudes in search of better climate and springs and water sources has been given a name of “rigidity line”.

On the average each village is located from 200 to 600 metres of altitude and at a very short distance (between 1 and 3 kilometres) from the river. The bottom of a valley has never been a chosen place for settling down. Even today, village inhabitants customarily go down to the gardens or the mills at dusk and up to the village at dawn.

As for human activities, the river has always served us as a long industrial estate of sorts, dedicated to all kinds of manufacturing which required water: tanneries, flower and olive mills, tin smelting and the uncountable little irrigated farms placed around the river bends on the fluvial plains. Contrary to what one might imagine quite often irrigation water comes from the many lateral tributaries and not the main river itself which is harder to tame. In any case, the best geographical reference for these tiny farmsteads called “alquerías de Genal”

are the villages themselves. What’s more, in many cases the riverbed serves as the village boundary. Even today you will find this homing instinct for the “vega”, the fertile riverside land, which belongs to the village and one does not need to overcome obstacles, such as the river, to get to it. As an unusual case, only the districts of Júzcar and y Faraján villages break the above-described criterion and own land on both banks of the river. As it could be expected, this is precisely where there is one of the best conserved bridges and there is more of a tradition to walk between both river banks. On many occasions, the spoken word is the way we find out about the use of the traditional paths towards the river. River is the reference when we hear about the transport of wood from Las Lomas, cork harvesting and the fish transport from Estepona or fruit from Genal to the coast. The riverbed is also mentioned as a means of communication with Gibraltar during hot summers when its waters were a mere trickle. Today the landscape differs enormously from what the Moors witnessed during the rebellions

Mix of colours in the thickets of riparian vegetation of the Genal



at the end of 16th century which also marked the end of a certain era.

The woods have grown to considerable proportions carpeting both the shady and sunny slopes of schist and chalk which make up the bulk of the valley. One of the defining features of the woods is their multispecies composition. The Gran Senda de Málaga runs through a broad sector where side by side there are thriving Holm oaks, Cork oaks, Aleppo pines, Wild olives and Portuguese gall oaks together with a great variety of Mediterranean scrub adapted to a variety of

environments offered by type of soil, the direction the terrain is facing, and its proximity to a fluvial course. This appearance of a wilderness should not mislead you; the mountain woods here are still totally productive. There are cork-related products, cork and pine wood, and the (more influenced by human presence) cultivars of chestnut groves. Extensive animal husbandry in some extremely productive dehesas which habitually are located on tops of the hills, big game hunting (Roe deer, Red deer and Wild boar) are all the other activities which are at the core of a wooded area, together with wildlife tourism which now is gaining more enthusiasts through the infrastructure of the Gran Senda de Málaga. Riparian woods are worth a separate closer look. An almost century-old lack of the previously intensive human activity at the bottom of the valley has afforded almost total freedom to the riparian vegetation of the Genal banks. It has mainly been developing along the river during the last quarter of the 20th century when sustenance agriculture and farming was definitely abandoned, with the added effects of emigration and the population concentrating in the village centres. This phenomenon of depopulation of the valley was added on top of the previous abandonment of the Moorish settlements; large independent farmsteads or alquerías which had managed to double the number of population centres in the valley. With this happening, the double belt of woods along river banks kept reclaiming its habitat with its astounding diversity. Multicoloured contrast of poplars against willows, tamarisks, black poplars, basket willow and alder depending on their habitat preference whilst brambles, oleander, yellow gentian and redoul compete for their little spot in the sun at the bottoms of the valley. The fish population is not as healthy as it should be here, their numbers dwindling due to human-related factors such as, evidently, the quality of the water and the entire aquatic ecosystem.

Cork oak trunk after the bark has been removed in summer





El Genal is an excellent area for wild mushroom picking, such as this boletus

The proportion of these fish species numbers is opposite to the usual as it is actually easier to see the Northern Iberian Chub than the normally common Andalusian Barbel or Nase. Other distinguished members of riparian fauna are the Eel, Otter, and Kingfisher, Grey heron or Dipper. Despite all these pluses we have not been able to bring comprehensive type of protection to the Valle del Genal. It is not protected under any laws as a whole, however it does belong to the Red Natura 2000 project and has been declared Lugar de Interés Comunitario (Place of Special Interest) by the EU. It does contain two areas at the end of the valley in the east,

which have been declared Parajes Naturales or Natural Areas: the summits of Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja and Sierra Crestellina. The GR-249 runs between these peaks towards Casares, the birthplace of a Spanish politician Blas Infante.

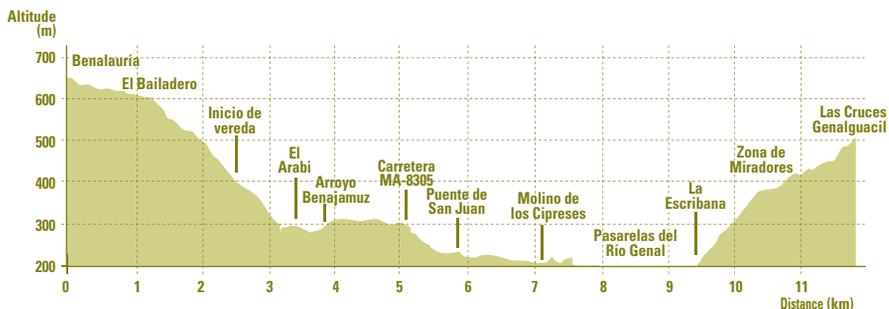
And such is the natural scenery, also largely charged with history, of these two stages of the walk, which keep on calling out to be discovered. The passage from village to village: Benalauría, Genalguacil, Casares; the pueblos blancos which, together with woods and rivers create one of the most beautiful walking areas in Málaga Province, full of well-defined character. ○

27 BENALAURÍA • GENALGUACIL

The Genal Valley



ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 50 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	11.6	Accumulated ascent	370	Final altitude	510
Ascent km	3.6	Accumulated descent	540	Maximum altitude	670
Descent km	3.9	Maximum difference	475	Minimum altitude	195
Flat km	4.1	Altitude at starting point	670	Average altitude	265

» Summary of this Stage «

The villages of Genal Valley are situated at similar altitude on both sides of the river. Villages which are on the same river bank are a different story. However, in order to reach the opposite bank villages, there is no other option but to go downhill, cross the river and climb back up again from the bank to the village. This is what happens in stage 27. Moreover, in case of the two villages, Benalauría and Genalguacil, they are not exactly facing each other, and there is no visual contact between them, so the distance is even greater.

As things are as they are, you also need, unfortunately, to trudge along the river for enough kilometres to connect two public paths, having descended from Benalauría before you climb to Genalguacil.

The landscape is totally forested, with prevailing diverse tree species, especially Cork oaks and Portuguese gall oaks, but as well chestnuts and Maritime pine. The multi-species galleried woods play a predominant role at the bottom of the closed in V-shaped valley with steep slopes, the kingdom of chalk and schist.

Up to the Prado de la Escribana you will be walking southwards, however the last section should lead you uphill and east towards the end of the stage.

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required	 0.3	 3.9	 7.4	 x 3
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Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

Walking along the Valle del Genal is already reason enough to love this stage. Firstly, because both Benalauría and Genalguacil have a special place in the Comarca de la Serranía de Ronda, (Ronda Region) due to the conservation and advancing of their original skills and, especially, for supporting arts and crafts.

Next, there are extensive woods of *Quercus* species occupying the steep hills, amongst them you will often see interspersed Maritime pines. These woods are replced in favourable places by chestnut groves which, to someone unfamiliar, are difficult to associate with crops. Also, the list of Mediterranean scrub species both on the sunny and shady slopes is very extensive.

However, the star feature of the day is the river Genal itself. It has been recovering the vegetation of its banks, the fertile plains, vegas, and its winding little corners until it has become a river which would have been hard to recognise by its ancient inhabitants. The past inhabitants of the river area had practically converted it into a long industrial estate where millers, gardeners, livestock breeders, charcoal makers, tanners, cork cutters and mule drivers toiled daily to support themselves. The remains and ruins of this old Genal have been left on the banks of the river as a reminder, visible from the ancient walkways which are being used again today. The path will also take the walker along the traditional caminos and symbolical places from the historical or ethnographical point of view, such as El Arabí, Benjamuz, the string of flower and olive oil mills, or the Prado de la Escribana.

- **Starting point:** Plaza del General Viñas, in Benalauría.
- **Access to starting point:** The only possibility is to use the MA 8306, which leaves from the A-369 between Ronda and Gaucín.
- **Finish point:** Pistas Polideportivas Municipales de Genalguacil, (sports centre) close to Venta Las Cruces.
- **Access to finish point:** From the A-369, the MA-8305 takes you to the intersection of the MA-8304 which accesses Genalguacil. Starting point is before the village. It is also possible to come from Estepona, either directly along the MA-8302 or through Jubrique via the MA-8301.
- **Possible "escape routes":** It is feasible to leave at Venta San Juan, on the MA-8305 at km 7 marker, close to Venta San Juan.
- **No return point:** For the first section this would be before Puente de San Juan; and the intersection with the path to Molino Almenta is your chosen point of no return. As for the second part of the stage, once you have passed Arroyo Hondo it is best to continue ahead.
- **Maps:** The beginning of the path is on map **1064-II** (Cortes de la Frontera), until past the Bailadero. The majority of the rest is on **1064-IV** (Gaucín).
- **District boundries:** Up to kilometre 2.9, approximately, where the path to Molino Almenta is, the district belongs to Benalauría. Thus you enter Algotocín territory, up to the bridge Puente de San Juan, and considering that the river Genal serves as a boundary between this district and the next, Jubrique. The fragment between Arroyo Hondo and Arroyo de las Perejilas constitutes the limit between Jubrique and the fourth district, Genalguacil, which continues till the end of this stage.



The streets of Benalauría deserve a relaxed visit

• Enjoy the walk safely

The distance between the starting and finish point is very attainable but walking along the road in between is complicated. It is advisable to plan your return or your overnight stay well.

The two intersections of Algotocín to Jubrique road and especially the little stretch you have to walk along this road to cross the river Genal must be approached with caution. There is no usable hard shoulder and there are two difficult bends before and after the bridge. (km 6.3).

Although the path which runs along the river Genal has been designed with walking in mind, minimising any risks, the riverbed is quite formidable and the water level can rise substantially, to the point of becoming dangerous. Common sense must be used in case of storms or long periods of rain even if it may result in your having to cancel your walking.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

The path which comes down from Benalauría to the river has been known as Camino de Jubrique. It used to lead to the other side at the Charco Esteban. Locally, the name Camino del Molino Almenta is used more often.

It is registered as Vía Pecuaría (right of way) path, second class.

It is a known fact that in the past the riverbed of Río Genal itself used to serve as a path, the Camino de la Costa, with direction to La Línea. The riverbed was completely devoid of vegetation back then. Once the water level has risen, paths started appearing along both river banks, especially given the fact that there were not many permanent bridges and the riverbed was very winding.

The Puente de San Juan bridge was one of those places chosen to cross to the other side because of its strategic position; it lead along the Camino de Estepona passing through Jubrique. Such was the significance of the crossing that the construction of the viaduct was started much earlier compared to similar places in the region. These traditional paths have been adapted to modern times with the conception of Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido (Short Distance Paths). The Gr-249 is accompanied by two short-distance paths on the way to Benalauría, until the Bailadero: the PR A-291 from Jubrique to Benalauría and the PR A-238 from Benalauría to Algotocín.

The new Camino de Jubrique from Algotocín leads down to the Genal and keeps on crossing the road time and time again until it finally matches the Gran Senda de Málaga at its first intersection with MA-8305 and up to the bridge.

The A-240 (from Benarrabá to Genalguacil) crosses the Río Genal through el Prado de la Escribana. This is another walk officially approved by the mountain federation Federación Andaluza de Montaña. The walk is about 5 km long, takes close to 3 hours and coincides with the GR until the destination village. There is a Descansadero also used as Abrevadero (former livestock rest stop and a watering station) at the Prado de la Escribana, as the Prado used to be an obligatory stop along another Camino de Estepona. The SLA-157 Prado de la Escribana also meets the GR in that spot.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The common feature of the tributaries which join the Genal flowing from the right side is their short length and the fact that all of them start in the vicinity of villages. This happens with the Benjamuz tributary first, then the Algotocín in the middle and Infiernillos at the end. All of their valleys are deep, separating the neighbouring villages along the bank. Although there is a watercourse which follows this pattern on the left side of Genal, the Arroyo Hondo, the presence of high mountain slopes of Sierra Bermeja changes the outlook of the environment here completely. Thus, both the Monardilla and the Almárchal tributaries start much higher up from the population centres and this way they are also much longer. They have a more substantial volume and, in fact, both support stable population of fish and both are called "ríos" by the local inhabitants. In case of the Almárchal there is an additional difference; its source is in the Spanish Fir forest, pinsapar, in the Paraje Natural de los Reales de Sierra Bermeja.

All in all, the water dynamics of the rivers and streams in the Genal differs enormously from its sister river the Guadiaro, mainly due to the fact that schist and chalk terrain prevails in Genal. There aren't any exuberant water springs, if anything, the volume of the streams tends to be more modest and come from more than one source. Drainage during the rains tends to be instantaneous as the ground filtering is more difficult, especially compared to the surrounding limestone mountains which mainly drain towards the Valle del Guadiaro.

Contrary to how it may seem, the irrigation water used for the riverside gardens comes from the tributaries more often than from the main river which is more difficult to manage. And so, both the Almárchal and the Monardilla accommodate numerous "acequias" irrigation channels and water outlets used for consumption.

There are two dams which are very popular with swimmers, close to Venta San Juan:

Charco Picado and Tomilla, plus there are a few more before la Escribana. In summer, bathing in the natural pools and places where water has been replenished by the winter rains, is a very popular thing to do in the nearby villages and there are favourite areas along the river enjoyed by the locals.

El Charco situated at the Prado de la Escribana is a watering trough or Abrevadero used by the Vías Pecuarías public paths which cross to the other side at the mouth of the Almáchar and continue the journey towards the Costa del Sol.

» Los Molinos

The mills, used either for grain or olives, require a somewhat stronger volume of water and a more constant flow than it is in case of irrigation. The Genal supplies just that and one of the most interesting mills is in the area of Arabí, called the Molino de Enmedio or Tomás's mill. This mill consists of two well-defined parts: one used to be dedicated to making olive oil and the other to making flower. The façade shows a painting in ochre of the symbol representing the Calvary with a commemorative inscription dating back to 1755 when the mill started working. Close by, upstream, accessed by a path off the GR just before reaching El Arabí, there is one of the few mills which have been restored in an acceptable manner

The rock and stone walls blend together



(this one due to having featured in some film programmes) and which should be mentioned here despite of its being out of the way. We are talking about the Molino de Almenta, de Piña or de la Máquina Quemada. It is located on the Camino de Jubrique and near the Nacimiento del Charco Esteban.

El Molino del Álamo was dedicated to grain milling, using the driving force of water and two stones. This mill has also been renovated as a country hotel. There is a millstone next to the building with an inscription from a London foundry which used to make cast-iron parts for this type of machinery at the beginning of the 19th century. The mill is situated between Venta San Juan and a campsite under the same name.

Another flower mill, Molino de los Cipreses, is tucked away at a river bend of río Genal on a broad fluvial plain in front of the Huerta de Juan Ruiz. This one is easy to find from the path. There is a stone on the track next to the Genal,

Chestnuts and their fruit can be seen up close in Benalauría



as you pass el Monardilla, which used to serve as anchorage for a make-shift cradle-shaped bridge to cross the river. Currently there is a simple wooden bridge there.

El Molino del Chairó used to get water from a canal from río Almárchal. This mill you will find very close to Prado de la Escribana and the Cordel de la Umbría at río Genal.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Los Caminos de Jubrique and El Arabí

In Benalauría, at Plaza del General Viñas, find the streets Iglesia and Cruz (towards the east) and arrive at la Fuente de la Cruz, at a terrace which looks down to the Camino de Algotocín, used by the GR at the beginning. After a bend in the path as you walk between steep slopes with almond trees, olives and prickly pears, arrive at Fuente del Chorruelo and turn south-east onto a forestry track gradually lined with more and more chestnut trees.

At km 1.3 you will arrive at an area called Bailadero (dance floor). This place was a favourite for fiestas and celebrations as it is located on top of a long slope with a very comfortable flat area, especially when compared to the surrounding wild slopes of Benalauría. It continues being used for entertainment, as it is evident from the electricity panels installed in a majestic Cork oak, a water connection to the fountain and a

surprisingly well-equipped Parque Biosaludable (outdoor gym) frequented by the locals during their constitutional strolls.

Two paths split off from Bailadero; the PR A-238 on the right which leads to Algotocín (the pueblo visible behind the foliage south-west and immediately after that, to the left, the PR

Mixed pine and quercus species in woods of the Genal



A-291 direction Jubrique. On the horizon, in the east, there are white hamlets of Alpendeire and Faraján among the grey rock of Sierra del Oreganal and the green scrubland. The GR-249 embarks on a steep descent through a sunny slope covered with a Cork oak grove where you can find Flax broom (*Teline linifolia*). The wood is interspersed with Holm oaks, Portuguese gall oaks and pines. Pine trees are abundant when, at km 2, 25 you must turn off the track and take a narrow path to the right, which might have crossed the track in a short-cut before.

At km 3.0 ignore a less steep path to your left. This path leads to Molino Almenta and Charco Esteban and it's called Camino de Jubrique. Meanwhile the GR takes you down to a dirt track where there is a wide curve. This is El Arabí where there are a couple of houses and two tracks which you ignore (one towards Molino de Almenta, crossing the river twice and the other one to Molino de Enmedio). Follow the GR direction northwest, then turn almost 180° as you ford Arroyo de Benajamuz (or Benajamón) stream. The stream shares its name with an abandoned Moorish settlement situated in the Monte Público de Algatocín, also called Coto y Vega del Río).

You are now walking through a spectacular Cork oak with heath and myrtle. The hill ahead in the Pago de Higerón is equally impressive, where there are also some Maritime pines. The track arrives at a junction with the MA-8305. Here you have good views to the Charco Picado and a long straight line of the Genal in the area of Molino de Enmedio. The GR becomes a path and crosses the road twice, takes you by a water tank and an old sawmill where The Great Málaga Path leads down to the tarmac again and crosses Puente de San Juan over the Genal (km 6.3).

» El Río Genal

The Venta de San Juan had already been an inn and a small restaurant before the road



Riding the mule up to the village after work

was built, due to the fact that in the vicinity there was the ford over Río Genal along the Camino from Algatocín to Jubrique, between the mouths of Arroyo Algatocín and Arroyo La Pedrera. Currently the building has been refurbished as a restaurant however you can recognise the part where the old inn used to be quite easily. There are two campsites on either side of the river, one in the district of Algatocín and the other in Jubrique.

The path continues at the back of the Venta and heads for the latter facility, passing by Molino del Álamo. Next you need to cross the El Monardilla river where there are poplar and willow copses and later an abundance of hackberry, tamarisks, oleanders. There is a slight climb along the bank until a flat area where there is a ruined house with eucalyptus trees, called Ventorrillo. This ruin marks the beginning of the most valuable area from nature's point of view of today's walk. It is a forgotten, quite enclosed meander of the river where exuberant Mediterranean vegetation has taken over the old irrigated fields. It is worth identifying the components of the surrounding fine thicket which has developed under the pine trees, Cork oaks and olives: Kermes oak, Butcher's broom, Mock privet, Hawthorn, Strawberry tree, Spiny broom and Lentisc; all entangled by the many creepers.



Holm oak acorns ripening

You will be in the company of these plants during the whole river section of the walk, sometimes mixed with river woods and sometimes with Cork oak and pine woods on the sides. First pass through Huertas de Juan Ruiz, then along the track again and climb a little around a river bend where you turn off the track and take a pretty path which leads up and down the slope, always keeping the river to your right, avoiding the chalky cliffs which the river has been excavating during floods.

Pass by the Arroyo Hondo, a watercourse which lends its name to the whole upper area where there is a water outlet. The overgrown riverbed favours the existence of an unusual plant, the reach a large fluvial plain called los Cuarterones, where there are a couple of houses amongst the old cultivated land whilst the path hugs and follows the ancient irrigation channel. The effort spent on adapting the walk in this area was quite major, given the level of deterioration of the old path. Past the ford across Arroyo de las Perejilas the GR enters an area where the valley gradually opens up until it reaches another dam which has been destroyed by latest floods. Walk between a poplar plantation, the river and high chalk cliffs (connected by two sections of spectacular metal walkways), pass through tamarisks, reed beds, willows and white and black poplars until you are very close to Charco de la Escribana (around km 9.5).

» El Camino de la Umbría

This place is worth a detour because of its open landscape and to catch a glimpse of the forest tracks leading to Benarrabá (crossing the river southwards) and to the other side of the valley to Almárchal and Genalguacil, resulting in a maze of tracks. If you wish to use one of these tracks to go up to one of the villages, you must explore them beforehand. At the Descansadero there is a small park and a few tables and benches.

The GR joins the PR A-240 (Benalauría Genalguacil) and the SL-157; it faces a beautiful uphill section along the Cordel de la Umbría al Río Genal, also known as La Cuesta de las Viñas (Vineyard Path). Throughout the ages the path had been gradually enclosed by the chalk slopes, reaching the height taller than a person. This happens mainly when you arrive at the first intersection of the track to Los Duros, in the section where the slope is steepest. Before then, there are a couple of viewpoints over to the Valle del Genal where the valley widens, its fluvial plains covered with citrus trees and poplar plantations.

Underneath the mix of pines, Cork and Portuguese gall oaks, walking east, arrive at another junction. This track is quite significant as it could be used to go down to Prado de la Escribana (to the right) or up in

A mix of autumnal colours in the river groves of Genal



search of the road to Genalguacil. The walk however keeps climbing quite steeply until you arrive at a small building and begins to flatten in some sections. The landscape is now much more open and from many spots there are views over the last part of Río Genal throughout the Serranía de Ronda.

It is especially worth stopping at a flat area where the path is lined with tall Cork oaks on both sides. Here you can admire the peaks of Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja behind Genalguacil, which is getting closer with every step. To the south you can see another Paraje Natural in the area, Sierra Crestellina. Looking west, there is Benarrabá on the other side of the valley. Small gardens start appearing along the walk, some with sub-tropical fruit trees, sprouting around tiny water springs. Holm oak, Cork oak and pine woods become thinner, usually ploughed underneath or with hardly any undergrowth.



Straight section of the walk along the Genal before Charco Picado

Enter the las climb, walking on the traditional path with sections of access roads to nearby houses. On your right, pass by the Camino de los Limones (which leads down to la Escribana) and arrive at a major junction of paths where you will find some of the sports facilities of Genalguacil and a Venta (roadside inn-restaurant). Here, with one of the best views of Genalguacil ahead, stage 27 ends. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Benalauría, Plaza del General Viñas	30S 0297720 4052261	670 m	2 Fuente del Chorruelo, water spring	30S 0297719 4052003	627 m
3 El Bailadero	30S 0298385 4051638	600 m	4 Junction to Molino de Almenta	30S 0298907 4050427	365 m
5 El Arabí (Cortijo de Media Oreja)	30S 0299020 4050158	295 m	6 Arroyo de Benajamuz (or Benajamón), stream	30S 0298687 4050386	280 m
7 Mirador del Charco Picado, viewpoint	30S 0298809 4049662	300 m	8 Bridge over Río Genal close to Venta San Juan	30S 0298993 4049206	228 m
9 Ford across Río Monardilla	30S 0299173 4048886	221 m	10 Stone support of an old bridge pointing to Molino de los Cipreses	30S 0299222 4048361	209 m
11 Arroyo Hondo, stream	30S 0299264 4048193	207 m	12 Charco de La Escribana and Molino del Chairó (or Limones)	30S 0297990 4047260	195 m
13 La Escribana track and el Río Almárchal	30S 0298275 4047131	195 m	14 Mirador de Sierra Bermeja and Genalguacil, viewpoint	30S 0298922 4046883	404 m
15 Pistas Polideportivas sports centre / El Cruce, crossroads	30S 0299536 4046885	508 m			

28

GENALGUACIL • CASARES

Mediterranean woods



ESTIMATED TIME
5 hours 45 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	20.5	Accumulated ascent	770	Final altitude	365
Ascent km	7.7	Accumulated descent	880	Maximum altitude	640
Descent km	7.4	Maximum difference	510	Minimum altitude	128
Flat km	5.4	Altitude at starting point	530	Average altitude	418

» Summary of this Stage «

Along just a little over 20 kilometres, the Gran Senda de Málaga undertakes the task of leading you from the dense woods of the shady slopes in the Valle del Genal, with its river running along on the right, to the first views of the Mediterranean. In order to achieve this goal, the walk follows quite a demanding itinerary, under the shade of the great Cork oaks, Portuguese gall oaks and Aleppo pines. It leads along traditional paths between the villages of starting point and destination and the ones which go to Benarrabá, on the other side of the river. The walk heads in a north-south direction in general; however it also makes two loops: first one at the beginning, eastwards, and then another one to the west. The walk goes back to the main direction in its final section.

The walk uses mainly forest tracks but also some of the few livestock paths which are still in existence, especially the ones which are used to ford streams and rivers. These are tributaries of the river Genal and their headwaters are in the nearby Sierra Bermeja. Thus you are facing a stage featuring a few ups and downs to and from the bottom of the valleys, but, altogether, it is very comfortable to walk due to a good design of the ancient paths.

» Highlights of this Stage «

During this stage you will be walking through 20 kilometres of woods, with noticeable subtle nuances between their different parts. Sometimes the woods are tamer, Cork oak dehesa style, or they turn into chestnut groves featuring the highest possible level of human intervention without losing their status of a forest. Other times the woods become a multi-coloured mix of Portuguese gall oak, Cork oak, and pine tangled with honeysuckle and shrubs. The use of these forests is mainly big game hunting and simply

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
2	2	2	3	2.1	14.7	3.7	x 4

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

obtaining wood and cork. However, there also are many country houses here, not only close to the villages but also in the heart of the woods. Many of these form part of fish farms but others can vary from luxurious mansions which are only used for short breaks, to isolated, almost spiritual places, far from the mundane noise where you can commune with nature. These are many different ways of life in the forest and you can witness them all along the walk.

The woods are evidently very attractive but the rivers are the backbone of the walk. Only the Almárcchal maintains a stable population of fish but the other rivers are important for many invertebrates and their predators, such as the Dipper, considering how clean the waters are. The GR-249 helps you get close to the numerous vegetable and fruit gardens and the fertile fluvial plains called vegas. The most outstanding ones are found half-way through the walk at the Molino de los Zaharames and, already on the other side of the Genal, at Los Pepes. Both places are sites of undoubted ethnographical interest.

Finally, the network of "caminos tradicionales" has always been very important around here as the Puerto de los Guardas and Puerto de las Viñas are the best options to cross over from the sierras to the sea and vice versa. This was a chosen place to transport forestry and horticulture products to the coast and fish and other products coming from the sea back inland.

A special mention must go to the succession of viewpoints overlooking the villages of Genal Valley (Gaucín, Benarrabá, Algatocín and Genalguacil) with their white houses surrounded by trees and grey ridges. Cols and slopes, valleys and corners which allow the walker to fill their rucksacks with images of a very well preserved landscape full of traces of ancient traditions existing side by side with new kinds of activities integrated with the forest environment. Welcome to the woods.

- **Starting point:** Mirador de los Poyetes or de la Lomilla, in the southern tip of Genalguacil, very close to the church and at the end of the street Calle Real. There is a car park at the starting point.
- **Access to starting point:** Genalguacil connects with the rest of the Serranía de Ronda via the MA-8304 and the MA-8305, which lead towards the Ronda-Algeciras road (A-369). On the other side from Estepona on the Costa del Sol, the MA-8301 goes up to the Puerto de Peñas Blancas. This opens the possibility of connecting with the village from Jubrique or arriving on the MA-8302 directly. It passes by the village hotel but is still not paved in sections.
- **Finish point:** Plaza de España, in the centre of Casares. The main streets which end here are the Calle de la Carrera and Calle Juan Cerón.
- **Access to finish point:** Casares also connects with the Serranía de Ronda and with the Costa del Sol. If you are coming from inland use the A-7150 which connects with the A-377 (Gaucín-Manilva). The above mentioned road also connects with the Costa del Sol, passing through Manilva, or directly via the MA-8300.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The only two possibilities are retracing your steps or continuing to the end. For the first option it is best to use the GR or the circular PR (this is a shorter way to Genalguacil) which leads to Puerto del Lentisco. In the final section of the stage, the only recommended way to retrace your steps is to use the GR. At Vega de los Zaharames, there is the possibility to cross the river Genal using a suspended bridge, arrive at Los Pepes, where it is normal to come across people. Another quite difficult option would be to continue to Benarrabá or Gaucín, having walked many kilometres of tracks in a network which requires good knowledge of the intersections.
- **No return point:** At La Vega de los Zaharames you will find yourself at half-way point of the walk which means that it is best to continue from here on, rather than trying to get back. Another key point is the Puerto del Lentisco during the first half of the walk. From this pass, Genalguacil is a stone's throw away, and this point is highly recommended as an escape route if necessary.
- **Maps:** A little more than half of the itinerary is mapped on the **1064-IV** (Gaucín). From the so-called Mirador de Sierra Crestellina (km 13), use the **1071-II** (Casares).
- **District boundaries:** At km 9.7, the Vega de los Zaharames (or Aljarames), marks the change of district boundaries from Genalguacil, which you walk through during the first kilometres, to Casares, when you enter Monte del Duque. Until the end of stage 28 you walk through the birth place of the Spanish politician, Blas Infante (Casares).



Polipodium ferns at la Casa del Helechal

• Enjoy the walk safely

You will have to cross four or five watercourses but only two of them are of any concern. El Arroyo de los Zaharames, about half-way into the walk has two makeshift bridges at the lowest point, one of them quite eye-catching as it is made up of one single log. It is up to you whether you prefer to use these bridges or wade through. It is important to stress here that trying to go back at this point of the walk could lead to a serious disappointment. Fortunately, with the first steps of the stage, at km 3.5, you come across the ford across Río Almárchal which is a good indicator of water levels of the day. This permanent river is the biggest watercourse of stage 28 and so it marks the top level of difficulty related to watercourses on the day. If it doesn't pose any danger, the following streams will not, either.

Los Montes del Duque, and other, less famous areas, manage big game and organise hunts from time to time. The legislation requires that the hunt areas are clearly marked, especially around the GR-249. When there is a hunt on, under no circumstances should you ignore signs and warnings. Hunting and walking in the same area should be able to be compatible, so, on the one hand you must scrupulously adhere to the sign-posted GR path, and on the other, walk as quietly as possible.

There are 40 kilometres of mountain roads with vehicle access between Genalguacil and Casares, which, again, stresses the importance of good planning, either for your return, or, even better, an overnight stay between the starting and finish point.

There is only one natural spring along the whole way, Fuente de Arquita (or Arqueta), but it is almost at the end of the walk and already very close to Casares.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Fortunately, both Genalguacil and Casares have bet heavily on their network of footpaths, both the officially approved ones by the Federación Andaluza de Montaña and the ones sponsored by the towns and other entities.

So far Genalguacil boasts three Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido. The PR A-240 from Benarrabá to Genalguacil connects both villages on the east-west axis, crosses the river Genal via El Prado de la Escribana and coincides with stage 27 of the Gran Senda de Málaga along the Vereda de los Limones. This route becomes circular if you use the Camino de las Cañas which also arrives at las Cruces, close to the centre.

The PR A-241 from Genalguacil to Jubrique is situated north of the village of the starting point and crosses the river which is already familiar to the visitor, the Monardilla. You can also walk there and back, following the signs along the Loma de Benajarón. The PR A-242 from Genalguacil to Los Reales is a long track which turns into a road. It is considered ideal for mountain biking and it partially coincides with our GR for only a few metres at km 1.8, at Puerto de la Loma.

The walk which does coincide with the GR quite a lot is the circular walk of Puerto del Lentisco. Until a flat area on the mountain slope they coincide entirely as it is evident from the yellow and white path markings. From this point though, which is also the maximum altitude point, the alternative route described above heads direction west again, towards Almárchal along the Loma de Benestepar

and returns to Genalguacil using a walk called Vereda de la Cuesta de lo Rozado.

As far as traditional paths and rights of way are concerned, the main "camino tradicional" is the one which leads from Genalguacil to Casares connecting the passes of Lentisco and Las Viñas. These are used almost point by point, except where you walk through Los Montes del Duque. In the middle part of the walk which coincides with the Montes del Duque property there is a triangle of livestock paths between the above-mentioned passes and the area of Pepes and Molino de los Zaharames. The two caminos with destination Benarrabá start here and they separate as they cross the river Genal, on their way to the two mountain passes. Additionally, there are a couple of paths which lead to the famed Baños del Duque, to the west of the route and at the base of Sierra Bermeja. Lastly, there is a path which unites Estepona with Gaucín and ends up at Puerto de los Guardas, having passed through the Monte de La Acedía which forms part of stage 29.

Already in the vicinity of Casares, el Paraje Natural de Sierra Crestellina boasts a walk which leads along the Paraje's peaks, called Crestellina Natural. It starts at the road, leads uphill along a partially paved track (the same one which is used by the GR-249 on its way down) and in Puerto de las Viñas heads for a mountain refuge and arrives at Mirador de la Cosalba, direction south. Then it leads down to the road and completes the circle. This walk is offered by the Casares Town Hall as Ruta Circular Número 1, sign-posted and marked with informational panels. This walk is joined by another one forming an extensive network which will be described in the next stage where the network shares the natural environment with the GR.

GR-249 Gran Senda de Málaga

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

Sierra Bermeja harbours a small water basin in its western flank. The GR-249 visits it during the current stage. Many gorges have their origins in the imposing peridotitic mass, in the long string of peaks formed by Los Reales to the south, and Puerto de Peñas Blancas, Cerro de la Herradura, Alto del Porrejón and Cerro Nicola completing the chain in the north. All of the gorges lead to the Almárchal river before the point where the GR fords it, except for the ravine of Arroyo de la Pasada which joins it lower down.

The major watercourses are Arroyo del Estercal, Arroyo del Quejigo, la Garganta del Algarrobo (which comes down from the pinsapar of los Reales) and Arroyo de la Cueva del Vaque (or de Vázquez) which enters from south-east exactly where it intersects with the Great Málaga Path at the Charco de la Vega. El Almárchal is an important river both because of its length and the volume of water it carries. Actually, there are mills and gardens along its entire length and it supports a healthy population of Chub (*Squalius malacitanus*), a species which has been recently described as endemic to the province and specifically the rivers around Sierra Bermeja.

The river Almárchal flows into the Genal in a spot which, again, is familiar to the Gran Senda de Málaga already, a place called el Prado de la Escribana.

Genalguacil from the Vallivana house



All of these mountain streams support a lot of aquatic invertebrates, where one needs to highlight the Dragon and Damselflies; their habitat is also frequently visited by the Dipper. This also occurs in another watercourse, Arroyo de los Zaharames, in the very heart of Monte del Duque formed by Garganta de los Baños and Garganta de la Cuesta ravines (the latter one is more to the south). The importance of the water basin of this stream lies in the splendid Portuguese oak grove it harbours, visible from many vantage points provided by the walk on the way down to the ford and then on the way up.

The predominant vegetation around the rivers and streams where the GR crosses them is composed of oleanders, willows, reeds and, most of all, tamarisks. The expanse and bareness of the main watercourses is striking; it is due to their torrential nature during the rainy season, proliferation of old cultivated vegas and the hostile nature of the travertine rock devoid of soil. The tiny streams on the other hand tend

to be covered with a dense Mediterranean scrub where brambles prosper.

Starting from the Puerto de los Guardas the schist terrain turns to limestone and thus there is a change in the hydrological nature of the surface. El Arroyo de Albarrán flows along the bottom of a steep ravine down to Casares. Half-way on the Camino de las Viñas there is a lowering where the water supply for Casares is located. A little lower down you arrive at the Fuente de la Arqueta (or Arquita), which, together with the Fuente de Carlos III at the end of this stage, constitute the remaining components of a water supply system financed by the king nicknamed "the hygienist", in 1785, by the means of ceramic channels with gravity pumps and a network of siphons. La Fuente de la Plaza de España, destination point of this channelling system is one of the most beloved monuments by the Casares inhabitants due to its history and unique architecture of the construction made of sandstone blocks.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» The Río Almárchal basin

The walk starts in Genalguacil heading east from the Mirador de los Poyetes (or de la Lomilla), and is surrounded by sculptures. First metres lead through the Cerecillo area along a faint path which crosses a lovely population of acanthus tucked away at a small stream very close to the village. Next the old camino turns into a track lined with small terraces in the steep chalk slopes where a few olives and prickly pears grow. On the escarpments, where the path used to lead, you can see Holm oaks and Cork oaks whilst the olive grove gives way to small vegetable gardens; a sign that you are arriving at the first stream, Arroyo de la Pasada (km 1.1), which you need to ford and which normally maintains a trickle of water and a few Great Yellow Gentian plants under the few

Poplars and Nettle trees. Another section of the walk passes by La Casa del Helechal with views to Genalguacil, amongst Chestnuts, Cork oaks and Almond trees, until it arrives at a dirt track which actually is the road to El Puerto de Peñas Blancas. A few metres away, at the Puerto de la Loma, the walk bears southwards along a narrower track which keeps climbing

Cork oaks on the Bañuela path



and passes on the right ruins of an old wine press and winery marked with a panel bearing the curious name of Nuestra Señora de Vallyvana, an image of Mother Mary which is actually worshiped in Morella (Castellón).

The first vantage point of the path is the Loma de las Posteruelas, where the olive grove co-habits with Holm oaks and ruins of houses and huts. As you start walking downhill, there is a gate which leads to a couple of good viewpoints to the pueblos of the Bajo Genal (Genalguacil, Algatocín, Benarrabá and Gaucín with its castle called Castillo del Águila), in the shade of Maritime pines. Behind a bend, the broad landscape you can see (km 2.4) consists of Sierra Bermeja ahead, with the sharp silhouettes of Spanish Fir trees and telecommunications antennas on top of the reddish summits; towards south-east is the Loma de Benestepar where there is an ancient depopulated Moorish settlement.

Pass through a gate and embark upon a spectacular descent amongst ancient Cork oaks. The path, deeply enclosed between chalk and quartz, is the Cuesta de la Bañuela. Now there are good views over to the Río Almárchal valley, with the striking ranch at the Vega de Don Juan with its perfectly circular front pavement. Then the path gets a little wilder as it turns west and passes by a sunny rocky slope which is tremendously steep. The old livestock path, at times its sides protected by retaining dry stone walls, passes goat sheds at the Mandanga (or las Madres) and takes you to the meeting point of the Almárchal river and the ravine Garganta de la Cueva del Vaque, where a striking rocky outcrop marks the Charco de la Vega (km 3.5).

Having waded across the river and gone through another gate, immediately abandon the little access track to la Vega de los Almeces and el Cortijo de la Vainilla, and find again the old path which goes up through the Paraje de



Vega del Almárchal, La Mandanga or Las Madres

las Rozas. This path soon runs into a broad track which surrounds a house and vegetable gardens in a shady Cork oak grove, and continues along. The Cork oak and Portuguese gall oak woods cover these slopes together with their cohort of lentiscs, Spiny broom, Mock privet, Tree heath, Mediterranean buckthorn and Polipodium and other ferns, especially around Arroyo de la Zarza, which you should be able to ford without any problems. A little later the forest contains Cork oaks on both sides of the path where the size of the trees is surprising. From here you are able to see the white village of Genalguacil again, especially when you get close to another landmark of the day, El Puerto del Lentisco (km 6.0).

» La Alharía

Three paths arrive at Puerto del Lentisco from Genalguacil. Apart from the above-mentioned one, the most evident one is the path which leads straight down to the pueblo, slightly direction north-east, descending along the Vereda del Calvo and ascending along the Cuesta de lo Rozado. The other walk uses the main track of Loma de Benestepar, which heads north-west in a curve then descends to the Almárchal and goes up along the same path as the previous walk. However, you need to make a half-turn and head south along abroad track which leads along all the numerous houses in the midst of a Cork oak wood. Little by little the landscape is



El Río Almárcal con Las Posteruelas y La Bañuela

opening up towards your right where you can gaze at the poplars of the Genal river and the vegas of los Pepes, la Gamona and los Lobos amongst the tree mass. Two outstanding masses of limestone rock close the valley off to the south-west and mark an end to the Serranía de Ronda, Sierra Crestellina on the left and on the other side of the river behind Gaucín, el Hacho. There are some orange groves and access roads to the many different houses continue, somewhat separate from the main track and boasting a diversity of construction styles.

There are three tiny streams before you reach La Alharía: la Fuente del Gas, el Arroyo de los Adrianes and Los Caldereros. The three of them are quite meagre but in the middle of the two last ones there are some of the wine-presses where the local liquor "aguardiente" used to be produced. They are located at an intersection of locally significant paths. Thus you reach the Puerto de Barrionuevo, passing by a hillock on your right. Behind it there are the main buildings of La Alharía, (or Ajería, as it is shown on older maps).

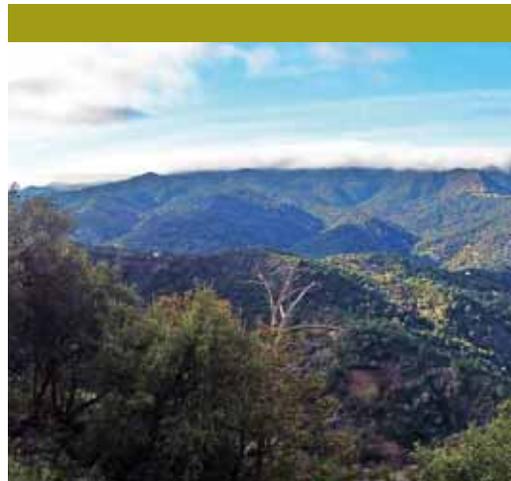
A little further there is a many-branched

intersection of forest tracks where you abandon el Camino de Casares, which you see continuing straight ahead along very dense wood. Take the zigzag leading west and this way you arrive at the edge of Monte del Duque.

» Los Montes del Duque

This hunting estate with over 2.000 hectares of land where the quite abundant wild boar roam, together with Red Deer, Mouflon, (very scarce) Roe Deer and Fallow Deer, occupies mainly the basin of the Arroyo de los Zaharames and the Garganta de las Alberquillas, more to the south, bordered along the west-east axis by the Genal and Sierra Bermeja respectively.

The walk through the estate starts by descending along a sharp ridge which is also the property line where an access road has cut the old path in two, whose bends appear on both sides. The area being exposed to sunshine as it faces south makes the Cork oak, Maritime pine and thick scrub of quite tall Gum cistus prosper. There are a couple of examples of large Cork oaks and then a ruin on your left, half way along the path which leads to a more open area from where you can see the bends and fluvial plains of the Arroyo de los



Aljarames. This is a name with deep Andalusí (Moorish- Andalusí) roots many of which appear often in the area. Reach the tamarisk thickets and reed beds at the ford which had been adapted in the past by adding a thick tree trunk which still can be useful to ford the stream in high water season. Access a wider track on your left, with a heathland and avocado trees surrounding it. If you decided to discover how the river Genal flows through these lands you would have needed to take a detour to your right before and passed through el Molino de los Zaharames with its spectacular acequia and a deep natural pool in a tamarisk clump. There is an old suspended bridge which allows you to cross the river to los Pepes.

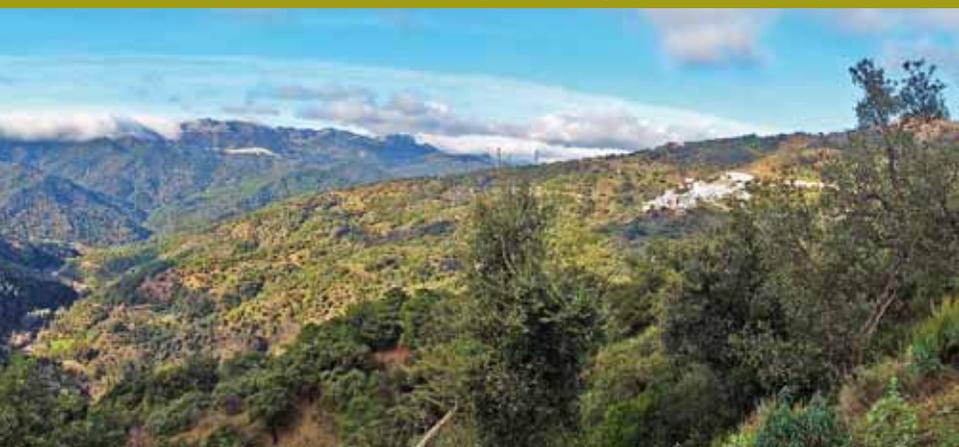
Having ignored this option, you must abandon the forest track soon and go through another gate to Monte del Duque walking along a road which has branched off the path. You are again walking southwards. Los Zaharames are at very low altitude of 130 metres above sea level and they mark km 9.5 of the walk. This isn't a bad rest stop, considering that the walker is warned here about the long 7.5 km of a climb leading to el Puerto de las Viñas (640 m) and more than 500 metres of gradient.

The next easily identifiable landmark is la Huerta de Crespillo, a fertile ledge where some citrus fruits are protected by an old ruined house. Here another great walk through mature scrubland begins; it is recommended to undertake this section by making stops where the terrain requires them.

The first excuse to stop is a little forest of Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*) hugging the Strawberry Trees in the shady sharp bends of the track. Arriving at la Ensellada del Amolador, a small col over a slope, you will have river Genal to the west and the Garganta de la Cuesta to the east, flowing in opposite directions. There is another steep slope where the many bends help conquer it, called Cuerda de los Coloradillos, due to the reddish colour of the ground.

Normally during this ascent the top of the slope is passed by on your left. There are some clearings along the watershed where the views open up to the west (Gaucín and Castillo del Águila) and east (Sierra Bermeja). This is especially remarkable around an old forest guard house which can be found at km 11.5, where the steep slope levels out a bit. The dehesas of large Cork oaks continue, but you enter an area of Portuguese gall oaks past a junction when you pass a shady

Broad views of Genal Bajo with Genalguacil in the foreground and Benalauría and Algatocín to the right





Valle del Almárcchal and Sierra Bermeja

area underneath a hillock of El Puerto Paloma. Amongst the handsome grove of Portuguese oaks there are heaths and a few striking large Myrtle bushes. Coming back to the sunny side of the slope, past a junction with its distinctive large chalky rock, there is an excellent natural viewpoint to the northern bastion of the Sierra Crestellina on the other side of la Garganta de la Alberquilla ravine. Next, a flatter area starts which has been taken advantage of by the estate workers to restore a building known as el Cuartel (km 13.7), create a chapel, build some storage and a helipad.

The itinerary, always respectful of the private property of Monte del Duque, also passes, by, away from the track, the offices and main residence of the large livestock refuge called la Majada de Madrid, enclosed by a row of hedges and Cipreses. There are also very well developed specimens of Cork and Portuguese gall oak here. The traditional cork harvest in this estate was the motive behind the construction of warehouses annexed to the house known as the Raspadero, where cork sheets are cut, piled up for storage and then transported out of the mountains.

» Sierra Crestellina and el Arroyo del Albarrán

You are still on an incline, although much less steep, Sierra Crestellina is getting closer and you access an important “communication hub”: the pass called El Puerto de los Guardas. It is easy to identify as from this vantage point you can see clearly for the first time, the sea, which is the traditional destination of this path, towards Estepona walking down La Acedía. Our path, however, keeps on climbing a little and comes out at El Monte del Duque leading to a gate next to a private track.

At the Puerto de las Viñas (km 17.1) there is an information panel awaiting you, which announces the end of the Crestellina Natural walk, where motor traffic is banned as this is the very beginning of the Natural Area, the Paraje Natural. El Camino de las Viñas begins now to descend using a track with a surface of loose rocks which passes by Arroyo del Albarrán on the right and the contours of mountain ridges which accompany the path direction south.

A ruin between Arroyo de Caldereros and los Adrianes



Country houses appear on the left and on the right; some of them have very emotive names written on the entrance gates you can see while you walk along a low area where there is a water outlet for Casares. The stream keeps getting more overgrown with pines, Cork oaks, Holm oaks, Wild olives. The Great Málaga Path keeps getting higher away from the bottom of the valley. Finally, you catch a glimpse of Casares ahead. The village has been built amongst cliffs and sharp peaks, and the Mediterranean in the background. This natural viewpoint and the following rest stop with a feel of foreign lands give access to Fuente de la Arqueta (or de la Arquita).

Now what you have left to do is to arrive at the by-pass road to Casares, cross it and follow the streets southwards towards the centre of the village, la Plaza de España, where the four spouts of la Fuente de Carlos III mark the end of this stage and start of the next one. ○



Sierra Bermeja and Montes del Duque on an autumn day



The abandoned Huerta de Crespillo located within a private estate

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Genalguacil, C/ Real Mirador de los Poyetes, street	30S 0299874 4046656	530 m	2 Ford across Arroyo de la Pasada	30S 0300592 4046237	430 m
3 Mirador de Genalguacil, Algatocín, Benarrabá and Gaucín, viewpoint	30S 0299857 4045613	527 m	4 Mirador de Sierra Bermeja, viewpoint	30S 0299803 4045512	503 m
5 Ford across Río Almárchal in la Mandanga	30S 029912 4044871	273 m	6 Puerto del Lentisco, pass	30S 0298846 4044840	400 m
7 Pass and houses of la Alharía	30S 0298196 4043726	389 m	8 Ford across Arroyo de los Zaharames (or Aljarames)	30S 0297090 4043966	133 m
9 Orange groves at the Huerta Crespillo	30S 0297002 4043810	184 m	10 Ensilada del Amolador	30S 0297043 4043380	284 m
11 Mirador de Gaucín y Sierra Bermeja, viewpoint	30S 0297149 4042950	356 m	12 Mirador del Paraje Natural de Sierra Crestellina, viewpoint	30S 0297390 4041545	461 m
13 El Cuartel de los Montes del Duque	30S 0297618 4041157	540 m	14 Majada de Madrid	30S 0297583 4040154	553 m
15 Puerto de los Guardas, pass	30S 0296687 4039035	575 m	16 Puerto de la Viñas and access to Crestellina Natural	30S 0296543 4038751	638 m
17 Mirador de Casares and el Estrecho de Gibraltar, viewpoint	30 S 0296174 4036838	476 m	18 Finish point at the Plaza de España de Casares	30S 0296273 4035607	365 m



The bulk of Sierra Bermeja from the Mirador de La Acedia

The Gran Senda de Málaga and the Western Costa del Sol

» The exceptional climate at the foot of the Baetic Mountains

Stages 29 to 35 of the Great Málaga Path cover the coastal fringe between the districts of Casares and Málaga, passing through the boundaries of Estepona, Marbella, Ojén, Mijas, Benalmádena and Alhaurín de la Torre. Other than the majority of the afore-mentioned places, the Region of Western Costa del Sol generally includes Manilva, Benahavis and Torremolinos. These are villages not included in the GR-249, or their itinerary is very short.

Geographical features of this region give it a lot of character and make it enormously attractive from many different points of view. Namely, there are two coastal arches, one open to the south-east and the other to the south. The first one harbours two coves called Ensenada de Estepona and Marbella located between Puntas de la Chullera and bordering with Cádiz province, and the system of capes: Cabo de Ladreros and Calaburra. Both coves

are separated by the Punta de Baños. A third bay opens to the west from the mouth of Río Fuengirola, Bahía de Fuengirola, whilst to the east it is bordered by Punta Negra and the mouth of Río Guadalhorce. The land platform is narrow, about 5 kilometres wide in average and between 150 and 200 metros of maximum depth.

In the north it is the mountain range which shapes the last southernmost bastion of the Cordillera Bética closing the whole complex and softening the effects of the cold northern winds. From west to east there are the Sierras de Crestellina, Bermeja (both partially protected as Natural Area or Paraje Natural), Blanca, Alpujata and de Mijas, distinguished by a line of summits over 1.000 metros high and reaching the maximum height of 1.452 metros at the peak of los Reales de Sierra Bermeja. The mountain chain is more or less continuous, separating The Costa del Sol from neighbouring regions of La Serranía de Ronda, La Sierra de las Nieves and Valle del Guadalhorce.

This geographical portrait is completed by describing the limits established by the valleys of the two large Malaga rivers: Guadiaro along the western flank and Guadalhorce along the eastern side.

» A very special area from nature's point of view

Another particular feature is the succession of sierras of very different lithology. Generally speaking, marble massifs (metamorphic dolomite limestone) alternate with peridotite (igneous plutonic rock) in a lucky and exceptional geological mosaic from a scientific point of view. Such heterogeneity of the substratum also leads to the existence of many mining facilities. Very few of them are active. They used to extract metal minerals or talcum as well as sandstones and marble for the construction business.

The mountain range of highest altitude and covers the biggest area is the peridotitic mass

of Sierra Bermeja. It includes smaller ranges such as Palmera, Apretaderas and Real. On the other side of Río Verde, eastwards, there are the dolomites of Sierra Blanca of Marbella, Istán y Ojén. Next, peridotites make an appearance again in the Sierra Alpujata, together with the Sierras Negra and Parda. Another white sierra composed of dolomite concludes the lithological display; it is shared by Mijas, Alhaurín de la Torre (this covers the most hectares), Alhaurín el Grande, Benalmádena, Torremolinos and Málaga.

Closeness to the Straits of Gibraltar places the western tip of Málaga at the crossroads of Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean and two continents, Africa and Europe. This, plus the geological complexity and mountainous character creates favourable conditions for the existence of interesting biodiversity which is also reflected in the changing landscapes.

The peaks of Sierra Bermeja preserve forests which are relics of severe past climates. The Pinsapar (Spanish fir forest) combines the rarity of an endemic Andalusian tree and its location on top of peridotitic rock which is almost exclusively found in Málaga province. This is one of the three Spanish Fir (*Abies pinsapo*) forests in the world, and this one is considered to have the most genetic diversity but it also takes up less space and is subject to more hostile environment.

The tree which covers the largest area in hectares is the Maritime or Black pine (*Pinus pinaster*). There has been a mention of a variety of the Maritime pine which when growing in one of the two peridotitic massifs, becomes a dominant species. There are also pine woods of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) and Stone pine (*Pinus pinea*). Many of the pine woods are original native ones. However the disastrous forest fires consume this resinous type of wood and many areas need to be reforested. Like in case of the pines, there are species of Mediterranean scrub which withstand the fire well; however so far there are no strategies to use that fact directly.

Quartz crystals on the side of the path



The visitors will be able to familiarise themselves first hand with places charred on different occasions and check for themselves the tenacity of the cistus, Mediterranean Dwarf palms, lentiscs, juniper and broom.

Amongst the larger animals around these peaks there is the Spanish Ibex, an ungulate which is exclusive to the Iberian Peninsula and very well adapted to life between rocks. It is quite easy to see it in certain circumstances. However the large raptors are also quite conspicuous and have a good presence on the Costa del Sol, both rook-dwelling ones and ones favouring wooded areas. The latter ones are especially frequent in Holm oak; Cork oak and Portuguese gall oak woods. These trees are recovering slowly the habitat they had lost in favour of the pines and prosper in favourable areas, especially on schist and chalk.

La Gran Senda de Málaga takes you to special habits as well, where limited distribution species occur and which often have their main if not unique, habitats in the world. Although they will be mentioned further along in the chapters of this book it is worth mentioning here the ones which are easiest to find and which are also very striking, such as the *Linaria clementei*, *Stachelina baetica*, *Arenaria capillipes*, or *Genista lanuginosa*.

» The Southern Water Basin

The mountain chain along the coast cuts off possibility of any collective water drainage to the south. In the north here are two water basins which receive the water, Guadiaro and Guadalhorce. The very many rivers which flow into the Mediterranean directly should be considered very special for many reasons. Particularly the ones whose headwaters are located in the so-called sierra parda, brown mountains, as they tend to be permanent and are longer. The outstanding rivers to mention are: Padrón, Castor, Guadalmanza, Guadalmina, Guadaiza, Río Verde and Fuengirola. They maintain stable population of fish, including a very special species in Andalucía, which has two of its three known locations in those rivers, the Freshwater Blenny. The river deltas are amongst the many attractions which the next stages have to offer. As humble as the mouth of a river can seem as a tourist area, these deltas attract an interesting community of birdwatchers. In order to birdwatch in the deltas, you must come prepared as there are numerous waders, ducks, gulls and other waterfowl strolling along the estuaries, visiting the cliffs and beaches, and, on some occasions and for the particular species, it is feasible to get close to them.

A millrace used now as a small pool





The coastal sands harbour such plants as *Lotus creticus*

» Human Influence on the Costa del Sol

The description at the beginning of the Topoguide of the eastern Costa del Sol can be also applied to its western part. The very little land that the coastal mountain chain leaves for housing construction caused Roman settlers to occupy the deltas of the big rivers, the only places where agriculture was possible. The sea has not always been a pleasant place to settle down; there has been a tremendously turbulent period during the andalusí domination (let's not forget the Moors penetrated Iberian Peninsula around here) and from the 15th century the largest number of fortifications and towers have been built, they dot the surroundings of some of the proposed itineraries.

A separate mention must be made about the iron and steel industry which, in the 19th and 20th centuries established their first Spanish facilities in these sierras based on the resources

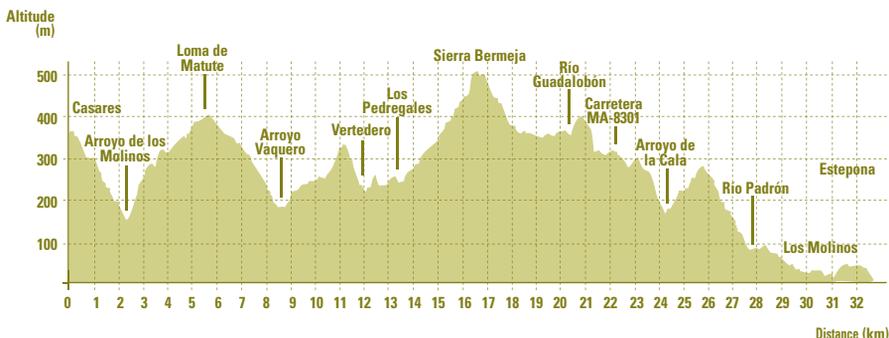
such as lead and iron, also forests and river waters. Nevertheless, the base triangle of production: dry and irrigated farming, fishing, and animal husbandry have been active since not that long ago. However, the construction boom which attracted everyone's attention to the area (due to the so-called construction bubble) at the beginning of 21st century has marred the old natural splendour of the place.

The GR-249 will take you to these primeval places both at the sea level, along the string of dunes, beaches and cliffs as well as the nearby sierras; alternating coastal and mountain stages. The GR will not omit, however, letting the walker see all the urban construction examples which have been created because of the Costa del Sol since its came into existence and was attributed to the Malaga coast in the second part of the 20th century.

29 CASARES • ESTEPONA

Sierra Bermeja and the Costa del Sol

 ESTIMATED TIME
10 hours 25 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	32.8	Accumulated ascent	915	Final altitude	11
Ascent km	11.5	Accumulated descent	1.285	Maximum altitude	515
Descent km	14.6	Maximum difference	505	Minimum altitude	10
Flat km	6.7	Altitude at starting point	365	Average altitude	275

» Summary of this Stage «

Although originally the traditional Camino de Estepona might have been used to connect the village with the city in a straight line, when it was asphalted it was also a good reason to include other walks in it, which lead predominantly east but continue taking quite large detours and this way they achieve a very mountainous itinerary with steep sections uphill and downhill.

Although you may not associate such walking with the Costa del Sol, it should be enough to gaze at the massif of Sierra Bermeja to get an idea of the difficult walking and stark landscapes which await you. All this is added to an itinerary of lithological diversity which is truly surprising. Before it climbs up to the sierra, the Great Málaga Path follows a series of wide curves to discover the clay-based farmland, “bujeos” of the Arroyo de los Molinos de Casares and the schist of La Acedía. After a long itinerary uphill and following the southern skirt of the Sierra Bermeja, you make a sharp turn southwards and back to walking on metamorphic acid rocks; then finally you tread the sandy soils which surround Estepona.

The distances seem to multiply during this stage due to the constant ins and outs the paths have to perform as they are forced to cross the many streams; some streams are seasonal and some permanent. This mostly happens in the middle of the stage.

							
2	2	2	5	6.6	20.9	5.3	x 6

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

Without a doubt the best of this stage is the heterogeneity of its type of soils and the following diversity of plants and human activities. The great feature of this stage is a truly rare rock around the world, plutonic in nature and originating from the Earth's many layers, the peridotite. The appearance of this great ball of magma changed the whole lithological environment it got in touch with, causing the creation of metamorphic marbles, schist and chalk.

The view that the traveller will have of the western Costa del Sol will be surprising thanks to a privileged location of a watch tower which the walker will see for the first time along the GR-249. The broad bay Bahía de Estepona below and the sharp profiles of the African Rif Mountains and Straits of Gibraltar to south-west accompany the walk almost at every moment, whenever you are higher up, abounding in great spots for sunsets.

Faced with the construction vortex of the coast which, fortunately hasn't been as destructive around Estepona, Manilva and Casares as it was in other areas, the walk takes you many times to places where there are still surviving traditional gardens, working farms and old mills dotting the banks of rivers and streams which flow towards the south surrounded with such richness of flora and fauna that it could seem more appropriate in other places.

- **Starting point:** Calle de la Carrera, very close to Plaza de España, in the village of Casares.
- **Access to starting point:** Casares is very close to the coastline with its motorways Autovías A-7 y AP-7. You can arrive directly using the motorways via the MA-8300 road or connecting from Manilva, the A-377 which goes to Gaucín and then taking the A-7150. Estepona can be reached from Casares directly via a road with no official number which splits off the MA-8300 and passes through Los Pedregales.
- **Finish point:** A little footbridge of Paseo Marítimo de Estepona over the Río de la Cala, in the eastern part of Playa de la Cala.
- **Access to finish point:** The relevant roads are Autovía A-7 and the Autopista de Peaje AP-7, there is also a direct road from Serranía de Ronda which arrives in the centre of Estepona coming from Jubrique and which is used by the Gran Senda de Málaga during one section, the MA-8301.
- **Possible "escape routes":** It is worth knowing that the 29, being such a long and hard stage, has good escape routes on both sides of the roads it crosses. Towards Casares you proceed to the left on the first section of the tarmac. The second section of the tarmac takes you down to Estepona. In the middle, the best point to abandon the walk, also proposed as possible point where you can divide the stage in two, is the Parque de Los Pedregales (km 13.5).
- **No return point:** The only section to keep in mind is the Sierra Bermeja, given the above-mentioned escape routes. There, once you have gone up the highest point of the itinerary, it still doesn't matter if you continue or go back. Once you arrive at the track again it is recommended that you continue. In the final section, however, once the tracks start leading downhill again it is best to continue, following them to the end, as they get you closer and closer to Estepona.
- **Maps:** Use the map **1071-II** (Casares) and **1072-I** (Estepona).
- **District boundaries:** Up to km 12.7 you are in district boundaries of Casares just as you arrive to the Parque de Los Pedregales, in front of the industrial estate.

• Enjoy the walk safely

A stage of this length and difficulty level needs to be carefully planned. Fortunately, and as stated above, there are many escape routes and also a possibility of dividing the walk into two legs. The two road sections are short, without too much traffic and generally the visibility is good. This doesn't mean you shouldn't take care when walking along these sections. The country tracks have even less traffic. Perhaps the Acedía and Valle del Padrón can possibly get a bit busier.

The many streams you need to cross do not tend to pose any danger and any bigger watercourses are rather token ones. There is no possibility to stock up on water unless you take a detour to Parque de Los Pedregales, a public area of Estepona. What you do need to address is the possibility of sunstroke in Sierra Bermeja, which faces south and is virtually devoid of shade along the deforested areas.

High voltage power lines, which keep the GR company in the sierra, could be potentially dangerous. You must not touch the electricity towers under any circumstances, especially during rain or thunderstorms.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

From Casares there are many walks towards Sierra Crestellina, which do not affect this stage, and towards Río Manilva and los Baños de la Hedionda, which are below the pueblo. The latter coincide with the Gran Senda de Málaga entirely or in parts.

The GR leaves from Casares the same way as the PR A-163 Casares-Estepona. Up to the Cerro de la Horca, just as you start walking, they coincide, but then the walk which connects the villages splits off to the left and comes back to the GR at Loma de Matute, sign-posed as leading to Cortijo del Robledal and then as it leads below it is marked with an information panel of Cerro de los Higos, in the opposite direction to the Gran Senda. This PR passes through la Puerta de los Pedregales, which makes it one of the circular options.

Again at the beginning of the stage, it is sign-posted as SL 8 la Ruta del Camino de Jimena, which leads to the right from Puerto de la Cruz. Right at the beginning there is an information panel for the suggested walk.

The PR A-162 Manilva-Casares leads downhill on a track from the last village and the GR-249 abandons it close to the ford of Arroyo de los Molinos, at a gate, when the two walks have covered 2.1 km together.

This gate has a sign explaining a local programme to sign-post walks; one of them continues together with the GR. It is called Ruta 2 Arroyo Hondo-Los Molinos and it is described in the opposite direction to the GR. There are other similar walks, 9 of them in total. One of these walks also leads to Arroyo Hondo (northwards) and coincides with the GR at the road access.

The next advertised walk is called SL 3 Pasada del Pino-La Acedía. Like the other 8, it hasn't been officially approved by the Federación Andaluza de Montañismo although it uses a similar colour scheme for sign-posting. In this case the proposed walk is circular and coincides with the Gran Senda when it runs along the Barranco de La Acedía; however they are also described in opposite directions. The two walks separate at the end of a forest track in the Monte Público de La Acedía, turning into paths.

The PR A-164 is the code for Estepona-Los Reales walk and it starts where the PR Casares-Estepona ends. It crosses the Gran Senda along a ridge which ascends boldly from the coast after you ford the Guadalobón. Both itineraries meet at km 20.

Finally, the GR-92 E-12 Senda del Mediterráneo leads from Almería to Málaga along the coast and as you are finishing this stage, willy-nilly you will cross that path. This gives the GR-249 walker the possibility of covering the only part of the Costa del Sol, eastwards, which is not described in the main itinerary, the section corresponding to the districts of Casares and Manilva up to Punta Chullera.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The only adapted drinking fountain that is known along this stage is located, as no surprise, between the dolomites and sandstone along the camino which goes down to Casares. This is the Fuente de Santa Catalina, hidden away to your right where an old convent (later converted to barracks) and many shelters dating back to various eras all testify to the importance of this water source. As a curiosity and a very common practice to avoid the accumulation of algae and insects someone has added fish to the water source from the nearby river and you can see them if you approach stealthily to see them hide away in the opening where the water is coming out.

The rivers and streams you discover during this stage have their own idiosyncrasies which are the cause behind treating them here as a separate basin, which flows in to Mediterranean directly. These are short watercourses but surprisingly not as seasonal as one could expect because of their lack of length and their steep gradient. This is mainly due to the hydrological characteristics of the peridotite, schist and gneiss of Sierra Bermeja. The exception is the Arroyo de los Molinos, which is a karstic spring with a significant volume of water.

The Arroyo de los Molinos flows along a narrow limestone gully at the level of Molino de Arriba. There are tall poplars, reeds, brambles and important plants for the local popular culture such as the Great Yellow Gentian and watercress. The stream, as its course develops along the way and downstream, continuously supports such structures as the mill, until the point where, together with other tributaries, it flows into the Garganta de la Sierra de la Utrera to come out as Río Manilva in the famous sulphurous Baños de la Hedionda. As mentioned before, a link to a PR footpath lends the Gran Senda an opportunity to access this recommended site not only because of its natural value but also historical and ethnological significance.

» The Streams and Rivers de Sierra Bermeja

The remaining streams and rivers follow the above description and their origin does not tend to be of limestone nature despite that all of the cross marble terrain at some moment. At the Barranco de La Acedía you ford the first stream, Arroyo Vaquero, with certain amount of water which can even support some stable populations of fish. This is the southernmost of the streams which are influenced by the Sierra Bermeja, given that it comes from a col situated between this Paraje Natural and the one of Sierra Crestellina, the well-known Puerto de las Guardas. Upstream from the Acedía, this pretty grove whose gardens and residences are supplied with water by the stream is given the name of Garganta de los Palos on maps.

In the vicinity of the landfill, El Vertedero Comarcal you must for the stream which significant amount of water compared to the size of its bed. There is a rubber pipe supplying water to a tank just above the landfill. Typical vegetation of such watercourses is composed of oleanders, rushes and frequently, the still natural pools contain pond skaters and water beetles. This and the next arroyo which carries more water, is more enclosed and also has its own subterranean water outlet (flowing to Parque de Los Pedregales) form together the Arroyo de Enmedio, which can be

The high walls of Convento de Santa Catalina



seen from the first vantage points of the stage, as it leads away towards the sea.

Next there are torrential watercourses, normally dry, which fill with water in rainy season; the white raging waters are caused by the steepness and rockiness of the terrain. These are headwaters of Arroyo de la Miel and Arroyo de los Polvitos. The following streams are bigger, the Barranco de las Minas and, above all, Río Guadalobón, which the previous stream flows into as a tributary. The volume of water carried by the Guadalobón is quite significant even at this altitude; it supports a beautiful natural pool at the foot of a great waterfall a few meters away from the walk. Below, in the valley, you can see a few ruins surrounded by the remnants of a dense forest, protected by the river bed.

At the ford of Arroyo de la Cala, having crossed the second road, the walker will discover a pretty stream amongst reed beds and willows which emerges from a small schist gully. It is not the first time you will be crossing this stream. As the walk descends, the GR-249 gets close to two watercourses as their flow becomes calmer due to more level terrain. If there is a curious section along this walk, it would definitely be the narrow isthmus separating the Valle del Río Padrón from Arroyo de la Cala; it is a narrow strip of chalky ground which the track follows. On the left, El Padrón proves to be a generous river as its waters are used for gardens and fruit trees, some of them subtropical ones thanks to the mild climate.

Watercress growing in the crystal-clear waters of Arroyo de los Molinos



This is one of the most significant rivers in the area, rich in fish and associated aquatic fauna; it also maintains a dense thicket of tamarisks and willows. At times, during the dry season, it disappears because of the many irrigation channels draining it; it reappears lower down, recuperated.

However, the star feature of the day is the Arroyo de la Cala which you follow for quite a stretch, having to cross it several times which doesn't pose any particular difficulties. It is quite easy to see Barbel and Chub in its waters when allowed by the depth of the natural pools and the dense vegetation. The name of Camino de los Molinos is due to a series of hydraulic mills which dot the path; some have been restored, some are ruined and one has been used as a swimming pool for a holiday home. They are named using ordinal numbers and you can see the Fifth mill up to the Second one at the last ford of Arroyo de la Cala.

And as if to claim its importance back, lost at the end of the itinerary, this humble watercourse arrives at the very place which as given it its name: la Cala de Estepona, and constitutes the end of the stage at the Paseo Marítimo.

The first ravine shelters a great diversity of vegetation



WALK DESCRIPTION

» El Arroyo de los Molinos

The long and demanding itinerary starts at Calle Carrera, where the birth place of Blas Infante is, and passes through Plaza de España, with its curious 18th century Carlos III fountain. You then walk down Calle Juan Cerón and leave the village through Calle Molino, in the south part of the white village of Casares which boasts a few viewpoints. The first intersection of the tracks is in a somewhat deteriorated area due to an old mine which used to take advantage of the local dolomite rocks, leaving little passage ways and holes behind, now occupied by stacks of unused materials, a slaughterhouse and lots of opportunist vegetation.

The Cerro de la Horca (noose hill), an unfortunate name reminiscing the actions of the Spanish Inquisition and similar events later in the history, is a limestone hillock on top of which the new cemetery is being constructed, circular in shape and similar to the famous Castillo de Casares. This is an intersection of the tracks from where some of the recommended local walks depart; to the right towards Jimena de la Frontera and el Río Guadiaro, and to the left the PR A-163 (Casares-Estepona).

The walk heads direction south and coincides at the beginning with the PR A-162 (Manilva Casares, Ruta de los Molinos). In a very short section you transit from the typical of Casares dolomite terrain to the “bujeo” clay type soil which is a result of the intrusion of the “Flyscht del Aljibe” rock. Exactly where the two types of the rock meet a tiny water source emerges called Fuente de Santa Catalina. Sheltered by the water there are some surviving water reservoirs from many different eras and the solid stone block walls with brick finish belonging to the old barracks of the Carabineers, which had been a Convent prior to that.

The landscape is dominated by sandy soil where Wild olives, Lentisc, and Carob trees thrive as they are specialists in struggling against such terrain, plus a fig tree here and there and a couple of almond trees. The piles of rock called “majanos” (piles remaining after clearing the land) are mainly boulders of “aljibe” sandstone which gives you a good hint of the genesis of the surrounding slopes. At km 2 where there is a sign-posted PR A-164 to Estepona, turn east and leave the wide track for good (which leads to the recommended PR walk to los Baños de la Hedionda). According to the paperwork available at Federación Andaluza de Montaña, this sign contains an error: the PR A-164 is the one which ascends Los Reales from Estepona and the walk Casares-Estepona does not pass through here; instead it stays around Cerro de la Horca, as mentioned before.

Next you arrive at a privileged site, el Arroyo de los Molinos, the first forerunner of Río Manilva. Out of translucent waters, and coming out of a



Casares and Sierra Crestellina from a farmhouse on the way

Extensive "bujeos" between Casares and the coast



karstic enclosure there is an irrigation channel which flows into the nearby Molino de Arriba, which boasts a few water outlets, and is well preserved. The channel continues to the next water mill but the walk crosses it above the mill and starts a climb where the path penetrates the thick scrub growing in the clay soil where the usual species are enriched by Spiny broom, Mediterranean Dwarf Palm tree and Broad-leaved Phillyrea or privet (*Phyllirea latifolia*).

The Cortijo del Robledal, an extensive country estate mainly dedicated to pure Spanish blood horse breeding keeps the walker company for a while on both sides of the path until the first ford in the Arroyo de Pocas Libras, with its abundant brambles and tamarisks and normally dry streambed. Another ascent takes you by old mines which now have been converted into landfills. The wind generators on the side of the A-377 and the white hamlet of Casares are coming into view again.

Between the junction which marks the direction to Cerro de los Higos and another which leads to the main entrance of the Cortijo del Robledal the track which coincides with the GR is the PR headed for Estepona, which runs in the opposite direction along Loma de Matute. This string of hills have track on top which goes to the north, with country houses and gardens

on both sides, little Cork oak woods and abandoned working fields taken over by the scrub. Thus you reach the kilometre marker 9 and the MA-8300 road amongst pine trees made up of Stone pine and Gum cistus with some mature Cork oaks.

» La Acedía

You need to walk along the road for about a kilometre, but there is a must-do stop at the Mirador de Peñas Blancas, where you have a global view of the middle part of this stage which runs through La Acedía and skirts the Sierra Bermeja. There is an information panel which helps you locate the surrounding landscape to the north and east. The circular walk "Pasada del Pino-La Acedía" leads through the area, coinciding with the GR-249, it is sign-posted as two distinct PR walks despite not being officially catalogued and its main interest lies in the "muladar" which is a feeding station for carrion eating birds.

The steep slope which takes you down towards La Acedía and a good number of luxury residences at the bottom of the valley, were the reason behind paving this section of the track, which used to be an old dirt track. The winding track enters a promising-looking wood of young Cork oaks with Portuguese Cork oak and a varied scrub which lasts until the ford in the Arroyo Vaquero, featuring willows and reeds. It has sufficient water volume to support Barbels and Chubs in the deepest pools.

Gardens and residences at the Monte de La Acedía



Leaving behind the cultivated subtropical trees and gardens you embark on a climb along dirt tracks, which are less and less busy as you progress through Monte Público de La Acedía. In general these woods consist of Cork oak; there are some large specimens at the beginning. However the scrubland takes the centre stage in areas with fewer trees, creating a tangled mass of Tree heath, Gum cistus, Wild olive, Mock privet, Gorse and Spiny broom. In the shade or where there is more humidity there are Portuguese gall oaks and Strawberry trees.

Pass along the joining line between the Arroyo del Palo and a tributary, the latter you follow while you ascend. On the northern slope there is a wood of Maritime pine mixed with Cork oaks, with Villa Bermeja on the left. Go up a track which allows you to see on the other side of the valley the ruins of Casa del Teniente, with its water source in form of an arch.

» The southern side of Sierra Bermeja

At km 11 you abandon the track and take a path which leads now to the east. You are in the midst of Sierra Bermeja, the rock faces are quite devoid of trees, with a few pine trees occupying the repopulated terraces. Keep walking down until you get close to the Vertedero Comarcal (landfill); you will be walking close to the fenced area after having waded through a stream which feeds a reservoir higher up. The great extensive mounds of residue are striking, hidden in many layers with ventilation tubes sticking out to help air the fermenting organic matter. The landfill is being expanded and some Cork oaks are being moved to another location. Hundreds of gulls fly over the facility.

There is an isolated forest further away which is a survivor of the last forest fire which has really ravaged the area, then you pass a couple of ruins and immediately have a view of an industrial estate on your right, just before you need to ford Barranco del



Maritime pines with their whimsical shapes, at Los Pedregales

Infierno and go up to a natural viewpoint. Pass by an access to the Parque de Los Pedregales on your right. This is a good point to marvel at the Park which has evolved as half-forest and half-garden. This is also the last opportunity to stock up on water or retrace your steps still quite easily.

The real climb to Sierra Bermeja begins. Whatever traces of old traditional paths have been lost; you are walking along tracks and service roads which had been used to put up the electricity towers. This type of walking continues until you reach the enormous ravine of headwaters of Arroyo de la Miel. One thing is certain: you get the best views of all of this stage from the vicinity of an electricity tower just before a junction, the views reach towards the Bay of Estepona and Straits of Gibraltar. From here onwards you need to climb along the path until you reach the maximum altitude of this stage (515 m, km 16.2) and then go down again till another electricity tower, where you find some dirt tracks again, at which point there is very little traffic.



Reddish rocks over the Bay of Estepona

The presence of Maritime pine woods is only nominal along the path, with the rock fields of the red peridotite supporting thin bushes of Kermes oak, gorse, broom, Esparto grass, Purple Phlomis and White Leaf Rockrose. However, the surviving trees have unique, gnarled shapes as a result of growing in such hostile environment created by the rock coming from the deep layers of the Earth. At the ravines of Los Polvitos, Las Minas and El Guadalobón, above all in areas which are less exposed to the sun and at the bottom of the ravines, a pine wood managed to survive, at times quite dense.

The Guadalobón is the only permanently flowing river you will cross but all the torrential gullies do fill up with water in rainy season which results in a spectacular show of contrasts between the red of the rocks and the white of the cascading rapids. Before the river, just as you catch the first glimpse of it; note how the cut in the rocks caused by the track has exposed the bare rock, fractured by deposits of natural asbestos and serpentine-type rocks, greenish in colour. The multi-directionality these crystalline dike intrusions present are a clue to the magmatic nature of these rock formations, whose rich metal contents supported an insipient mining industry in the past.

A steep descend (after the intersection with the PR A-164) takes you up to the MA-8301 road which climbs up from Estepona to the Paraje Natural de Los Reales of Sierra Bermeja. At this intersection there is another geological surprise, a lime kiln which used to be fed with the white rocks which are visible all around, the marbles which had been created by the pressure and heat upon contact with magmatic peridotitic intrusions.

» The Río de la Cala Valley

These marbles remain visible as you walk along the road until you take the junction at km 22.5 of the walk, but, little by little schist is taking over the terrain. This change in terrain causes the appearance of the acid soil specialist: the Cork oak with its entourage of fire-resistant bushes, especially the gum cistus.

You ford the Arroyo de la Cala for the first time in the vicinity of a small excavated pool and at the point of the river where it can support populations of fish. The GR climbs a little along a track which turns into a path until arriving at the main track which descends along the Loma de la Pontezuela. Pass a Cork oak which looks like an island surrounded by a circle of dirt, and through pine woods with heath and myrtles which you pass by on your left in Valle del Padrón, very open and flanked from the east by thick pine woods of the Loma del Nicio. There is an Arabic fortification there with the same name.

Mineral veined intrusions in peridotitic rock



Along the first bends there are a few country houses mixed with animal enclosures, until you reach another intersection where a tiled marker confirms you have been walking along the Camino del Puerto de las Palmas. You arrive at Río Padrón (km 26.8), which you do not cross. The walk leads towards the slope which separates this river from Arroyo de la Cala.

First mills appear on your right, between traditional gardens, abandoned houses and second residences. Arroyo de la Cala has to be crossed three times in a little valley which keeps getting very narrow but then it opens up again next to a garden shop/nursery and one the second mill, which has been converted into a private home. The last section leads along a tarmac track which takes you uphill, just after you cross the Arroyo de Marimacho, and over the Autovía del Mediterráneo arriving at the



Valle del Río Padrón and its subtropical cultivars

upper part of Estepona. A short walk along the streets passing by the school Colegio Público Sierra Bermeja, leads the traveller to the destination which is the footbridge at the Paseo Marítimo where you meet again and for the last time the Arroyo de la Cala. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

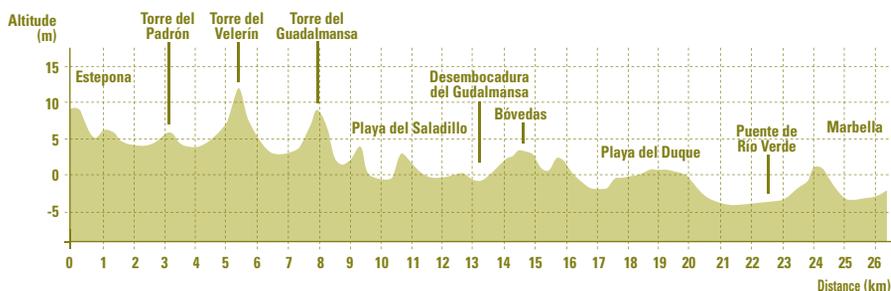
1 Casares, Calle de la Carrera street and Plaza de España square	30S 0296263 4035692	365 m	2 Fuente and the old Convento de Santa Catalina	30S 0296278 4034384	240 m
3 Arroyo de los Molinos stream and the mill Molino de Arriba (or Gorrino)	30S 0296520 4033797	160 m	4 Mirador de Peñas Blancas at the MA-8300 road	30S 0298429 4035799	345 m
5 Ford across Arroyo Vaquero in La Acedia	30S 0299152 4035407	190 m	6 Mirador del Vertedero de Residuos Sólidos, viewpoint	30S 0300951 4036315	240 m
7 Mirador de Los Pedregales, viewpoint	30S 0302090 4036086	273 m	8 Mirador de Estepona and del Estrecho, viewpoint	30S 0303086 4036466	430 m
9 Headwaters of Río Guadalobón	30S 0304420 4037914	360 m	10 Lime kiln beside the MA 8301 road	30S 0305312 4038278	327 m
11 Ford across Arroyo de la Cala	30S 0306422 4037808	175 m	12 Río Padrón and the huge Carob tree	30S 0308087 4037313	90 m
13 Ford across Arroyo de la Cala close to Molino Tercero	30S 0308686 4036103	50 m	14 Second mill, Molino, close to Vivero Río de la Cala nursery/gardening shop	30S 0308588 4035531	37 m
15 Arroyo de Marimacho, stream	30S 0308251 4034665	30m	16 Estepona, Paseo Marítimo & mouth of the Río de la Cala	30S 0308448 4033559	12 m

30 ESTEPONA • MARBELLA

The beaches of western Costa del Sol



ESTIMATED TIME
7 hours



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	27.1	Accumulated ascent	150	Final altitude	2
Ascent km	4.4	Accumulated descent	135	Maximum altitude	15
Descent km	4.6	Maximum difference	15	Minimum altitude	0
Flat km	18.2	Altitude at starting point	12	Average altitude	3

» Summary of this Stage «

This stage is almost flat with ascents and descents of zero difficulty, leading at the sea level direction east, or slightly north-east, between the towns of Estepona and Marbella. It begins in the eastern part of the promenade Paseo Marítimo in Estepona but it immediately penetrates the coastline to travel through the first 17 kilometres along the beaches and dunes of the western Costa del Sol, with brief detours on the pavements along some housing estates. Normally the itinerary of this first part is done by walking on the sand, although there are stretches of boulders and even fossilised dunes.

You have to cross numerous waterways, some of significant scale, which could even prevent passage during the rainy season. The remaining 10 km of the walk leads along the promenades (Paseos Marítimos) of San Pedro and Marbella, sometimes paved, others with wooden walkways and some with clay or dirt surface. All of them do feature landscaped gardens along at least one side. The river crossings, which are much less numerous in this second part, are done using bridges, some of them quite beautiful.

							
1	1	2	4	17.1	-	10	x 5

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

This stage is an opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the urban development of the western part of the Costa del Sol, linked intrinsically to tourism and its many different facets. Frequently the public access seaside acquires quite negligible dimensions or is completely urban in other parts. However, at times the walker will be rewarded by places of singular beauty and surviving reminders of what nature used to be like here in the past.

Thus, the coast has had varied luck due to the moment in history when it was being built up, generally leaving the original wilderness relegated to just a few meters in result.

At certain points of the coast of Estepona, you can still see the surviving strings of dunes, especially at the beaches of Saladillo and Matas Verdes. It is even possible to try to go back in time watching the traditional coastal trades such as the few still working orchards, a few meters from the sea shore, or fishing boats and gear resting on slopes high above the beach.

However, undoubtedly, what livens up the long route along the coast of Malaga is the network of watch towers and medieval beacons, which are sometimes very different from one another; also there are the numerous mouths of the Bermeja rivers. This is the coast which is world famous and yet remains a great unknown from the point of view of its patrimony and natural environment.

- **Starting point:** seafront promenade in Estepona, at the east end of the beach of la Cala, just above the little wooden bridge built over the Arroyo de la Cala.
- **Access to starting point:** The Mediterráneo motorway A-7 and the AP-7 Autopista de Peaje (toll motorway). The long coastal Avenida de Litoral that leads to Estepona follows the route of the old N 340, which is the eastern access to the city, and this is the road that leads to the starting point.
- **Finish point:** at the promenade (Paseo Marítimo) of Marbella and the mouth of the Arroyo Guadalpin, close to the Palacio de Congresos in the centre of the city.
- **Access to finish point:** the A-7 and AP-7. The main Avenida de Marbella is the perfect link; use as a reference the roundabout Boulevard Príncipe Alfonso de Hohenlohe.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The Autovía del Mediterráneo or the old N-340 are always located towards the interior, to the north, and not too far away. There are numerous streets that lead to these two main roads which have bus lines running in both directions.
- **No return point:** the Guadalmina can be taken as the halfway point of the route, and therefore from there on it's best to continue ahead.
- **Maps:** You must use, in that order: **1072-I** (Estepona), **1072-II** (San Pedro de Alcántara) and **1065-IV** (Marbella).
- **District boundaries:** Estepona and Marbella districts meet at Río Guadalmina, which constitutes the boundary line. At km 14.2 is where the districts change.



Clay cliffs at Punta de los Mármoles

• Enjoy the walk safely

In the first section, just as you start walking along the beach, the path leads along a clay cliff. There is a potentially problematic point at the end of the cliff as water can rise right up to its edge during high tide.

It's worth looking up the tide time-table and in case of the sea rising, take the paved path just above the escarpment instead. Also, the compacted clay terrain can be very slippery when wet, take care not to slip and fall.

There are other sections where the stretch of sand you're walking on is reduced to the minimum and becomes very narrow but this should not cause any serious problems. Another issue is your having to cross various rivers, especially the Guadalmanza and the Guadalmina. As there aren't any pedestrian bridges, you must look for a road bridge in case the water levels are high, and these bridges are quite far from the coast.

As far as the rest of the rivers are concerned, and you cross them first, fording them is less complicated and there are road bridges close by. Be careful with the sun, you will be walking either into the sun or having it right behind you, considering the direction of the path. It is highly

recommended that you use sun block cream and wear a hat.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

There isn't a PR Pequeño Recorrido path which would join GR-249 directly, but there is the GR-92, with which GR-249 shares the path and direction. Los Paseos Marítimos of Estepona and Marbella, the pedestrian promenades meant for leisure walking are ideal places to walk on when they coincide with the path but it is perfectly feasible to complete almost the entire itinerary walking on the sand along the beach.

Wading birds feeding at the beach



THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The existence of so many watercourses with considerable flow is due to the presence of Sierra Bermeja. All the important rivers that the traveller has the opportunity to meet at this stage have their origin in the mass of red coloured peridotite rocks. The Río Verde is the longest; it is followed by the three “sister rivers”: Guadalmanza, Guadalmina and Guadaiza. One shouldn’t jump to conclusions about the volume of the watercourses by looking at what amount of water arrives at the beach, at the river mouths; the first river is regulated higher up by a reservoir which supplies this part of the Costa del Sol with water, and the other three are connected to the whole river network through draining channels that contribute to the Río Verde.

The other rivers and streams have no dams to regulate their courses, although they do suffer losses in the flow due to irrigation; similar phenomenon used to occur with the watermills in the past. All of them constitute a separate watershed, the basin of the western Costa del Sol which should be treated as a separate entity, and is situated between those of the Guadalhorce and Guadiaro.

The prevailing vegetation around the streams usually consists of reed beds so dense at times that are can completely block the watercourse. Around large rivers there are poplars and tamarisks accompanied by reeds, bulrushes and cattails. The large pools at the mouths of the rivers, where the fresh water temporarily blends with seawater, are quite important as they offer conditions that lead to the greater diversity of aquatic fauna. This is a known fact to the anglers who come to river mouths in search of predatory fish, mostly sea bass, as they like to prowl here at night.

The Padrón, Castor, Guadalmanza and Guadalmina rivers are places declared to be “of European Community Interest” (LIC, Lugares

de Interes Comunitario) that is, they receive a special recognition at a European level thanks to their representative ecological values.

Each of these zones has an area slightly bigger than 8.30 hectares. One of the species which was behind the special recognition is the European Otter. A large population of these animals use the beaches as connecting channels between the natural corridors of the banks of the rivers, which actually are very close to one another.

Obviously, given the permanent nature of the watercourses and the river mouth backwaters, the fish population is also significant and, similarly, the population of ducks and kingfishers. It is recommended that you walk through these sites quietly and you should be able to see ducks, Moorhens and herons quite easily.

Guadaiza River and Río Verde are also LICs, with the area of 9 and 108 hectares respectively, representing the last rivers with headwaters situated in the metamorphic rocks which you walk through at this stage. Other streams have a very meagre flow and form part of the “urban maelstrom”, thus losing the environmental appeal that characterizes the previous watercourses.

Housing estate reaching down to the beach



» The Sea Bed

Speaking of the richness of the coast: the traveller has the opportunity to start the tour in another place of Community Interest called The Sea Bed of the Bay of Estepona (Fondos Marinos de la Bahía de Estepona, 552 has) and pass through another, El Saladillo - Punta de Baños (1755 has). Both areas have been declared to be of European Community significance because of the existence of vast prairies of *Posidonia oceanica*, a plant exclusively found in the Mediterranean and which has its westernmost population in the Straits. The meadows of *Posidonia* are the greatest example of plants which can settle on sandy sea bed, stabilizing it and providing refuge for numerous zoological species.

One of the conservation efforts that have been successful in preservation of the coastline and sea bed is the integral purification of waste water. In an area such as the western Costa del Sol this is a tricky issue which, with hindsight, should have been resolved sooner. The complications are caused by the extension of narrow and oblong-shaped populated areas and their high density with hot



Pebbles of very diverse origins and composition

spots of highly polluting activities. Above all, the biggest problem is the close proximity of houses to the coastline.

Because of all the above-mentioned factors, there is no choice but to transport the wastewater along the beaches themselves. The Great Málaga Path walker will have a chance to observe many inspection covers and pumping stations; the latter are necessary due to the lack of natural incline at the beach. One of the stations is on the left bank of the river Guadalmanza, little more than one mile from the path, cleaning up 35,000 m³ of water per day and providing service to over 140,000 people.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Coastal cliffs and narrow pebble beaches

Arroyo de la Cala has been a regular companion of the Great Path during the previous stage and now serves as the mark for the starting point. You will have walked less than 500 metres from the beach promenade when the walk takes you to an area of sand and cliffs. Your proximity to Estepona makes it possible to try to predict how the waves and tides are affecting this potentially problematic spot which can be slightly difficult to walk through at times. The escarpment which confines this tiny pebbled beach is made of clay and it is fairly high. Additionally, the narrow strip you can walk along is getting narrower with time. Under normal circumstances, there should be

no problems to pass through. However, it is up to you to retrace your steps and look for a pavement which leads along the top of the cliff, through a garden, if the situation so requires. Also beware of the compacted greenish clay at the beach, which is extremely slippery when splashed by the waves.

Ants feeding in the flowers of European Searocket



Having crossed Punta de los Mármoles you arrive at a small beach, Bahía de la Plata, where there is the mouth of a stream, and which is bordered by earthen cliffs and it marks the beginning of another narrow area. This time caused by houses, which are literally in the sea in some cases. La Playa de Punta Plata is not a great quality beach because of its size and tendency to be covered with pebbles, but it is a great place to watch Turnstones, Sandpipers, Dunlins and other waders next to flocks of gulls relaxing or preening in the fresh waters of the deltas.

As a curiosity, it is very easy to detect where the waste pipelines run underground, as in some places the ditch has opened above the compacted clays which appear in the terrain and then has been filled in with rocks and sand forming a channel visible between the elevated inspection covers.

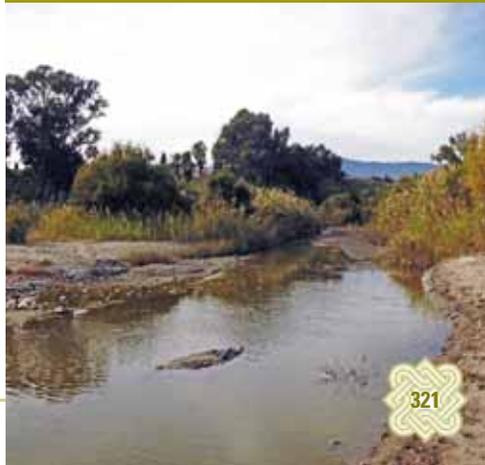
» The mouths of Bermeja's rivers and the beacon towers

And so you arrive at km 3, to an area of much wider beaches, a fact due to, amongst other things, the large number of rivers flowing here into the sea.

The first river is the Padrón or Paredón, characteristic because of its clumps of cane and reed beds. If there is an area which is exemplary of the coast and its contrasts, this would be it. Right next to a luxurious hotel, in whose gardens the first watch tower is situated, you can also find one of the Estepona-style traditional gardens at the foot of the beach, protected from sea breeze by cane fences and native vegetation. The first plant specimens adapted to dune environments start appearing, marked with a sign explaining their importance to the European community. The sign shows the name "malcomietalia" which refers to Sand Stock (*Malcolmia littorea*), one of the most conspicuous and colourful species.

Next, Río del Castor makes its appearance, very similar to its predecessor. It lends its name to another cape, Punta del Castor. Then there is the Río Velerín (km 5.2), with somewhat more diverse vegetation but shallower pools and less water volume. In its vicinity, on top of a hill, there is Torre del Velerín. It is slightly less well preserved than the Padrón Tower but it is much more accessible and located next to a small pine wood. Construction materials can be easily identified: very uneven stone blocks came from areas where rivers passed over them, and these blocks have been held together with mortar made of sand and lime. Ceramic brick has been used for the finishes (this is the reason why the vault and arches of the windows-doors are still surviving) and, sometimes, cut sandstone blocks used above all to support the machicolations. The latter have not been preserved. The towers were plastered and some of them still show traces of mortar on the north sides. Period foundations and the wall base are also visible, surrounding living quarters next to the tower. Other towers of similar structure tend to be, just as this one, Christian in origin dating back to the beginning of the 16th century.

Mouth of the río Velerín



When you pass the Arroyo de las Cañas (km 6.5) you arrive at Punta del Guadalmanza, past a very pronounced turn, and it is where you should look for a watch tower which stands out from the usual tronconical shaped models. La Torre del Guadalmanza (or Desmochada) is large, with two floors contained by its 14 metre high square construction, and of much earlier origin. It was built in the 10th century, during the Al Andalus period, however quite possibly an older site was used for the construction, as suggested by a Roman site at its foot, located inside a landscaped area of a housing estate. What is striking about the Torre de Guadalmanza is its dimension, the sandstone blocks used on its corners and arches, and a couple of sgraffito motifs, one of them depicting an encircled Jerusalem cross.

» The Beach and Dunes of El Saladillo

The mouth of the Guadalmanza river is close now, and this is the first really large one. The end pool of the river is many hundreds of metres long and very wide. The large water surface makes it a comfortable place to watch waterfowl, which find refuge between the two strips of riparian vegetation with reeds, cane, tamarisks and a dense carpeting of bulrush on the right river bank.



Dunes and pine wood of Saladillo

The best place to marvel at the flora and fauna of the dune systems of the Costa del Sol starts right here. In order to do this, walk away from the sand affected by tidal waves and walk towards the promontories direction north. The remnants of long-gone vegetation thrive here. Also, along the first section there are, here and there, poppies, sea daffodils, sea holly and beachgrass. Having covered 9 kilometres, at La Punta del Saladillo, you can find abundant *Ononis ramosissima* and the fragrant, everlasting *Helichrysum stoechas* on top of the dunes. There are also the erect flower stems of Great mullein and some Sampire plants.

Along this whole section it is worthwhile searching for the long list of species connected to the sandy environment which reaches up to a few metres towards the sea. It would be unusual not to find some of the plants flowering during any season of the year, even in most unfavourable times such as mid August; this is when the Sea Daffodil is in flower.

The Arroyo Taraje is a little further and it is quite interesting, given its location: surrounded by dunes and on the way to the Torre del Saladillo, which is similar to previous towers but situated at a tarmac roundabout.

At the Arroyo del Saladillo, very similar in its vegetation composition to the previous

Matacán and Cruz de la Torre de Guadalmanza



stream, there is the residual water pumping station (Estación de Bombeo de Aguas Residuales) and another one a little further, at the mouth of Arroyo de Dos Hermanas; this stream also harbours a few good specimens of White poplar.

A little further still, passing by a few Stone pines with their quaint shapes caused by battling the wind, there is another dune system, Matas Verdes or Casasola. It is separated from the previous system, located amongst coastal woods of Estepona, by a row of wooden stakes which block access to a low pine wood with a few maturing Cork oaks. In the clearings the dense scrub prospers: Lentisc, Dwarf palm, Phoenician juniper, Buckthorn, Rhamnus and Spiny broom. The fauna, though elusive, tends to leave traces revealing their whereabouts such as rabbit latrines, wasp tunnels in the ground or prints left by beetles on the sand.

A sign informs the walker that the sea bed contains the second population of Neptune grass (*posidonia oceanica*) during this stage, and this site is also protected as a European Community interest site (LIC).

La Torre de Baños (or de Casasola) is your next landmark. Inaccessible due to being surrounded by a fence, this tower is two floors and 15 metres high and though it is of Muslim origin (15th century) it had to be strengthened two centuries later using a tronconical fortification as the tower was very slim. This is the only tower with one of the floors shaped like a horseshoe, as its north wall is completely flat. This watchtower marks the entrance of a river and the beginning of Marbella district at Guadalmina, having passed another pumping station.

»» The beach promenades of San Pedro and Marbella

An unusually located hotel golf course whose grass almost touches the sand of the beach leads to Torre de las Bóvedas. Exceptionally well preserved but very similar to the previous ones with its tronconical shape, this tower is in the middle of a first-rate and well taken care of archaeological complex. The Roman Baths (Las Termas Romanas de las Bóvedas) are just on the side of the tower, however there is a fence surrounding them and you cannot enter unless you book a tour.

Río Guadalmanza river mouth and Sierra Bermeja in the background





Torre del Saladillo, built in 1575

The *thermae* building dates back to the beginning of the past millennium and is structured around an octagonal central patio, surrounded by seven, also octagonal shaped rooms, the famous bathing chambers. The whole building used to be covered with pink marble sheets, and even now, with the bare walls, its state of conservation is still surprising.

Surprises at km 17 around the Arroyo del Chopo stream mouth do not end here. Next, a group of fishing boats and traditional boat winches resting on high ground indicate the spot where you can find a sort of small community of fishermen under a few Eucalyptus trees. At the back find the early Christian church *Basílica Paleocristiana de Vega del Mar*, also surrounded by a fence but you can get close enough to admire its main features. One of its most recognizable characteristics is a baptismal font shaped like a fish and made of mortar.

You will cross the Río Guadaiza when you already are in the middle of Paseo Marítimo of San Pedro de Alcántara, which turns into Marbella promenade and continues to the end. One of the aspects which live up the walk along the beach promenades is their variable design.

The surface can be tiled or paved, of natural stone, clay or wood. Sometimes there is a

protective fence on your right sometimes railings of different shapes jetties in some places and rock breakwaters in others.

In all of the cases the landscaped areas are a thing in common, showing a different variety of styles. Meanwhile, the housing estates are placed at varied distances from the beach but there is always a margin wide enough to walk along the path or stroll peacefully along the successive beaches.

And so the breakwaters and coves of the Playa de Nueva Andalucía give way to the cape of Punta del Duque with its famous Puerto Banús. Just before that, in private gardens, you can locate the square Muslim tower Torre del Duque. It owes its name to the Duke of Cádiz and Arcos, named Don Rodrigo Ponce de León, one of the protectors of the so-called Christian rulers (*Reyes Católicos*) during the conquest of Al Andalus.

If there is an image that ought to stay in the mind of the GR-249 walker, summing up the actual Costa del Sol, it would be the contrast between the valuable heritage of the section of free coastline you have just left behind and Puerto José Banús, with its exclusive shops, flashy cars and luxurious boats. At km 21.5 of the itinerary, it is worthwhile stopping and marvelling at the pleasure boats, sometimes quite outrageously lavish in size and appearance, and gaze at the large Flathead mullets swimming meekly in the oily waters.

The mouth of the river Río Verde is quite wide, similar to the ones of Guadalmanza and Guadalmina, it has quite an extensive water surface and it is quite deep. It is told apart

Roman baths of Las Bóvedas



from the others by the fact that it has a lofty bridge made of metal and wood. Here ducks are quite easy to see, both wild and domestic, very used to the constant traffic of passers-by who are either strolling or exercising. Just after you cross the bridge, search through the villas on the left bank for a plot which is not too far from the beach; this is where the Villa Romana de Río Verde is situated, a very significant archeological site. There is a fence stopping people from getting in but you can still see some of the mosaics with animal motifs and scenes and characters from classical mythology.

The last watchtower of today is somewhat difficult to find because it is higher up from the beach than the others, at the Punta de Nabules. It is the Torre de Ancón, its dimensions and structure already familiar to the Gran Senda de Málaga; it is situated at km 24. The vantage point which has been used



Winches and traditional boats along the string of dunes

as the base for the tower shows the fact that now the coast becomes rocky again, although flat at the same time, which creates a good building platform compared to other terrains which may be prone to erosion. The last section consists of walking along the large part of the Paseo Marítimo with its outdoors gym equipment. Pass by the Arroyo de Nagüeles, the pretty pine grove at the Playa de Casablanca beach and on your right and finish the itinerary at the mouth of Arroyo Guadalpín, your walking companion which awaits you at the next stage. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

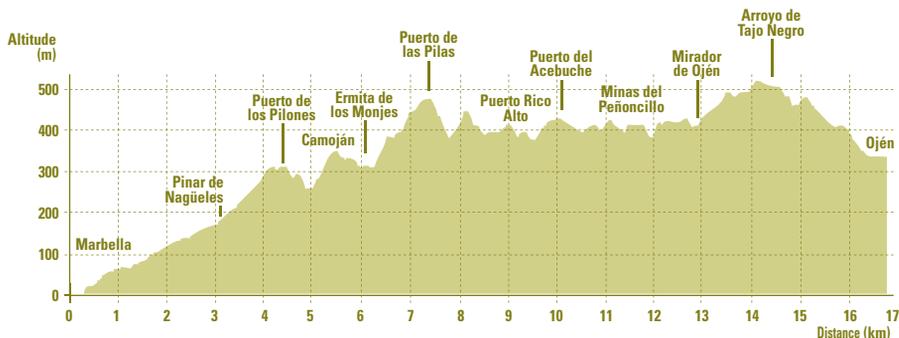
1 Paseo Marítimo de Estepona promenade and Arroyo de la Cala stream	30S 0308448 4033559	12 m	2 Torre del Padrón tower, and mouth of the river	30S 0311140 4034356	10 m
3 Punta del Castor and Río Castor	30S 0312103 4034948	3 m	4 Torre del Velerín tower between mouth of the river and the winches	30S 0312854 4035675	15 m
5 Torre de Guadalmansa at the Punta under the same name	30S 0314892 4035959	8 m	6 Río Guadalmansa near Punta del Saladillo	30S 0315659 4036002	0 m
7 Torre del Saladillo, tower	30S 0317043 4036842	2 m	8 Dunas del Saladillo and Matas Verdes	30S 0318779 4037002	2 m
9 Torre de Baños at the Punta under the same name	30S 0319663 4036967	2 m	10 Mouth of the river Guadalmina	30S 0320350 4036897	0 m
11 Termas romanas (Roman baths) de las Bóvedas and Torre Almenara tower	30S 0321424 4037721	2 m	12 Basílica Paleocristiana de Vega del Mar and the fishing settlement	30S 0321706 4038165	2 m
13 Puente de Río Guadaiza, bridge	30S 0323258 4038985	2 m	14 Torre del Duque tower at Puerto Banús	30S 0324795 4039654	2 m
15 Puente de Río Verde, bridge	30S 0325757 4040512	4 m	16 Torre de Ancón, tower	30S 0326994 4041217	5 m
17 Mouth of Arroyo de Nagüeles	30S 0327734 4041279	0 m	18 Marbella, mouth of Arroyo Guadalpín	30S 0329722 4041829	2 m

31 MARBELLA • OJÉN

La Sierra Blanca of Marbella and Ojén



ESTIMATED TIME
3 hours 55 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	17.0	Accumulated ascent	930	Final altitude	335
Ascent km	9.0	Accumulated descent	645	Maximum altitude	517
Descent km	5.2	Maximum difference	515	Minimum altitude	2
Flat km	2.8	Altitude at starting point	2	Average altitude	360

» Summary of this Stage «

The stage begins at the mouth of Arroyo Guadalpín, at sea level, crosses Marbella direction north-west up to Pinar de Nagüeles and then skirts the southern margin of Sierra Blanca, mainly direction east. Therefore, the walk will be constantly cutting through ravines and streams that descend from the enormous limestone mountain chain into the sea and leading you through large and small cols and mountain passes.

The cumulative elevation gain is significant but the uphill sections are usually short. As far as anthropization (human influence) of the terrain, there are noteworthy sites where farmsteads and even horticultural areas could be founded because of the closeness to water. Special attention needs to be paid to the mining in these metamorphic mountains, its use of aggregates, and the abandoned el Peñoncillo magnetite mines which led to the installation of the mining railway of San Juan Bautista and the 300 metre pier at the Marbella beach used for loading and shipping of the mineral.

From the mining area onwards the path turns northwards, frequently leading in and out of the valleys of the eastern slopes of Sierra Blanca, already in Ojén. With the A-355 road always on your right, resembling an impassable frontier, but with the white village of Ojén increasingly closer, go up a hill with telecommunication antennas on top, from where the tarmac access roads to the village can be used to arrive at the end of the stage.

							
2	2	2	3	4.4	0.3	12.3	x 3

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

Sierra Blanca is a very special mountain system, bearing great significance for the Marbella and Costa del Sol inhabitants, up to the point where it was actually a local association intent on recuperating the numerous Sierra Blanca footpaths which took care of their promotion, sign-posting and improvement (<http://mujeresenlasveredas.blogspot.com.es>) or focussed on clarifying any doubts surrounding the history of places the paths lead you to (www.cilniana.org).

The GR-249 walker can also enjoy the surroundings thanks to the work of such volunteers, their work wholeheartedly appreciated by Málaga's local council.

La Red de Senderos de Sierra Blanca, the local network of footpaths, constitutes the first incentive for the walker, offering plenty of alternatives to climb the sierra's summits or to go back down to the sea level.

Nevertheless, the strong contrast between the urban and tourist vortex of Marbella and the solitude of these mountains could be the most important treasures of stage 31. This solitude can be admired from various vantage points and cols which afford a broad view of the bay Bahía de Marbella and the Mediterranean in general, with the grey ridges behind you.

The starting and finishing points couldn't be any more different. There is a significant distance between cosmopolitan, exclusive Marbella and the cosy village atmosphere of the pueblo blanco of Ojén, though physically they are no more than 8 kilometres away. Ojén was one of the scenes of, and was largely affected by, the terrifying fire which happened in summer 2012 in which more than 8.000 hectares were burnt. The last part of the itinerary leads through the burnt areas west of the road, which lets you appreciate the natural recuperation progress of the native plant life.

- **Starting point:** At El Paseo Marítimo de Marbella, at the level of Arroyo de Guadalpín, at the Playa de la Fontanilla beach.
- **Access to starting point:** From the main streets of Marbella, between the Avenida del Príncipe de Hohenlohe and Ricardo Soriano. In order to get to these use any access roads to Marbella splitting off the A-7 and the AP-7, to the east or west of the city centre.
- **Finish point:** Western entrance of Ojén, using the old road which crosses the village, the A-7103.
- **Access to finish point:** The road which connects Ojén with Marbella (southwards) and Coín is the A-355. The old road which used to connect the village with the Costa del Sol is the one mentioned earlier A-7103, which comes off the A-355 and joins it again later.
- **Possible "escape routes":** Best places to return to Marbella are: the Ermita de los Monjes and the area of Puerto Rico. From these easily identifiable landmarks take any of the paths which lead south and downhill.
- **No return point:** From the Minas del Peñoncillo, it is best to continue walking to Ojén, as it is quite difficult to shorten the way from here due to many housing estates surrounded by fences and the road often being closed off in sections between Coín and Marbella.
- **Maps:** the entire walk is on the sheet **1065-IV** (Marbella).
- **District boundaries:** A bit more than half of the walk leads through the district of Marbella. The walk practically coincides with the district boundary between Marbella and Ojén from Puerto Rico, at km 9, to the first hill of monte público at the Minas del Peñoncillo (km 10.5). From there on, when the path bears north, you are in the territory of Ojén.



El Pinar de Nagüeles is a natural recreational area of Marbella

• Enjoy the walk safely

Whilst the tangle of many footpaths constitutes one of the main attractions of the Marbella area stage, it might also be an issue should you abandon the sign-posted GR. In any case, it is important to remember that all the possible exits are in the south and also that climbing towards the mountains increases the possibility of difficulties.

A large section of the walk leads underneath an electricity line. Although this should not pose any potential danger, be extra careful if the weather forecasts thunderstorms.

There are bee-hives, correctly sign-posted in the Puerto de los Pílonos, the first hill in the sierra. Before you reach the Ermita de los Monjes there is a somewhat slippery section due to the stretch of bare rock surface on a slope. It has been equipped with a rope handrail.

There are few streams you need to wade across and they are shallow, so they do not create any problems in general. However, at the Arroyo del Tajo Negro (at the end of the stage) as well as another tributary before that, there are quite high cascading slopes of travertine rock and you should not approach the edge.

There is no easily accessed water source, especially drinking water source, during the whole stage. The route mainly follows direction north-east however you are walking in the sun in the midst of the Costa del Sol, which should suffice as a warning.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

In the Pinar de Nagüeles there is a possibility of doing a walk to Istán along the traditional Camino. The PR A-140 Marbella-Istán departs from Parque de Nagüeles and leads along the western skirt of Sierra Blanca. It coincides for

a few metres with GR-249, just before you enter a wood, and it is slightly less than 9 kilometres long.

The environmental agency, part of the Marbella town hall (La Delegación de Medio Ambiente y Playas del Ayuntamiento de Marbella) has added on to the design of walking footpaths in Sierra Blanca with five suggested routes.

Ruta 1 coincides with the one described above. Ruta 2 is the Cañada de las Encinas – Mina de Buenavista and matches the first part of the GR as it enters the sierra. Instead of crossing the Arroyo de las Piedras it continues uphill.

Ruta 3 (Nagüeles-Ermita de los Monjes) uses an identical route as the initially suggested walk from Pinar de Nagüeles to Ermita de los Monjes (km 6.2), however it later turns off southwards and leads down along the Cañada de Calaña.

Ruta 4, la Senda de los Monjes, in reality leads along the above-mentioned Cañada, but in the opposite direction.

Ruta 5 is the one which could be considered a star walk of the Marbella area, la Vereda del Faro. Actually, the effort devoted to recovering the walk and releasing a specific publication about it was all well worth it. It is a circular, it goes up via Puerto Rico, turns west, and without going up to the Ermita it leads down to Marbella through Montúa.

The PR A-169 Marbella-Juanar departs from the old cemetery of Marbella, goes up the Camino de los Cabañiles up to the Puerto Rico Alto, where it coincides for a short while with the GR-249, and then leads to Refugio de Juanar crossing the mountains northwards.

In order to find other options now you need to proceed to the area of Ojén. From the village, at the same spot where the GR stage ends, the GR-243 Sierra de las Nieves departs direction west towards the area of Juanar, where it forks: one branch towards Monda and the other direction Istán. This very route is also catalogued as PR A-167 Istán-Ojén, 12 kilometres long and crossing part of Sierra Blanca which hasn't been described here yet, the north.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

Except for the rainy season when some of the Arroyos can carry crystal-clear waters, this is not a stage of the walk where the aquatic environment prevails, as it can be expected in a dolomite sierra with pronounced ridges, and at the altitude of the walk. Both the Arroyo de Calaña and Puerto Rico, which, as if for dessert, make up the Arroyo Guadalpín as they unite, are the drainage channels of quite extensive watersheds and as such these streams can maintain water longer in the season, enough to feed some natural pools. But, in general, the suggested itinerary does not let you see these areas. At the Puerto de los Mochileros you are very close to Cascada de Camoján, a water emergence which lends its name to a whole housing estate.

The site of a hermitage in the valley of Arroyo de Calaña was surely chosen because of its seclusion but also the availability of water from a spring which you will not see from the path but which is quite close, about a kilometre and a half walking upstream from the ruins.

A separate mention should be dedicated to the Puerto Rico, whose name reflects the potential resources, represented by two factors of the site: two large flat plains at two different altitudes and a water source in the upper area. The fact that the water source was taken advantage of is confirmed very shortly as you cross the stream at the Puerto Rico Alto where you find an old masonry acequia finished with solid brickwork. The thick vegetation hardly lets you see any cultivated areas but, a little higher up, you can see a few orange trees and other fruit trees while the human influence on the area is shown by the ruins of a couple of houses.

Actually Puerto Rico Alto constitutes the border of an enormous ancient water fall which, throughout the millennia kept on creating a bulkhead of a rock cascade based on consecutive

layers of travertine loaded with lime. The profile of the semi-circular gorge which overlooks Marbella has numerous crevices and caves which used to be inhabited in prehistoric times, considering the combined factors of a forest environment, shelter offered by the valley and existence of a permanent water source.

Towards the end of the stage there is another area of cascading tufa but much more modest ones. These are two small valleys belonging to the Arroyo del Tajo Negro, which have miraculously escaped the 2012 fire. At the main stream there is a long watering trough adapted for big game species of fauna and, later on, up to the hill with telecommunication antennas on top, there are two more smaller water troughs, with the same purpose, and equipped with a system of floaters that keep the water flowing from a hose which is visible along the path and comes from a nearby water deposit.

Aleppo pine woods reach up to the first outcrops of Sierra Blanca



WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Sierra de Marbella

The actual coastal margin of Marbella which can be considered flat and appropriate for construction is very narrow. This is the reason why the walk climbs into the vicinity of the Palacio de Congressos as you go past the mouth of Arroyo Guadalpín.

There is a short walk along Calle Ramón Gómez de la Serna until you cross Avenida Ricardo Soriano and take direction north-west along Avenida José Mora y Aragón passing above the section of Autovía A-7 which is not split into the toll road Autovía de Peaje. The long Avenida Butchinger keeps climbing north-west and becomes Calle Albinoni, which leads to an unused quarry converted into an auditorium used for a well-known festival.

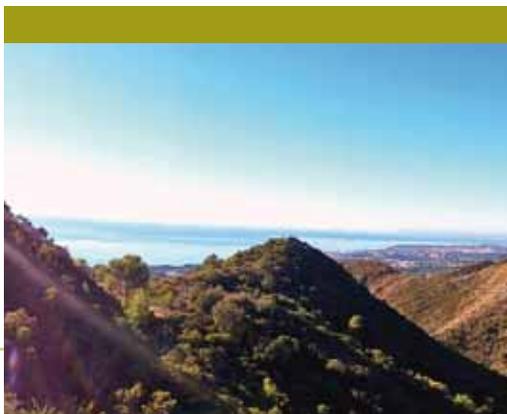
And the sierra begins (km 3), its familiar view being the background of hundreds of photographs taken on the coast of Marbella and Puerto Banús and published in gossip magazines, with the unmistakable sharp image of Pico de la Concha. The walk swerves east and enters fully Monte Público Sierra Blanca y Nagüeles, belonging to the district of Marbella. You can even use the city bus system to arrive at the starting point of this stage but now it is time to venture out deep into the Pinar de Nagüeles. This is a wood made up of pointy Maritime pines, Carob trees and Wild olives where the most interesting part is the diverse vegetation sheltered underneath the trees. There are abundant specimens of good-sized Savin juniper and Lentisc accompanied by Dwarf palm, Cistus, Wild asparagus and Spiny broom. The Camino along the area called Romeral used to be a forest track originally but the frequent passage of motor vehicles has worn it out quite a bit. On your left, pass by the wall of the quarry with the sign for the Auditorio de Marbella, whilst you catch a brief glimpse of the white cliffs of la Concha in the background. The track has many junctions but you need to follow the middle track which finally turns into



The ruins of Ermita de los Monjes

a path and embarks on a pronounced climb along Cañada de las Encinas up to a junction in the paths in the midst of Esparto grass and limestone dolomite rocks. The branch which leads uphill goes to Minas de Buenavista while the chosen direction of the GR is the branch going down, crossing Arroyo de las Piedras with its thickets of oleanders, and leads up to Puerto de los Pilonos. A flat area on the side of the track which was prepared to place here a high voltage electricity tower is also being used to accommodate a few bee-hives. These are the same electricity lines which you have been following in the first section of the stage.

Another descent and subsequent ascent takes you to the top of Puerto de los Mochileros. A third gentle downhill section takes you to a junction in the path. The path direction south leads to Marbella, to a housing estate called



Urbanización Cascada de Camoján. However, the GR follows the path to the left which goes uphill along the Cañada de la Janta. This is one of the areas richest in vegetation due to being in the shade.

Here you encounter the first significant climb, whilst you walk amongst two types of pine trees: Maritime and Aleppo; other candidates for the plant catalogue contain Juniper, Myrtle, Narrow-leaved Phillyrea and Mediterranean Buckthorn. Some of these plants reach quite impressive sizes. El Puerto de Camoján (km 5.4) is a first-rate look-out point. Towards the east, the direction of the walk, note the Cañada de Calaña with the site of the hermitage and on the horizon, La Cruz de Juanar. In the south, there is the bay, La Bahía de Marbella, in all its splendour, with the Strait and the Rock of Gibraltar and the Rif Mountains on the African coast, visible on clear days.

» La Ermita de los Monjes and Puerto Rico Alto

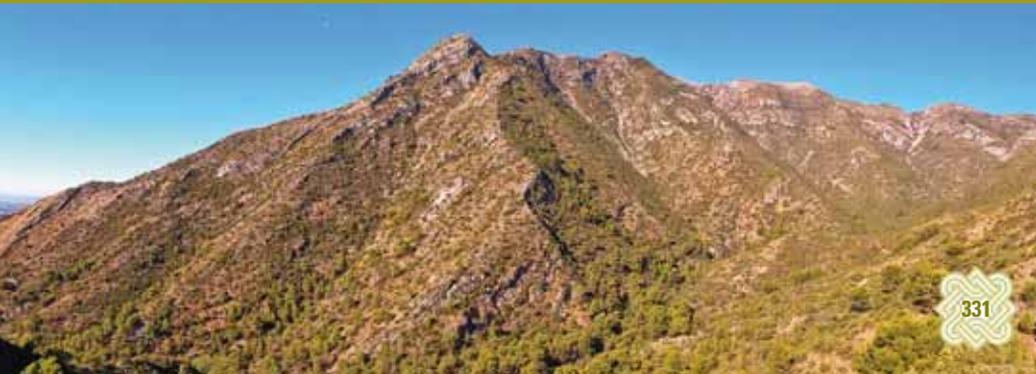
Descend gently direction north, leaving the electricity power line behind you for good now, and follow the slope which has been affected by the fire and where Esparto grass prospers. In contrast, the bottom of the valley is very overgrown and supports a dense pine wood. In order to get there you need to perform a slightly complicated manoeuvre walking along a section with a rope railing and next you arrive at the Ermita de los Monjes (kilometre marker 6). There is very little left of the building but it is more recognisable nowadays thanks to the

cleaning job done by volunteers, both of the building and access roads. The small number of monks who resided in this isolated spot, ideal for the Franciscan order, had lived on the premises starting from the 16th century. The hermitage was connected to the church Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación via a path made especially for the worshippers. The chapel was dedicated to a succession of three Virgins: Virgen de las Angustias, la Soledad de la Sierra and Dolores. There are footpaths that ascend the mountain or lead down to Marbella, but, as it normally does, the GR crosses the stream and leads to a dense wooded area, almost jungle-like, which some time ago must have been cultivated, judging from the high dry stone walls of the terraces.

The second significant climb leads to a vantage point (Puerto de las Golondrinas) close to the viewpoint Mirador de los Gitanos. On your right ignore a little path which follows the itinerary of Vereda del Faro. Still affording a view to Cañada de los Monjes, the walk climbs northwards along the western slope of the ridge until a new junction located in the Puerto de las Pitás (km 7.4), which is sign-posted. Here the options of going up the sierra repeat, but you should turn eastwards and start the descent towards the Arroyo de la Laja and the subsequent ascent to the Puerto del Pino, yet another privileged vantage point.

During the steep descent it is possible to see the area of Puerto Rico Alto with its neat woods and the reddish rock face of the fossilised cascade, and the footpath which departs direction east, which you will be walking in a while.

La Sierra Blanca de Marbella in a dizzy drop towards the coastline



In such an area, rich in water, vegetation at the bottom of the valley becomes leafy, even Strawberry trees and Portuguese gall oaks start showing up on the sandy and clay soil, well penetrated by water and poor in lime. El Arroyo de Puerto Rico (km 8.5), an old irrigation channel, a lime kiln and some ruins can be seen in succession between the two junctions with the PR A-169 which comes from Marbella and continues towards Juanar. From the Puerto de las Golondrinas up to Puerto Rico, the Vereda del Faro and the GR-249 share routes, however in opposite directions.

Surrounded by the Grey-leaved cistus embark on a gentle section of the walk in search of Hoya de los Cabañiles, where another junction takes you to Puerto Rico Bajo and links with the PR A-169. It is worthwhile turning around for the views in the west and to admire the other face of the rock cascade, its base full of caves, where you can frequently see local and visiting rock climbers enjoying the warm rocks. Still looking back, you can also see footpaths leading downwards, the pipeline which carries channelled water, and a few gauging boxes.

» Las Minas del Peñoncillo and the Sierra Blanca de Ojén

The recent industrial history of Marbella is closely linked to the area where it borders with the districts of Ojén. Past the Hoya of the Cabaniles, which lends its name to an old path that emerges from the GR, you reach the Puerto de Acebuches, which is quite deforested. Soon you can see a wide flattened gully. It is one of the mines of el Peñoncillo, located higher up.

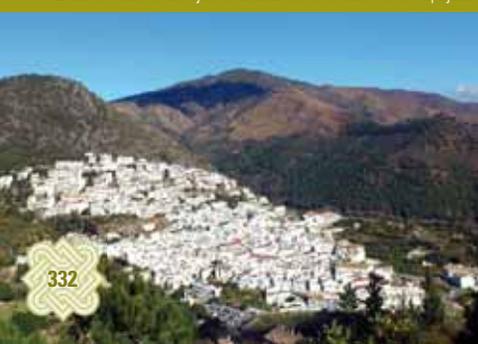
The mining activity was related to the production of iron from pyrite and magnetite, transformed in the Altos Hornos (high furnaces) of the ironworks Ferrería de la Concepción y el Ángel (at Río Verde). This pioneering company reached three-quarters of all the production of Spain in the mid-19th century. At the end of the century the industrial landscape changed when the Scottish company The Marbella Iron Ore Company Limited bought the mine. They closed the processing plant and updated the extraction process, replacing cables with 6 kilometres of a mine railway named San Juan Bautista after one of the mines. They installed a long metal jetty at the beach to be able ship the ore to England. The result of the long history of steel production was the deforestation in the surrounding sierras of Marbella.

There is a boundary stone at kilometre 10.8, right on top of another open pit mine, though the cut in the rock it creates is not visible from the path. This is where the current direction east changes suddenly to direction north. The GR-249 has already been passing through the district of Ojén, and the boundary stone marks the extensive Monte Público Sierra Blanca (with the markings MA-10007-JA). A thin fence separates the wooded area which is also a hunting reserve, Reserva Andaluza de Caza, from the luxurious housing estates in the woods, which have been built partly on the flat areas on the site of old mines. The walk leads along the limits of the monte público for quite a long stretch.

There are a few consecutive uphill and downhill sections leading along the villas, swimming pools, sports grounds and even facilities for young fighting bulls. Then you arrive at an area with well-developed pine trees of the three species: Stone, Maritime and Aleppo.

More ups and downs finally result in a view to Ojén, just past a pile of collapsed white marble rocks which had rolled down from the quarry above. The village shines against the black mountains.

El blanco caserío de Ojén contrasta con la oscura Sierra Alpujata





Mining area where the walk bears northwards

In the back, and you reach the area which has been burnt. The slope is very steep unexpectedly blocked on the right by the road escarpment, and yet it sustains lentiscs, European Dwarf Palm, Carob trees, Junipers, and a few Tree violets.

The vegetation turns spectacular on the steep slopes which surround Arroyo del Tajo Negro. Here the plant diversity is widest of the whole stage, making a strong contrast with the areas which have been affected by the disastrous

fire. The pine wood mixed with Wild olive is not well developed but the scrub reaches jungle-like proportions as all the splendid species you have been seeing throughout the day tangle together right here. When you reach the first rest stop the end of the stage is near. Reach the small hill with antennas on top, take the track which leads down to the road which you cross using an underpass, and follow the sharp bends to the eastern part of Ojén where stage 31 ends. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Marbella, Arroyo Guadalpín stream	30S 0329722 4041829	2 m	2 Intersection of Autovía A 7	30S 0329356 4042917	60 m
3 Beginning of pine wood Pinar de Nagüeles	30S 0327911 4044134	170 m	4 Puerto de los Pilones pass and bee-hives	30S 0328786 4044797	310 m
5 Puerto de los Mochileros	30S 0329049 4044765	290 m	6 Puerto de Camoján, pass	30S 0329560 4045111	345 m
7 Ermita de los Monjes chapel and Arroyo de Calaña stream	30S 0329858 4045622	305 m	8 Puerto de las Pitás, pass	30S 0330241 4045878	471 m
9 Puerto del Pino, pass	30S 0330829 4046039	445 m	10 Puerto Rico Alto, pass	30S 0331183 4046192	390 m
11 Hoya de los Cabañiles	30S 0331682 4045666	370 m	12 Mojón de Monte Público at the Peñoncillo mines	30S 0332451 4045319	410 m
13 Well-developed pine wood	30S 0332798 4045973	415 m	14 Mirador de Ojén, viewpoint	30S 0333290 4046760	405 m
15 Arroyo and Abrevadero del Tajo Negro, stream and rest area	30S 0332818 4047759	500 m	16 Ojén, across A-7103	30S 0333756 4048259	335 m

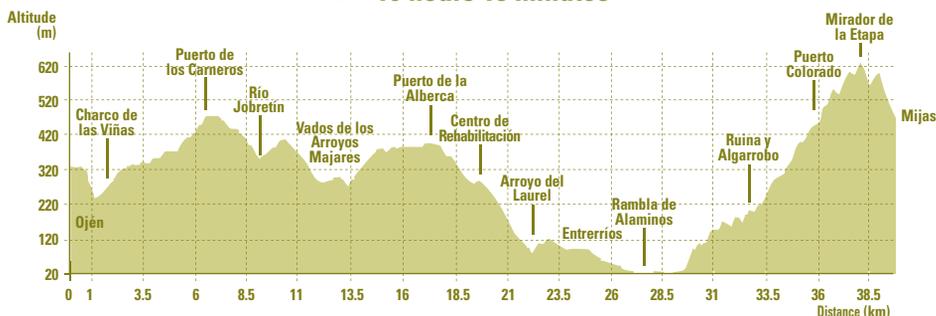
32 OJÉN • MIJAS

La Sierra Alpujata



ESTIMATED TIME

10 hours 15 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	39.8	Accumulated ascent	1.190	Final altitude	465
Ascent km	16.6	Accumulated descent	1.020	Maximum altitude	636
Descent km	15.2	Maximum difference	620	Minimum altitude	18
Flat km	8	Altitude at starting point	330	Average altitude	340

» Summary of this Stage «

Stage 32 covers the distance between the villages of Ojén and Mijas mainly in the eastern direction, so one could say that it actually connects Sierra Blanca with the Sierra de Mijas.

These two limestone mountain chains are united by another, very different mountain system, the Sierra Alpujata, which is composed of peridotite rock. You will skirt its entire southern margin.

From Ojén you must climb up to a level of 350 metres on average to be able to walk the cols and valleys forming this reddish-coloured sierra, with mountain streams meandering through, and even maintaining stable population of fish. The mountains contain a multitude of country roads and forest tracks which are frequented by mountain bikers. Mountain bike might be the best form of transport for the first part of the stage, given its total length of 40 kilometres and the significant cumulative elevation gain.

Whilst Ojén is located right at the union of two very different geologies, the enormous basin of Río Fuengirola separates Sierra Alpujata from Sierra de Mijas with its deep valley cut in the gneiss, slate, and schist, which are much more prone to erosion. This is the reason behind the major ascents and descents here. The descents are done on tarmac while the ascents on the jumble of dirt tracks which offer little hard surface.

The last part, from the intersection with the A-355 road leading to Puerto de los Pescadores, takes the walker on the ultimate climb along the steep southern slopes of the Mijas mountains, passing by the Ermita del Calvario until the finish in the vicinity of the village.

							
2	2	2	5	11.2	24.1	4.5	x 3

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

Ojén and Mijas are both privileged sites on the Costa del Sol. Their whitewashed houses, the winding streets, rural environment and natural mountain environments are some of the reasons why a visit is always recommended. Both have been built on rocks of travertine origin, whose crags and caves are integrated into the villages, and Ojén also has numerous natural springs which convert its surroundings into fertile orchards.

Sierra Alpujata is one of the mountain chains which, located at the back of the Costa del Sol, has been almost forgotten. The peridotite rock is one of the main rocks which form the sierra which influences amongst other things, the specialisation and exclusiveness of its plants and the scarceness of human settlements. These are limited to the fertile fluvial plains, las vegas, of the very numerous streams, (which are of great importance because of the fauna they harbour) or areas of slate rock with deeper and more fertile soils where the Cork oak groves proliferate.

The terrifying fire of summer 2012 has devastated 8.000 hectares of mainly forested land where Maritime pine was the predominant species. The consequences of this for mountain ecosystems are evident throughout the tour, although fortunately there are specialist plants which have managed to overcome the disaster, growing new leaves such as Cork oaks or the non-native Eucalyptus, the Canary Island pines, germinating from scatter seeds just as the Maritime pine, or growing anew from the old stumps and roots like the Dwarf palm, Heath and Esparto. Over the years the GR-249 walkers will be able to keep witnessing the evolution of the Mediterranean vegetation which, once more, survives the blaze.

At the Cerro del Pulpito, a magnificent lookout point, already suggested by the name (pulpit or platform), an improvised bird observatory has been established by the organisation called SEO Málaga (Sociedad Española de Ornitología, similar to British RSPB and American Audubon Society) for monitoring pre-nuptial and post-nuptial migrations of birds to and from Africa, helped by the thermals generated by the bare stone outcrops. The Entrerriós area is much tamer and for this reason you will encounter many roads and houses which initially were farming settlements; nowadays they are residential. The hills that connect with the sierra used to be covered by dry crops and vineyards, but now have become no man's land with an incipient thorny scrub resistant to drought, creating a landscape somewhat misplaced in time, two steps away from the coast. So it is the feeling of immersing yourself in the forests of the Sierra de Mijas, where the mountains are cut by the gashes of marble and aggregate quarries, but still preserve a part of their undeniable natural values.

- **Starting point:** area west of Ojén, intersection of the A-7103 road.
- **Access to starting point:** the only road is the A-355, which leaves from Marbella towards the area of Alhaurín el Grande and Coin, to the north.
- **Finish point:** The A-387, in the northern part of the village of Mijas.
- **Access to finish point:** above-mentioned road connects with the area of Alhaurín el Grande and Coin, while the best road to follow from the coast is the A-368 which comes from the AP-7S and the parallel N-340, already practically inserted in the coastal urban fabric.
- **Possible "escape routes":** there are many tracks which descend towards the south and the coast, but all of them mean covering quite a distance. The best idea would be to follow the path or retrace your steps. Starting from the Centro de Rehabilitación de Drogadictos the reference area is Entrerriós.
- **No return point:** just past the helipad and the water reservoir for fire fighting there is a junction which leads to Linarejos. Keep in mind that at this point there is the same distance to Ojén (returning) and walking ahead to Centro de Rehabilitación de Drogadictos. The latter is an ideal place for an "escape" since it is well connected to the Entrerriós area through a paved track and is well known in Mijas.
- **Maps:** For the first part, firstly to locate Ojén, you need the **1065-IV** (Marbella). Then, in that order, **1066-III** (Entrerriós), **1066-IV** (Fuengirola) and **1066-II** (Alhaurín el Grande). You can also use as a supplement **1066-I** (Coin) to have an overall view of the upper part, in the north of Sierra Alpujata.
- **District boundaries:** you will be passing through the district of Ojén from the start until a little after crossing the Majal de la Parra, at approximately 14.8 km. The exact border is at the col between the Cerro de la Luz and la Loma de Topil, a few metres from the talc and mica quarry. From then on, until the end and for the remaining 25 kilometres you are in the territory of Mijas.



Charco de las Viñas at the beginning of the stage

• Enjoy the walk safely

There is quite a long distance between the starting point and any inhabited areas, about 24 kilometres to Entreríos, where there are bus lines. Sierra Alpujata is characterised by scarce population which means that the walker needs to address facing such a walking distance as far as time and provisions are concerned. Obviously, in summer you need to focus on water supply. There is only one water source along the way, Fuente del Cabañil, however it hasn't been treated for human consumption and you must take a detour to get to it. A good way of doing this stage would be on a mountain bike. However, you would need to be an expert mountain biker to be able to follow most of the paths which make up the 10 km section from the first ford across the Río de las Pasadas and along the streambed of the Arroyo de los Pilonos.

It is recommended to adapt your walking to the available daylight hours depending on the season, and to the length of the walk, keeping in mind that you need to maintain an average speed of 4 km an hour including stops so that you can complete the whole stage in 10 hours.

The streams you cross in Sierra Alpujata carry little water and the fords along the tracks are adapted by the use of broad concrete platforms. You shouldn't encounter any problems at the Río de las Pasadas either, although it may seem to the contrary looking at the wide riverbed. The same happens during the long kilometre you must walk following the steam bottom of Arroyo de los Pilonos or along either stream bank. The stream rarely carries any water or it is reduced to a narrow ditch which is easily crossed. Anyway, you can use part of the PR A-170 to cross the stream over a bridge. There are many sections

of road, in Entreríos and then before Mijas. Quite frequently there is a shoulder you can follow but not everywhere so you need to be careful. Pay attention at the bend of the road where you step off the asphalt to cross Río de las Pasadas (km 27.5), as there is little visibility.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

La Mancomunidad de Municipios de la Costa del Sol, the local governing body, published in 2011 a network of itineraries in which the PR A-170 Ojén-Mijas was included. Although it nominally coincides with stage 32, it differs in its approach to Mijas, and thus in the cumulative elevation gain and length. The good side of it is that the PR can be used as a much less mountainous alternative. In order to do this, instead of fording the river Río de las Pasadas you would need to follow the road to encounter the walk on top of the bridge and follow the signs from there to the end.

Apart from the paths described in stage 31, to Ojén, the other adapted paths are in Mijas and are confined to the sierra. There are information panels at the starting points but practically speaking these are paths which ascend towards the highest parts and there are many possibilities of circular walks.

One of the starting points is the Puerto Colorado, and in fact the starting point is the same as for the GR-249 where this walk leaves the A-387 road. Here start such walks as Ruta Naranja (orange walk) to Pico Mijas, about 4 km one way, Ruta Verde (green walk) from las Cañadas, same length and with a connection to the previous one, and Ruta Azul (blue walk) from la Fuente de las Adelfas, 3 km long.

However, our path uses the red walk, Ruta Roja or de la Cruz de la Misión (2.6 km) heading east. In the mining area it connects with a short 1 km itinerary, (white walk) Ruta Blanca or of the Cantera del Barrio, and a couple more which are described in stage 33 as they coincide with that stage during the majority of the walk.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The village which is the start of the stage is famous for its springs, which have traditionally fed the fertile orchards of Ojén. In fact, the pueblo is located between two streams: Almadán and Real, and the terraced orchards along the banks form a unique landscape until the fork of the two streams. The natural springs in the surroundings of the village (of Almadán) Chorrillo and the Cañada de la Puente) are located to the west and, as it usually happens, they flow from a limestone flank. Another watercourse to the east is more stable and comes from peridotite. It culminates as the Río Real, which flows directly into the Mediterranean. One of the tributaries of this river in its upper basin is the Arroyo del Tejar, accompanying you on the right of the path until it crosses the path in Cordobachina. There is a sign before reaching the cemetery which points to the pedestrian access to the Charco de las Viñas, a pretty pond situated under large blocks of peridotite in the river bed which is quite enclosed and covered with willows.

The southern flank of Sierra Alpujata or Sierra Negra is the headwater of the Fuengirola river basin. The Puerto de los Carneros at 450 metres in altitude prevents any runoff from flowing towards the west, while the Cerro de Juana Díaz (508 m) and la Loma del Puerto prevent water draining to the south. This is the reason why the streams which have their origin in this part of the sierra (on its southern slopes, which is where the walk crosses it) head towards the east. You need to ford or cross the consecutive streams of Jobretín, Majar de Hinojo and Majar de la Parra; all merge to form the river Ojén. This river course meanders between peridotite, away from the GR, but is invariably on your right for half of the duration of the walk. All these streams are permanent in nature, as evidenced by the Chub and Barbel which can be seen in the deeper natural pools, sometimes in large numbers.

Riparian vegetation might not be too diverse or that lush, since the peridotite soils are very limiting and contain heavy metals. There are, however, willows, oleanders, reeds and heaths in the river groves. Other river courses appear in the area of Entrerríos. The Arroyo del Laurel is the first one, and it descends from the Puerto de la Alberca and then crosses into the area of Candelero, where there is the Pine of Candelero. The other two watercourses are at the lowest area, El Río de las Pasadas (or Alaminos) and the Arroyo de los Pílonos. As mentioned, both should be considered "ramblas", watercourses where the water disappears for much of the year due to the permeability of the land. In a place so dry and punished by the sun in summer and flooding in winter only tamarisk have managed to adapt, several metres away from the centre of the riverbed or streambed. The proliferation of kitchen gardens, country houses and residential areas in the Entrerríos hamlet, including its name (between rivers), are due to the close meeting point of the Río Ojén and Pasadas as they from Fuengirola river, which flows a few kilometres further down beside the Castillo de Sohail.

During the ascent of Mijas and its sierra, you are walking along a line which is quite far away from the little valleys which also drain into these rivers but only in rainy season, hampering the existence of even the kind of riparian vegetation better adapted to droughts. Additionally, in limestone mountains water tends to circulate underground which results in extremely dry landscapes of sand and stone.

The 2012 fire deforested most of Sierra Alpujata



WALK DESCRIPTION

» The Arroyo del Tejar Valley

The exit from Ojén in the Almadán area takes the hiker by caves carved out in ancient travertine rock at the foot of the walk and then once you are outside the village, by sign-posted threshing circles. There is a sharp decline on a concrete track to the ford across the Arroyo Real between traditional orchards, now also with subtropical trees. Immediately after that you start climbing. Before the cemetery there are steps with protective railing accessing the Charca de las Viñas, a traditional spot for a swim, close to the village. Next pass by a farmhouse with irrigated terraces. The traditional path used initially is the right of way Colada del Camino de la Puente which leads to the Puerto de los Carneros along the bottom of the valley. The GR, however, follows later a wide forest track with a good surface which winds around more but leads to the same destination as the path described above, but on the slope on the left. The two alternative routes separate at 1.8 km.

The peridotites have been ruling the landscape for a while, and with them the specialist tree, the Maritime pine. The undergrowth, very thin here, is composed of Dwarf palm, junipers, esparto grass and some gorse. The country road embankments used to be supported by rows of eucalyptus trees after construction, and they line the walk for many kilometres. The Ojén Town Hall and the City Council have signposted with tiled panels and crosses the first junction (and many others within the village district). Ignore the junction on the left that leads to the Fuente de Cerrillares and the road that was formerly called C-337 and has now been renamed A-7103, connecting with Monda.

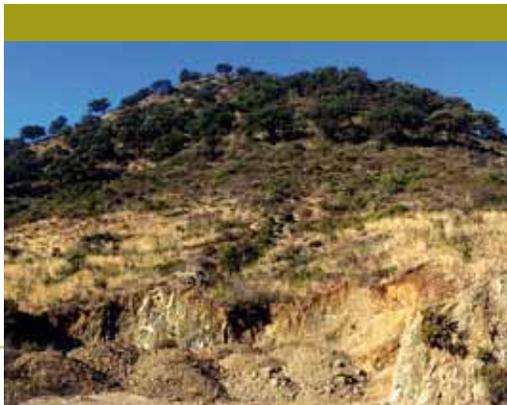
Higher up there is a surprise: a Cork oak grove occupying a few hills that obviously contain some farmhouses because of the better-quality



Sierra Blanca from the walk with the houses and gardens of Ojén

of the schist terrain when compared to the peridotite. Under the trees, with a few interspersed Portuguese gall oaks, there are some Spiny Broom and Sage-leaved Cistus. When another stretch of concrete track ends, in the area of Cordobachina, you see the first effects of the 2012 fire. It came right up to the headwaters of the Arroyo del Tejar, where a few houses had to be evacuated. In the area where Cork oak groves change to pine woods, although they have disappeared here, you will find a few terraces of citrus and olive groves of very small production.

On the next rise, turning around, you have an impressive panoramic view of the burned and surviving oak forests while in the distance there is the Sierra Blanca, the scenery of the previous stage of the walk.



» The Headwaters of Río de Ojén

A row of the revived eucalyptus, the few survivors along the path up to the Puerto de los Carneros (km 6.3), where you arrive at another sign-posted, multi-branched junction and ignore the tracks on your right to Ojén and Marbella, the Paraje de Los Sauces and Paraje de Los Molineros. Soon you reach a new minor intersection which affords views to the other side of the sierra. Here ignore the track on your left, even though you will notice that it is frequently used by walkers and cyclists to perform a circular route through the Sierra de Alpujata, belonging to Ojén. This track will re-connect with our walk in a talc and mica quarry.

The views that follow as you descend are startling, especially for those who remember the pine wood which used to grow here. The colour of the bare sierra only emphasizes the drama emanating from the landscape. There are good views of the highest altitudes of Alpujata, the ridge between the hills Cerro de Castillejo (1,074 m) and Cerro de Aguila (1,034 m), to the north. Very close, there are the farmhouses in the small vegas at the Jobretín stream, which can be reached on descent, after passing by another junction towards the Cerro de Juana Díaz and the Tinajones area to the right.

The Arroyo Jobretín is responsible for providing water for the fire-fighting reservoir a little further up, on the right and below

the path, next to its helipad. Behind, direction southwest, the charred ridges of the Cerro de Juana Díaz only maintain a row of tall Eucalyptus and Canary Island pine, a reminder that the best time to extinguish a fire in an area as wild as this is when the fire is still an attempt.

Walking further ahead you find a track which turns off to the right, beside a ruin, towards a valley where there are the houses of Linarejos. The hill that bears the same name closes the landscape off in the south, and is also significant because around the hill there are a good number of abandoned open pit mines of talc and mica. Looking rather like quarries of aggregates, they are not close to the walk but you can see the old access roads almost everywhere. Time and time again you will need to ford the same two streams, which appear on the tiled signs Arroyo del Algarrobo (Majar del Hinojo on recommended maps) and Arroyo de los Laureles (Majar de la Parra). Either way, they are permanent watercourses with interesting flora and a stable population of fish, visible especially in the pond created by the second stream as it cascades from a concrete ford.

A significant ascent leads to the hill located between the Cerro de la Luz and La Loma de Topil, where Ojén district ends and the track which coincided with the walk at the beginning joins the GR again. Thus you enter another valley of Arroyo del Laurel, which eventually joins the previous stream and forms the river Ojén. Now you do actually cross a mica and talc

the Cordobachina area, many Cork oaks have survived the 2012 fire



quarry located at a col, while the walk leads in a wide curve, wading across a few streams which harbour striking flora around the meagre flow and the nearby streaks of clay, especially the Upright heath (*Erica terminalis*).

Nevertheless, throughout the walk you can see several species of small plants endemic to the peridotite mountains, some very striking such as the *Armeria colorata* or the *Staehelina baetica*, or the particular subspecies of some shrubs such as *Halimium atriplicifolium* and *Genista hirsuta*, which can be very abundant at times.

At the Puerto de la Alberca you will have walked 18 km and then you start a descent, first passing through some interesting two-toned strata, containing minerals which used to be sought after by the mining industry. After wading a stream surrounded by heath, to your right and down at the bottom of the valley, among the most extensive of the eucalyptus groves of the day, you will find the Fuente del Cabañil. Actually what you can see is the (unused nowadays) natural pool, since the water source is hidden amongst the vegetation and protected by a small shed. Also note, from the same lookout point, the steep slope in the east which is a hill called Loma del Becerril and the ruins of one of the mining facilities, Las Minas del Jaboncillo.

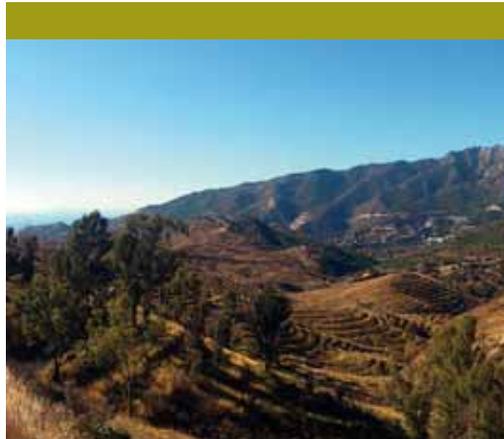
» Enterríos

As you keep walking finally you reach a mountain pass where, on the former site of the house of the Forest Guards, at the Cerro del Púlpito, there is La Comunidad Terapéutica Centro FADAS Mijas de la Junta de Andalucía, which is a drug rehab facility. This hill is well known thanks to the excellent viewpoint and is a superb vantage point to observe the regenerating grove of the erect Canary Island pine (*Pinus canariensis*) after it has been, literally, charred in the fire. In 2012, for the second time in two years in a row, the occupants of the Rehabilitation Centre had to be evacuated, as well as many houses of the Enterríos area, because of the greatest fire in the province of Málaga in years.



A warning sign about forest fires

A little further down there is a major junction to the left, leading into the last of the eastern foothills of Sierra Alpujata (or Sierra Negra). Ignore the junction as our track turns south, still paved, and passes by another fire fighting reservoir on the right. In the area of Candelero, ford the Arroyo del Laurel, much diminished in the summer as it keeps filtering away, but it does still support fish in the seasonal pools. Now you are entering inhabited areas that in part have been affected by the flames and some Cork oaks that now have already started to regrow. The fire did spare the pine tree called Pino del Candelero, an outstanding specimen, more because of its uniqueness in the midst of the farmland, than its actual size.



The paved track becomes a road with bus service, an indication that you have reached Entrerrios. There is a major junction at kilometre 24.5 where you ignore the left turn and shortly thereafter is the Cortijo del Campillo, dating from the 18th century. You need to pay close attention at a sharp bend to the right (it can pose some danger) as you need to leave the road here and walk straight towards the riverbed at km 27.1.

If you have opted for a mountain bike for the stage, this is the place where you need to switch to walking, unless you are an expert cyclist. On the other side of the Alaminos river (or Río de las Pasadas) walk upstream until you encounter a dry stream bed which is the tributary of the river and follow this, walking along either bank or the streambed itself. The road which you pass under is the A-7053 Fuengirola-Puerto de las Pescadores road (between Mijas and Coin). This bridge over the Alaminos river can be used as an alternative to cross in the case of flooding.

The streambed is abandoned to take a track along its left bank which is marked as "sin salida para vehiculos" (no exit for vehicles). And so begins the long climb north-eastwards along the Loma del Flamenco, passing by on

both sides gullies that come down the hill to join the streambed you have left behind. The terrain changes substantially; there are gneiss, schist and slates that have caused the path to narrow and led to its poor shape, both made worse by occasional quads and dirt bikes passing through. The vegetation along the first metres is much denser, but there is nothing other than scrub which is adapted to drought.

Low scrub of Spiny broom is interspersed with Wild olives and cultivated olive trees which were tended to long ago and now are giving way to the scrub. There is Sticky fleabane, gorse, Ononis natrix, Genista umbellata and lavender. There are a couple of ruins of simple houses quite separated from each other; the path makes slight downwards turns but in general you are walking up. There are short sections of country road but these soon disappear. Here, and also in the nearby hills, there are copses of Holm oaks on the higher points, three or four at a time, witnesses of their lost domain.

There is a larger farmhouse surrounded by eucalyptus trees and a few Carob trees on top of a hillock (km 32.7).

There is an ancient threshing circle on the hill visible if you descend a little, and deposits of quartz in the surroundings.

Spectacular views of the sierra affected by the fire and the Sierra Blanca of Ojén in the background



Now the walk connects with a wide dirt track which continues up the Matrichi, passing more and more houses on both sides, traditional and residential ones. On the right (at the headwaters of a stream) you can encounter a couple of lime kilns. There are spectacular views from any of the hills over the coast of Fuengirola, Sierra Alpujata looking back or the Sierra de Mijas ahead, which, at this point of the walk, is your destination at the end of the day.

» The Sierra de Mijas

What is left to do now is to continue climbing along a couple of bends until you arrive at the A-387 road at the level of Valtocado housing estate, a bus stop and the bridge Puente de la Adelfa. The stretch of road which separates you from Mijas on the right is a short stretch of 600 metres, which nevertheless you need to walk using proper precautions. Thus you access Puerto de los Colorados, a contrasting meeting point between white marbles, dolomites typical of this sierra and the schist of the hills that you have just walked along.

A panel showing walks prepared by the Town Hall of Mijas marks the place (km 36) where different routes begin. In order to get your bearings you need to remember that the GR-249 coincides with the red walk (Ruta Roja, Cruz de la Misión), the one which has the least

La Fuente del Cabañil at the bottom of the valley and the old mine on the terraced slopes



Piles of burnt pine trees left over after the fire

uphill incline compared with the other walks starting at this point. All the paths share the first section, with steps and ditches which stops this part from deteriorating, but soon the orange, green and blue walks branch off to the left. The little valley to the right and the foothills of the mountains are covered by an extensive immature eucalyptus plantation until you climb to the top of a col with excellent views over the Costa del Sol. From this point on surviving Stone pines which have escaped the last fire and small young, regenerating trees dominate the landscape. The scrub is quite dense in the first part, with Rosemary, gorse, Genista umbellata, Spiny broom, Broom-like kidney vetch and young pines beginning to peak out in between. This area, affected by another massive fire around Mijas, is recovering slowly, bringing hope to the future of the vegetation of the Sierra Alpujata, bridging the gap between the two affected areas and their distinct type of soil. The first to regenerate here will be the pine woods, of Maritime pine initially and Stone pine.

The walk descends slightly towards a very well preserved lime kiln and an information panel. Then you continue to climb towards the highest point of the day, first passing by a scree slope.

After a waterfall. This is a superb place to have a look at your walk so far, looking west: Río Fuengirola valley with its tributaries coming from the eastern foothills of the Sierras de Alpujata y Negra.

Thus you reach another intersection in the path where you need to follow downhill the direction to the abandoned marble mine. You can see the last cuts in the metamorphic limestone rock where blocks of it were taken, white polished surfaces and remains of material mined for construction work. Finally, arrive at a cross which indicates there is the Stations of the Cross are close, leading along sandy paths and culminating at the Ermita del Calvario chapel. The last section consists of walking downhill, ignoring a couple of uphill paths on your left and arriving at the A-387 road where stage 32 is brought to an end. ○



Arroyo del Jobretín regaining its riparian vegetation



Charca in el Arroyo del Laurel or Majar de la Parra

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

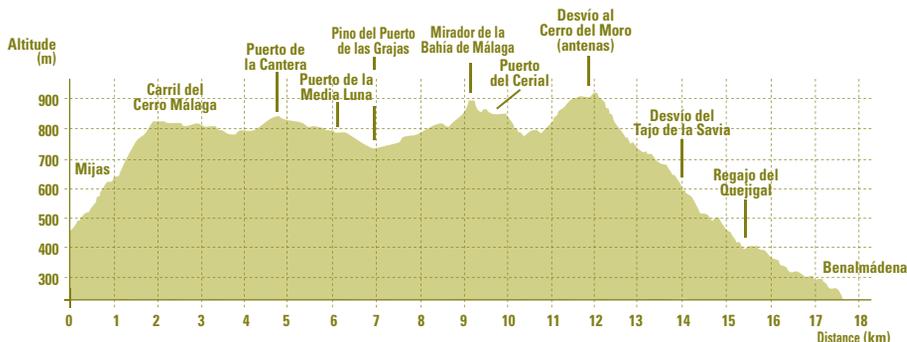
1 Ojén, across A-7103	30S 0333756 4048259	335 m	2 Charco de las Viñas	30S 0334635 4047738	245 m
3 Cork oak wood at Cordobachina	30S 0335769 4048068	355 m	4 Puerto de los Carneros, pass	30S 0336851 4047890	450 m
5 Bridge over Arroyo Jobretín	30S 0338778 4047772	350 m	6 Helipad and fire-fighting reservoir of Jobretín	30S 0339284 4047536	380 m
7 Ford across Arroyo Majar del Hinojo	30S 0340113 4047560	300 m	8 Ford across Arroyo Majar de la Parra	30S 0340821 4048034	275 m
9 Open-air talcum and mica mine	30S 0341669 4048133	805 m	10 Puerto de la Alberca, headwaters of Arroyo del Laurel	30S 0341830 4049473	390 m
11 Viewpoint to the water tank and Fuente del Cabañil water spring	30S 0342419 4049322	300 m	12 Detour to the Centro de Drogodependencia. Tarmac starts	30S 0342961 4048847	285 m
13 Ford across Arroyo del Laurel	30S 0344593 4047822	85 m	14 Barriada de Entrerriós	30S 0346258 4047261	95 m
15 Streambeds of Arroyo Alaminos and Las Pasadas	30S 0348281 4046497	20 m	16 Mirador de la Sierra de Mijas from the Loma del Flamenco	30S 0349435 4049079	180 m
17 Two lime kilns	30S 0350543 4050466	250 m	18 Puerto Colorado, path through the sierra starts	30S 0351352 4051496	455 m
19 Viewpoint to stage 32	30S 0352422 4051455	635 m	20 Abandoned marble mines	30S 0352722 4051284	575 m
21 Viewpoint of Mijas, A-387 road	30S 0353336 4051363	465 m			

33 MIJAS • BENALMÁDENA

La Sierra de Mijas



ESTIMATED TIME

6 hours 15 minutes

LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	18	Accumulated ascent	750	Final altitude	235
Ascent km	6.3	Accumulated descent	1.000	Maximum altitude	925
Descent km	7.8	Maximum difference	695	Minimum altitude	235
Flat km	3.9	Altitude at starting point	465	Average altitude	685

» Summary of this Stage «

The original population nuclei of Mijas and Benalmádena are quite close together, just where the southern profile of the white Sierra de Mijas slopes more gently. Stage 33 cannot use the direct east-west line that joins them (approximately 6 kilometres) but instead rises into the mountain, traversing the ridge and describing a north - south arch.

The gradients are significant here, but the slopes are made easier by the excellent design of the traditional paths. This, coupled with the reasonable length, make this stage a highly recommended one to achieve the fundamental objective of the day: getting to know this modest but interesting mountainous coastline of the Costa del Sol, much beloved among the inhabitants of surrounding villages. It is common to pass walkers and cyclists, each on their own selection of paths through an extensive network of tracks and tracks that criss-cross the woodland area.

The paths covered here usually have a good earthen surface and they are not used by motor vehicles. While the tracks have an acceptable and safe conservation level, in certain sections where vehicle access is possible, the sand doesn't compact, causing gullies and bumps which make walking more difficult.

» Highlights of this Stage «

A mountain range whose peaks are between 900 and 1,150 meters in altitude, separated from the coast by 10 kilometres at most, in a straight line, has to offer excellent views of the coast of Málaga. In addition, the proportion of clear days and blue skies is very high, ensuring the spectacle. This is probably the main asset of this stage, the successive panoramic views over all aspects of the sierra. »

							
2	2	2	4	0.3	6.7	11.0	x 1

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» The distinguishing features of the Sierra de Mijas are the dolomites that prevail, rocks that are derived from marble, white when fresh-cut but acquiring a beautiful grey exterior due to the weathering process. Erosion also yields red clay but more frequent than this is the bright white coarse-grained sand, forming deposits many centimetres deep. The extreme porosity of the terrain is due to the karstification of the rock's cracked and fractured surface, so that the storm-water drainage is almost instantaneous, percolating toward the numerous potholes.

Such a dry environment requires the incorporation of specialist vegetation, principally the three species of pine trees to be found during this stage: some Maritime pines, more Aleppo pines but mostly Stone pines. The thickets and undergrowth are dominated by the aromatic plants and thorny scrub, but in certain enclaves there are broadleaf shrubs and even Holm oak copses attempting to come back in favourable areas. One of the most complicated sectors to recover are the aggregate quarries, although small in the district of Mijas, those of Alhaurin de la Torre are extensive, this Stage allows you to visit both settings.

There are a few easily recognized endemic plants along the way, some quite striking and usually adapted to the dolomite mountain sands, while highlights of the fauna are an excellent population of Spanish Ibx, which are easy to see in some areas, the conspicuous Large Psammodromus lizards and the impressive Eagles.

- **Starting point:** The Mijas ring road, actually the A-387 which connects to Coín and Alhaurín el Grande through the Puerto de los Pescadores pass. There is a place for parking, direction Coín, at the end of Calle Mirador street.
- **Access to starting point:** There are two access roads to Mijas from the coastal motorway AP-7S, taking the A-368. In addition, there is the above-mentioned road from Coín and Alhaurín el Grande.
- **Finish point:** At the Plaza Castillejos on the Avenida Juan Luís Peralta de Benalmádena, close to where it joins with the Calle Luís Cernuda street which comes down from the sierra.
- **Access to finish point:** There are various access ways into Benalmádena Pueblo from the Autovía del Mediterráneo, but the most used coincides with the old road, the already mentioned A-368.
- **Possible "escape routes":** Out of all the paths that turn off from the one taken in the main part of the walk, the best for a possible escape is the one which heads south from the Pino del Puerto de las Grajas. The others, going toward the northern slopes, are much longer.
Another point of escape is the asphalted track that leads up to the Cerro del Moro, a small number of cars pass by here. This track, which goes to the telecommunication antennas, leads up to the eastern access to Mijas where it joins with the possible escape described before.
- **No return point:** In this stage it is not too relevant, given the closeness of the start and finish points. It is not advisable to continue when you have finished walking the forest track after the Pino del Puerto de las Grajas. From there the path is very mountainous and more demanding on the walker, but not for long. Once you arrive at the junction between Ruta 6 (blue) with 4 and 3 the best thing to do is to go down because it is more complicated to retrace your steps.
- **Maps:** All of this Stage is on map **1066-II** (Alhaurín el Grande).
- **District boundaries:** Up to kilometre 6 you are within the boundaries of Mijas. The ridge of the Sierra represents the border between Mijas, Alhaurin el Grande and Alhaurin de la Torre. Alhaurin el Grande is not entered, but you will go in and out of Alhaurin de la Torre intermittently until kilometre 10.8, when you reach the asphalted track. The final part, after leaving the asphalt at kilometre 12, belongs to the district of Benalmádena.



Path between Esparto tussock and dolomite sands

• Enjoy the walk safely

There is no single point to stock up on water during the entire walk, therefore you must be prepared.

Normally there should be no problems in finding the path during the course of this stage, but you should have clear ideas of where you are if you intend to make detours or use any of the numerous alternatives to shorten or lengthen the walk.

In the steepest areas loose stones on the path can cause slipping, but the sections of greater difficulty for walkers are the areas of deep sand, from the point where you leave the asphalted track going to the antennas, up to the immediate vicinity of the Tajo del Quejigal.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

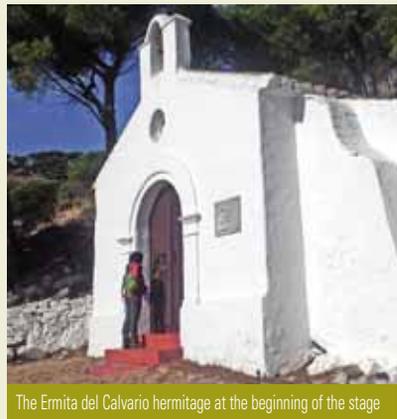
The towns of Mijas and Benalmádena have each designed their own network of paths, described using colours and you link here with Ruta 6 / blue, which is called Puerto de Málaga in Mijas and Cazadores in Benalmádena. It goes over the watershed and connects several others along the highest point.

Thus, the walks described in Stage 32 Ojén-Mijas for the western area, are joined at this stage by three other paths, as well as the walk to the Ermita del Calvario hermitage (also called Virgen de la Peña). The GR-249 uses in principle the blue walk, but only until it arrives at the track where you leave the path as it continues to climb. But before this

point, there are two other options which go off in loops: the white path or the Cantera del Barrio, going towards the west, and the yellow path or the Cañada de Gertrudis that leads in opposite direction.

In Benalmádena the scheme is repeated at the Cerro del Moro. Firstly, you can leave the asphalted track, on Ruta 5, Mina de la Trinidad, identified by the bright pink colour, leading down, and along the border between Mijas and Benalmádena. Then, also heading south, but coming from the eastern flank of the peak, there is the green path, number 4, of the Tajo de la Sabia (with two branches) which you ignore, and the pink Ruta 3 or Quejigal, which coincides with the Great Path of Málaga.

Alternatively, there is a short distance walk, the PR A-171 Mijas- Benalmádena 16.4 kilometres long, which coincides almost point by point with the GR-249. In other parts this very path appears under the name of PR A-171 Mijas-Puerto de las Ovejas, 12.1 km long. Either way, the described path separates between kilometre markers 1.9 / 4.8, where the GR leads runs along a track while the PR goes up to the Puerto de Málaga pass (999 m) and then pick up the ridge to the Puerto de la Cantera from where it follows the ridge.



The Ermita del Calvario hermitage at the beginning of the stage

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

The village of Mijas between the mountains and the coast



The limestone nature of the Sierra de Mijas, which as mentioned includes the municipal districts of Alhaurin de la Torre, Alhaurín el Grande, Benalmádena and Torremolinos, ensures that there is no permanent flow in a large part of this vast domain of the mountain. While the rains are not uncommon, surface circulation is hindered by the process of karsification of dolomites. This phenomenon results in the underground transport of water to a number of subterranean hollows that are characterized primarily by their vertical development. They don't tend to be too deep, or to be more precise, the part that has been explored rarely exceeds thirty metres in depth. Those close to the walk are at Puerto de la Media Luna, Zagalurrera, and Arenales and that of Repetidor, approximately following the ridge line.

Moreover, the sierra is the divide between the watersheds, Guadalhorce, towards the north, the rivers Alaminos or Pasadas to the west, and a series of gullies draining

southwards directly into the sea, and which you will see during this stage. Their general aspect is that of dry gullies, as is the case of the Arroyos de la Seda, Hondo, del Nacimiento or de las Presas at the beginning of the stage.

A different case is the Regajo del Quejigal. This ravine is located at the foot of the Tajo del Quejigal gorge and it begins at higher altitude. Although in general, when crossing you encounter only a bit of damp earth, the upwelling of water is significant, and used to be more so for Benalmádena in the past, as testified by the 9 level registration boxes that dot the last part of the walk. You can still see the rubber tubing as well as lime crusts left by the water on the pipes and on the walls. The sierra, on the other hand, is responsible for dispensing water which rises in hundreds of small sources all around, distant enough not to affect the walk, to the point that the capital of Málaga in a not-too-distant past looked towards here to alleviate the shortage of urban water supply through a project that did not materialize and will be shown in the last stage of the Great Málaga Path.

These Echiums are well adapted to the limestone sands



WALK DESCRIPTION

» To the Puerto de la Cantera pass

Taking the necessary precautions as you cross the A-387 from the street that leads to the Viewpoint, note to your left the first sign of the walks of Mijas and a plaque that commemorates the late author of a publication on the natural values and walks of the sierra. From here follow a path that coincides with a Via Crucis (Stations of the Cross pilgrimage path); there is a bench at each station of the Cross. Although the path takes a turn to the right a little before, it is worth a detour to see the Ermita del Calvario chapel, visited during the fifteen stations of penance. This hermitage is under the patronage of the Virgen de la Peña and was erected by the Carmelite monks for the time when they withdraw into prayer, then, of course, there was no road and access was more complicated.

Pass the chapel on your left and the path which coincides with stage 32, and continue climbing. The adaptation of the Stone pine trees to fire shows well in these first steps since the fire damage barely remains visible other than slightly blackened trunks. The vegetation in this first part is composed of Esparto grasses, with European Dwarf Palms, Blackthorns, brambles, *Lavandula multifida*, *Dianthus* and *Staehelina dubia*. Along the hilltop path the views of the Costa del Sol are not blocked by any obstacles, except the more dense groves of pines.

There are paths off to the left and right leading to the Cantera del Barrio and the Cañada de Gertrudis respectively, and when you have travelled 1,900 meters you will join a track. Here turn uphill onto the Ruta Azul (blue walk) aiming for the Puerto de Málaga pass while the dirt track levels off toward the east. Now walk around the headland of the Arroyo del Nacimiento stream leaving the Cerro del Chaparral hill and the Pico de Mendoza summit on the left.



The path ascends between Stone Pine trees

At each one of the bends you pass a run-off channel and as you get to the edge there is an opportunity to admire the aggregate quarries from above. The rounded and shiny tops of the Stone pine trees offer a stark contrast with the sharp profiles of the open-pit mine and its white terraced hillsides, which fortunately are being replanted with native vegetation.

At the foot of the walk, the slopes offer the sight of the emaciated rocks with their strikingly eroded forms and the pink sand that slips between the rock plates, proving the instability of the terrain and the ease with which runoff water can erode the mountains. The only effective remedy against this pernicious phenomenon is the vegetation cover. Those plants that can colonise this surface, with almost no soil, appear in the nooks and



crannies, and some of them are very striking such as *Alyssum serpyllifolium* and *Echium albicans* which has a limited distribution. In the last section of the track there is an excellent vantage point that allows views along the ridge of the Sierra de Mijas which you will walk to the Cerro del Moro, crowned by telecommunication antennas.

The shoreline is very close to the mountains at that point. Immediately after this, the vegetation changes substantially thanks to the protection of the mountain, numerous Holm's oaks appear between the Aleppo and Stone pines with Kermes oak, Juniper, Rosemary and brooms of good size but also a diversity of smaller plants.

One finally gains access to a junction that marks the Puerto de la Cantera (km 4.8) in which you take a better quality forest track, veering right. This track rejoins the GR with the PR A-171 Mijas-Benalmadena, coming from the west.

»» Along the line of summits

The northern orientation of the first few meters of the new track means that the Aleppo Pines are much more developed, and so dense that they hardly allow other plants to grow. As testimony to the fact that we are near quarries, on the right there is a disused green coloured reservoir which is property of the Compañía General de Canteras S.A (General Quarries Company Limited) for supplying water to the

Cantera de los Arenales quarry. At the Puerto de la Media Luna pass, when the track describes a wide curve toward the north, it enters for the first time in the district of Alhaurin de la Torre and a new copse of Holm's oaks appears, emerging from between the planted conifers.

In an instant you have spectacular views over the Guadalhorce Valley, the Central Limestone Arch and even the limestone mountain ranges around the Sierra de las Nieves, the Tajo del Aguila, a high escarpment, closing the panorama to the left. Thus we get to one of the most emblematic places in the Sierra de Mijas, the Puerto de las Grajas, where a landmark tree known by walkers and mountain bikers as The Pine (a good specimen of *Pinus halepensis*) points to a cross roads. The lateral tracks go to the lowland areas (the one on the right represents a good escape road). However, you continue straight on, aiming for a dead-end track (km 7.8) signposted as *sin salida* (without exit) for vehicles. During 1,400 meters it passes along the flank of Cerro Jorado getting narrower between lush vegetation joined now by terebinth, Lentisc, wild olives, cistus, phlomis, abundant creepers and *Bupleurum gibraltarium*.

A true footpath begins in the largest Maritime pine woods of the day, with tall examples that can hardly be sustained by their roots due to how closely they have grown.

After a steep climb you walk along the limestone ridge with views over the bay of Málaga, walking between abundant indigenous shrubs

From the first part of the track you can appreciate the ridge walked in Stage 34



and Joint Pine (*Ephedra fragilis*) until passing through the first col (or saddle), the Puerto de las Tres Caleras, and a second called Puerto del Cerial, both areas with grand examples of Black Pines and Aleppo Pines.

To the south the path joins with an asphalted road that could be an alternative to shorten the walk, you will also find it again near the access road to a sign-posted viewpoint on Cerro Castillejo. The telecommunication antennas are visible on top of the Cerro del Moro, with its 939 meters of altitude, is also a good place for 360-degree panoramic views. Both this possibility and the Route 5 of the Mina de la Trinidad remain to your right until you reach a junction that turns back towards the east (km 12 and highest point of the stage).

»» The Barranco del Quejigal ravine

The steep slope, the very sandy terrain and perhaps the path being used for other means, has made this first section a place where good care must be taken. Surrounded again by dense pine woodland, the path soon meets with a couple of sign-posted crossings for the Ruta 4, you are now in the district of Benalmadena. The landscape now opens towards the coastline of this town in a deep ravine along which the path takes you.

While leaving to the left the Tajo de la Sabia, not visible from the walk, the terrain becomes increasingly sandy until reaching a



Linaria clementei, an endemic plant of Málaga with limited distribution

third junction. The branch leading straight on is what the Stage 34 uses to go to Calamorro. But for now you have to finish what is at hand, descending through the habitat for the local endemic and protected plant *Linaria clementei*, in dolomite sands. Thus we get to the bottom of the ravine to make a detour toward the west looking for the Tajo del Quejigal, one of the most famous escarpments of the sierra, being close to Benalmadena and for the interesting flora that is protected by the shade of the gully.

When the path crosses the Regajo del Quejigal (km 15.4) between oleanders and reeds you will have passed by a kind of rest area with benches and a fountain without water, here is located the first of the cabins

The bay of Málaga and the town, with pines and quarries in the forefront



that accompanies and marks the way until the end. The walk climbs slightly where the vegetation continues adding numbers of species and gaining in luxuriance. The plant life installed in the cliffs of the disused quarry is very interesting, here the terebinth prevail.

GR-249 turns progressively towards the west and approaches the autovía del Mediterráneo motorway, which it accompanies from where it is joined on the right by the Ruta 4, bright pink, which you have encountered higher up. A second junction constitutes another path offering this alternative. Following the inspection covers and rubber pipes that appear from time to time, pass below the AP-7S through the tunnel of Arroyo Hondo, which ends at a small Park at Luis Cernuda Street and leads to the end of stage in the Avenida Juan Luis Peralta in the area north of Benalmadena. ○



Views to the south, dominated by the Guadalhorce valley



The emblematic pine tree at the Puerto de Las Grajas junction

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

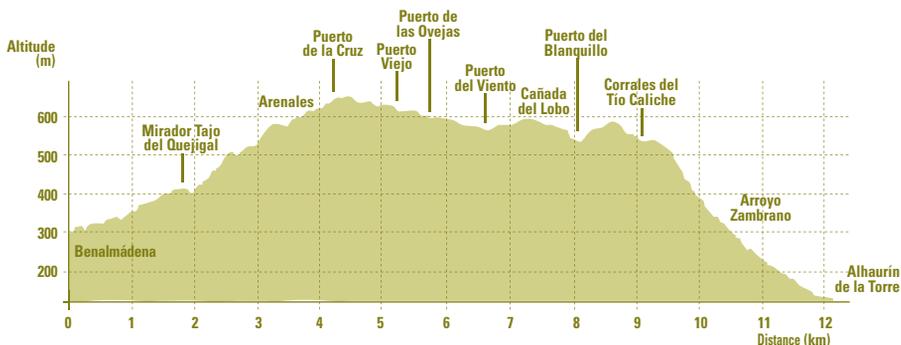
1 Mirador de Mijas viewpoint, Carretera A-387	30S 0353336 4051363	465 m	2 Ermita del Calvario chapel (or Virgen de la Peña)	30S 0353299 4051458	530 m
3 Beginning of the track on the southern slope of the sierra	30S 0353009 4052134	830 m	4 Mijas quarry viewpoint	30S 0353532 4052661	790 m
5 Puerto de la Cantera quarry and track junction	30S 0353527 4053455	850 m	6 Holm oak woods at Puerto de la Media Luna pass	30S 0354249 4053954	800 m
7 Viewpoint to the southern part of Málaga province	30S 0354340 4054116	795 m	8 Pino del Puerto de las Grajas emblematic pine tree	30S 0354575 4053943	745 m
9 Beginning of the footpath after the tracks	30S 0355777 4054085	845 m	10 Hoya de Málaga and Valle del Guadalhorce viewpoint	30S 0355908 4053922	900 m
11 Puerto del Cerial pass	30S 0356361 4053509	860 m	12 Detour from the asphalt road to the footpath	30S 0357338 4052602	925 m
13 Detour to the right for Ruta Número 4 (walk 4)	30S 0357593 4053050	750 m	14 Detour from the Tajo de la Sabia to the south	30S 0358476 4053418	585 m
15 Regajo del Quejigal	30S 0358693 4052664	400 m	16 Benalmádena, Calle Luis Cernuda	30S 0359360 4051322	235 m

34 BENALMÁDENA • ALHAURÍN DE LA TORRE

Between the Guadalhorce River and the Costa del Sol



ESTIMATED TIME
4 hours 10 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	12.3	Accumulated ascent	440	Final altitude	125
Ascent km	3.9	Accumulated descent	620	Maximum altitude	650
Descent km	5.6	Maximum difference	525	Minimum altitude	125
Flat km	2.8	Altitude at starting point	290	Average altitude	470

» Summary of this Stage «

The proposed itinerary follows an N-shape on the map. Firstly it rises toward the north from the town of Benalmádena, through the mouth of the Tajo del Quejigal gorge, sharing a path with the previous stage. Then it connects the successive passes along the ridge line of peaks that separate the inland towns from those on the coast, a traditional path of communication along a southwest - northeast direction. Finally it descends toward Alhaurín de la Torre using another ravine, the Arroyo de Zambrano and turns to the north again. Despite being a mountain path, the walk is within anyone's abilities, not because it lacks uphill and downhill sections which actually are quite significant, but by using traditional paths which are well suited to access the upper areas easily and have been selected for pack-mules, charcoal makers and people from the countryside. The highest elevations of the entire Stage are in the vicinity of a bastion landmark on the Costa del Sol, the Cerro Calamorro, reached by the well known Cable Car of Benalmádena. In fact, this infrastructure can be used by walkers on the Great Málaga Path as an alternative, or to complement the itinerary.

The walk, on the other hand, passes through rocky areas, dolomite sand banks, pine and Holm oak woodland and plateaus of aromatic scrub. There are constant spectacular view points over all the eastern slopes of this emblematic mountain range of Málaga.

» Highlights of this Stage «

In the flat region of the Guadalhorce valley and the corresponding area of the Costa del Sol where the capital of the province is located, the Sierra de Mijas, in a broad sense, represents the biggest elevations in the vicinity, the first real mountains. The eyes of the nearby settlers have perused its well-visible peaks from the beginning of time. »

							
2	2	2	3	1.2	1.1	10.0	x 0

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» It has been a refuge, but also a source for forest resources and miners, and sort of a sponge that measures out the natural spring water for human consumption.

Therefore it is only logical that each of the towns surrounding this calcareous mountain wanted to have their part in the distribution of its land. Alhaurin el Grande and Alhaurin de la Torre occupy the northern slopes, sharing their slopes up to the ridge, each town using it differently. Today it is the latter that maintains the mining activity with quarries for construction materials. There are huge open gashes (you will see them from above on this Stage) cut to remove aggregates whose destination is easy to see just by looking at the vast expanses of urban growth everywhere.

Mijas has a sun trap side at the south-western end while several villages distribute the eastern part, the richest in water upwellings, and which this stage will introduce you to.

Málaga, Torremolinos and Benalmadena also enter into the division, always reaching to the ridge and including watershed areas. Although there is controversy about the generic name of the mountain range between the district proprietors, the Sierra de Mijas maintains its own, very clear, identity, defining its limits more accurately than any other mountain area of Málaga. With this tour you can appreciate all these uses and how each town has seen different resources in the mountains, sometimes focusing on forest resources, others on hiking, rural tourist accommodation or, finally, on leisure infrastructures related to the sun and beach theme.

Stage 34 travels in this distal portion of the sierra, further away from the central core of high peaks, but no less wild. There is a great diversity of calcareous rocks characterized by numerous escarpments that bring variety to the landscape and to the plant species that live in it. These natural values, the excellent network of paths complementary to the GR-249 and the magnificent views over the plains that surround the mountains are the main virtues of the proposed route.

- **Starting point:** Calle Luís Cernuda de Benalmádena street, in the higher area close to the Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway.
- **Access to starting point:** The A-368 road, accessed from the AP-7S motorway, the main road which crosses Benalmadena. Where it changes name to the Avenida Juan Luís Peralta is where this stage begins.
- **Finish point:** The housing developments to the south of the old town of Alhaurin de la Torre are the highest in the village, situated in the folds of the mountains. One of them, Los Manantiales, is based on both sides of the Camino de las Viñas, which is the road that leads to the final destination of the stage.
- **Access to finish point:** The network of roads that lead to Alhaurin de la Torre has its reference in the autovía del Mediterráneo motorway when it bypasses Málaga in the South. The most logical access is the A-404 road, which also communicates with Alhaurín el Grande. From the Carretera de Cartama (A-357), the access road is known as Carretera de Churriana A-7052 which is linked to the first.
- **Possible "escape routes":** The escape areas are located between the Puerto de las Ovejas pass and

the tourist facilities of Cañada del Lobo. You have to look out for the forest track that goes down in a south-east direction from the crossroads at the Puerto del Viento.

- **No return point:** Prior to the point described above, once you have seen the view of the Calamorro summit (km 4.8) the best thing to do is to continue forward. On the other hand, near the end of the stage, reaching the Corralones del Tío Caliche, there is an option to continue down into Alhaurin de la Torre, which is the closest village.
- **Maps:** You will only need **1066-II** (Alhaurín el Grande).
- **District boundaries:** The beginning is entirely within the boundaries of Benalmadena to kilometre 4.1, at the logically named Puerto de la Cruz, as here it converges with the district of Alhaurin de la Torre. Here the ridge line is the border between this town and Benalmadena (up to the kilometre 5.8) and then with Torremolinos until the Puerto del Canuto (km 9.5). The GR-249 will thus jump between these three municipalities during five and a half kilometres, as it diverts around the watershed basins. Logically, the last metres belong to the town of Alhaurin de la Torre.



Lobularia maritima, a common plant with an extended flowering time

• Enjoy the walk safely

There are two cores of human activity during this stage should you need assistance. One of them is the Cerro Calamorro, wait here until a cable car arrives from Benalmadena, the exception being it does not run in very bad weather. Climb to the peak following the directions provided by the signs of Ruta 1 (red path) from Benalmadena. The other point is the refuge or the lodgings at Cañada del Lobo, which are often occupied during the holidays and have a municipal guard. Otherwise, it is a solitary mountain very close to the shore but it receives countless visits from walkers and mountain bikers. There is no drinking water during the entire walk despite the fact that there are a few sources within walking distance. You would need to know of these in advance and remember that the water has not been treated for human consumption.

The network of paths is extensive and you would have to be sure of what you are doing if using any of the connections, especially in adverse weather conditions. Although it is an unlikely event, be careful with telescopic walking poles in the event of a storm or if the relative humidity is very high as you skirt the Cerro Calamorro, where you pass beneath a power cable that, due to the terrain, seems to be lower than usual.

• Connections with other footpaths and trails

As in other aspects, this stage also

complements the previous one in terms of the different alternatives. For the first 3.1 kilometres both coincide in layout but in the opposite direction, so that successively you leave two detours to your left: the two branches of the Ruta 4 (pink path) called Tajos de la Sabia. Take Ruta 3 (green path) to Tajo del Quejigal.

Where the two stages of the GR-249 finally separate, rejoin the Ruta 6 (blue path) of los Cazadores. When you reach the Puerto Viejo, at the foot of the Calamorro, you will see Ruta 1 (red path) the Arroyo de los Muertos, which offers different alternatives. Along this path, provided by the Town Hall of Benalmadena, you can reach the Estación del Telecabina de Benalmádena (Cable car) or you can walk around the flanks of the Cerro Calamorro, ascending the hill up to the Puerto de las Ovejas or to the west to the Puerto Viejo.

The PR-172 Puertos de Torremolinos takes its name from its central axis, which runs along the ridge between the Puerto del Canuto and Puerto de Viento passes. It therefore coincides with the GR between these places, during 2.8 kilometres in total, but it begins and ends in Torremolinos, to the south.

Either of the two is a good alternative if you want to finish in Torremolinos. The length



Path to the Puerto Viejo, with the Calamorro peak behind

of this almost circular PR is 9.9 kilometres and it leads in the opposite direction to the Great Málaga Path.

The other officially approved itinerary is the Sendero Local SL-50 (Local Footpath) Arroyo Zambrano-Pico Jabalcuza. It coincides with the final part of this Stage and is 4 km long, one way only. This is the ascent to one of the most emblematic peaks of Alhaurin de la Torre, the Pico Jabalcuza or Abarcuza, which with 609 metres of altitude is the highest peak in the vicinity of the town and so it is also the place to visit for avid walkers.

Last but not least, there are the three colour-coded walks offered by the town hall of Torremolinos. What they all have in common is their use of the valley of Arroyo de la Cueva

de la Higuera stream to arrive at the Puerto del Canuto. The Red path then encircles the Pico de las Palomas and comes back parallel to the point of origin in the area of los Manantiales. The green path takes you on an anticlockwise journey, along the ridge line between the passes, and then from the Puerto de las Ovejas along the footpath that goes through the bottom of the Arroyo de los Muertos gorge (which is the border with Benalmadena).

In regard to the blue path, from the Puerto del Canuto it turns to the east and then gradually to the south so completing a tour as long as the green path, but having walked a section on asphalt to return to the origin of the three paths at the source of the Fuente del Pinar.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

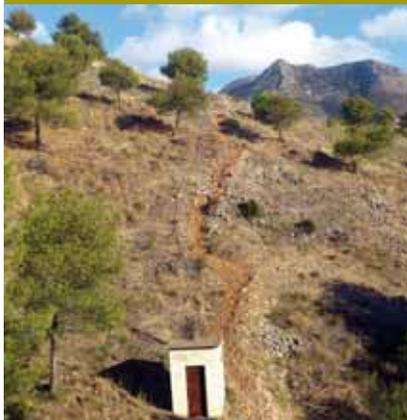
Stage 34 travels a long line that serves as a boundary to several of the towns on the Costa del Sol and which also marks the dividing line between watersheds. Gullies which descend from the successive cols in the north direction turn into streams much lower down and then drain into the great river of Málaga, the Guadalhorce. Some modest river courses originate here: in a clockwise direction, the Arroyo del Pinar and the Arroyo Blanquillo, which cross the quarries, and the Arroyo Zambrano that winds through the GR. The extreme porosity of the sandy soil and the natural joints and flaws in the dolomite rock drain the surface flow from the channels and augment the subterranean water circulation.

Looking toward Málaga and its boundaries, the only stream of any importance is the Cañada de Ceuta, along which you can descend on the blue path of Torremolinos. Already in the town, on the southern slopes, there are five gorges: that of Cueva de la Higuera (criss-crossed by footpaths), the smaller ones of Pinillo, Pedregal and los Gatos, and the enormous ravine of Arroyo de los Muertos and the Saltillo which constitutes the border

with Benalmádena.

But the most important are the various springs, which, below a certain altitude and thanks to the meeting of the calcareous rocks with impermeable materials, arise in the foothills. In fact, in both Torremolinos and Alhaurin de la Torre, urbanized areas that skirt the mountain are called Los Manantiales (The Springs), in

Old water supply system, bordering the GR, in Benalmadena



both cases there is a string of water deposits which follow a certain height to obtain the necessary pressure for urban water supply in densely populated areas.

The aquifer of the Sierra de Mijas belongs to a hydro geological unit that it shares with the Sierra de Ojén and it doesn't seem to be disturbed by the peridotites of the Alpujata. The recharge through rainfall averages 600 l/m² (some years are more than 800 l/m²) but it is obvious that the groundwater reserves fluctuate due to amount of rain, while the

consumption grows year by year. The excessive exploitation of the carbonate aquifers is especially evident in the mountain range that stage 34 runs through. There are more than a hundred water collection deposits and boreholes in its vicinity. Each causes a drop in the reserves which has to be replenished in future rainfalls. Therefore, correct water management represents a progressively greater challenge for the Costa del Sol, and it is in these wooded summits where the scene is set.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» La Garganta del Quejigal

Beginning on the Calle Luis Cernuda the walk takes you under the *autovía del Mediterráneo* motorway through a tunnel that is also the watercourse of Arroyo Hondo stream, then twists to the right and leads for a kilometre on a gentle incline beside the AP-7S. You will pass the gauging stations of an old supply of drinking water, now abandoned, and ignore the road to the Ruta 4 path on your left. After the fifth gauging station there is the second link with the pink path, which is also ignored, and then the path, so far northbound, veers sharply north-west. The sparse scrubland of Esparto tussock grass, dianthus and thistles (including the interesting and unusual *Carthamus arborescens* and *Ptilostemon hispanicus*) is giving way to an understory beneath dense and tall Aleppo pines, with European dwarf palm, gorse, fennel, Terebinth, Mastic, Mediterranean buckthorn and Juniper.

You will pass by a very shady abandoned quarry and from there the slope is much greater whilst the path enters the narrow valley. After this there is a hillock before you wade through the Regajo del Quejigal, which has the best panorama of the rocky cirque that closes above you, highlighting the Tajo del Quejigal cliff with its Terebinth, Holm oaks and contorted pine trees.



Notable scrubland at the head of the Garganta del Quejigal gorge

The oleander, rushes, and mare's tails imply that there is moisture from the substrate, although the water spring here has long been disused.

The walk then goes past a confluence formed by two streams that make up the head of the valley and here, in a sunny area, is where the scrub is best represented. There are mature specimens of junipers, myrtles, Terebinth, Lentisc and buckthorns accompanied by rosemary, European dwarf palms, rockroses and spiny brooms among the Maritime pines. It is then at (kilometre 2.7) where you encounter a sandy area, cross a new streambed and then conquer another steep slope. Toward the east you can see the stark hillside on the other side of this little valley. Being devoid of protective vegetation it has suffered soil loss.



Panorama from the Puerto Viejo to the path left behind

Thus you reach the junction, seen previously, located close to the Tajo de la Sabia, which is situated a few meters behind the watershed line. Here there are links to Ruta 6 (blue path); you take the right-hand path along a sector which is extremely sandy. Here is the ideal habitat for xerophytic plants that are adapted to the dryness and instability of the terrain (many of them have restricted distribution) and animals such as the Spiny-footed lizard (*Acanthodactylus erythrusus*). Note how the examples of Stone pines are gradually increasing in size on the re-planted terraces. They give an appearance of combed lines over these peaks.

»» The Mountain Passes

Gradually the slope will level out, and you will leave behind, to the west, the views of the Cerro del Moro bristling with antennas, through which runs the last part of stage 33, coming from Mijas. The first pass is the Puerto de la Cruz (km 4.0), where Benalmádena and Alhaurín de la Torre come together, the GR maintains a level of 650 metres with good views towards Benalmadena initially, and then the Cerro Calamorro peak, after walking through Kermes oak that rest on the rocks at the highest point of the day.

You will reach the Puerto Viejo pass, a hill where there are paths that climb Calamorro from Benalmadena (it is common to see groups of people at all of the viewpoints). The selected itinerary opts for the northern slopes, along a power cable that, for a moment, seems to

be alarmingly close. But the most striking is certainly the clearing created by mining activity below, on the area of Sierra Llana between the two streams Arroyos Blanquillo and Pinar. Several companies are dedicated (in the district of Alhaurín de la Torre) to digging and preparing the white limestone to obtain aggregates of different particle sizes used for construction. In some places the slope has been terraced and planted with conifers, the best plant to thrive in this bare environ. There is no doubt that this is a controversial issue, as it is difficult to combine conservation with production, but even more so in an environment as fragile as the Sierra de Mijas.

The following vantage point is the Puerto de las Ovejas (km 5.8), significant because here you can access a track that ascends from Arroyo de la Miel. The branch that turns to the right serves to climb up to the cable car station. This is also the headwaters of the Arroyo de los Muertos and el Saltillo, and therefore this is where some of the alternative paths described lead from, in particular Ruta 1 (red path), in the perimeter of Calamorro. Continuing along a dirt track now, with views of the coastline, you reach a junction of paths that marks the Puerto del Viento. As it is usual at this height, the GR selects the path which goes to the summit. The others are lead towards the south-east to the Arroyo de la Miel (a good escape route) and its cemetery and to the north to the Arroyo Blanquillo quarry.

Effects of the shortage in vegetation cover on the dolomite



The Cañada del Lobo complex is something that the GR will discover shortly. The municipality of Torremolinos has installed here an infrastructure for tourism and the natural environment, connected by public transport access which is even lit at night. The combined series offers 30 places (in the hostel and the refuge), a gazebo, the watchtower and a Nature Hall. You abandon the tracks in pursuit of a path that zigzags along a thin limestone pavement and leads to Puerto Blanquillo (km 8.1), recognizable by a new crossing leading to Arroyo Blanquillo stream and the quarries. Just before that you pass under a power cable (between Torremolinos and Alhaurín de la Torre) and next to an old turret of steel and concrete.

The limestone is gradually changing as you pass through the bleak upland known as Loma or Llano de los Pajaritos, devoid of trees or thickets and dominated by aromatic and prickly plants. The decline begins in a copse of tall Maritime and Aleppo pines through an interesting area from a geological point of view due to its folded and blue limestone that was once used to build the dry stone walls known as the Corrales del Tío Caliche (km 9.1). This is a curious place name that testifies not only to hundreds of metres of built walls, but refers to a type of geological formation, Caliche, which is nothing more than upper crusts hardened by lime in the

sediments of sand and edges of the quarries. Maybe Tío Caliche (Uncle Caliche) had nothing to do with this phenomenon, but it is certainly possible to see it lower down on the slopes of the arroyo.

» The Arroyo Zambrano

A small ruin is located near to a good place for a little detour to the north which allows the best views toward Alhaurin de la Torre, now very close. At the Choza del Caliche hut there is one of the cairns marking el Monte Público (public mountain land) that became visible from the Puerto de las Ovejas, the next one being at the Puerto del Canuto. This is another emblematic place, as passage through here is required on the traditional roads between Alhaurin de la Torre and Torremolinos. It is also a place where there are three legally approved trails of the three different types existing in Andalusia (SL, PR and GR).

The access to the Pico de las Palomas, which is to the east, and the Pico Jabalcuza to the north also is in the Puerto del Canuto. The Great Málaga Path changes to the northwest and descends deeply into a ravine, the Zambrano, where the lush vegetation takes on the appearance of a jungle with abundant growth of Lentisc, Terebinth, Buckthorn and Carob trees with rough bindweed tangled amongst

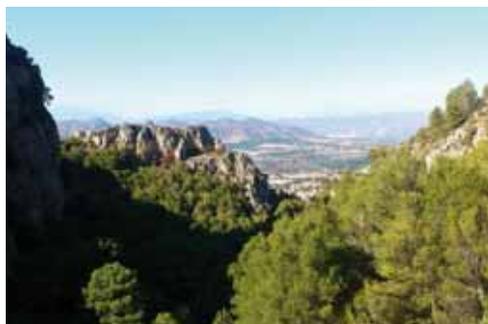
The Guadalhorce valley from the Corrales del Tío Caliche



other climbing plants. The density of the vegetation contrasts with the two rocky escarpments that flank the valley, the Jabalcuza to the right and the Coto Alarcón left. Terebinth thrives here, interspaced with other broadleaf shrubs. This area is a good place to look for rock fauna that characterizes the sierra, among which must be emphasized the Spanish Ibex, eagles and smaller birds.

Always with the cables of a new electricity layout above, the valley will progressively open; you must cross the stony stream several times until you reach a flat area inhabited by tall pine trees. Among the leaf litter and the shrubs you can discover the crop retaining walls which are disused and even a roofless hut. Perhaps the vineyards used to be here, given the name used further along the road.

You cross the Arroyo Zambrano again, just before it turns into a small pit by the escarpments where you can see the



The cliffs of Coto Alarcón and Alhaurín de la Torre

afore-mentioned calcareous concretions and the slope is hollowed out by landslides. This leads to a fenced olive grove and soon to an asphalted track. It is the Camino de las Viñas (Vineyard Road), that descends markedly to Alhaurín de la Torre among orchards of subtropical crops and labourer's houses that are gradually being replaced by modern housing estates that welcome the end of the stage. ○

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

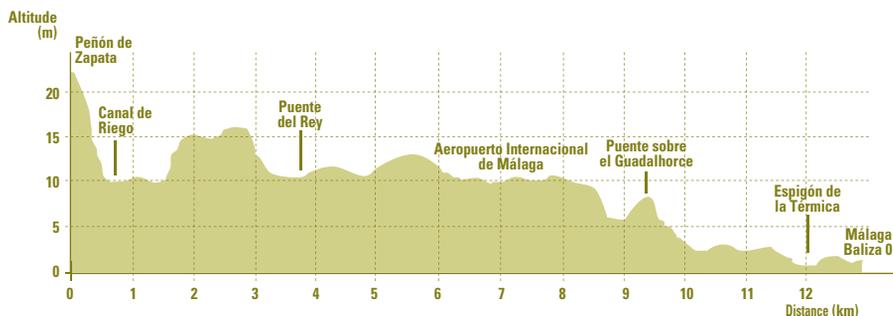
1 C/ Luis Cernuda street in Benalmádena	30S 0359360 4051322	235 m	2 Mirador del Tajo del Quejigal viewpoint	30S 0359180 4052557	380 m
3 Beginning of the sandy area	30S 0358655 4053030	500 m	4 Puerto de la Cruz pass	30S 0359112 4053587	635 m
5 Puerto Viejo pass and access to Calamorro	30S 0360125 4053693	615 m	6 Puerto de las Ovejas pass and track	30S 0360418 4054087	600 m
7 Lodgings at Cañada del Lobo	30S 0361397 4054782	590 m	8 Puerto Blanquillo pass and electricity towers	30S 0361857 4055267	530 m
9 Loma de los Pajaritos hill	30S 0362130 4055838	570 m	10 Corrales del Tío Caliche dry stone walls	30S 0362130 4055838	570 m
11 Puerto del Canuto pass	30S 0362566 4056041	520 m	12 Viewpoint of the gorge of Arroyo de Zambrano	30S 0362052 4056557	340 m
13 End of the fenced in pines and olives	30S 0361678 4057169	215 m	14 Camino de las Viñas road of Alhaurín de la Torre	30S 0361013 4058068	125 m

35 ALHAURÍN DE LA TORRE • MÁLAGA

The mouth of Río Guadalhorce



ESTIMATED TIME
2 hours 35 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	12.9	Accumulated ascent	10	Final altitude	2
Ascent km	2.4	Accumulated descent	30	Maximum altitude	25
Descent km	4	Maximum difference	23	Minimum altitude	0
Flat km	6.5	Altitude at starting point	25	Average altitude	8

» Summary of this Stage «

Stage 35 concludes the total itinerary of the Gran Senda de Málaga. It connects the town of Alhaurín de la Torre with Málaga Sur. An arduous task, if you take into account the fact that you have to cross a metropolitan area with housing estates, bedroom communities, industrial estates, an airport, extensive farmland and, of course, the estuary of the most important river of the province.

The theoretical north-east to south-east line which the walker has been following so far, now goes through various modifications to be able to adapt the walk to various "obstacles" and at the same time let the walker discover each of these obstacles; without a doubt, they form part of the 21st century Málaga's identity.

Stage 35 is virtually flat, with a slight climb at the beginning, and lacks any difficulty, other than having to cover 13 kilometres of tracks. These tracks are mainly in good condition. However, they can be a bit muddy in rainy season, especially in the vicinity of the Guadalhorce.

» Highlights of this Stage «

If there is an area of overwhelming urban dynamism, it would definitely be the area of Málaga and its surroundings influenced by the capital. At times it is guilty of improvisation, at times, probably more so, trying to adapt to the daily influx of population. The design of its infrastructures

							
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Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

and housing estates seems chaotic as a result, especially to the eyes of a first-time visitor. However, the fundamental task of stage 35 is to help the visitor understand how the location of the capital city of Málaga province influenced the situation. Málaga is situated in a cone-shaped sedimentary area which the river Guadalhorce (and Guadalmedina to a lesser extent) have been feeding deposits throughout the millennia, between the Sierra de Mijas and los Montes de Málaga. For a walk which is so close to the capital city, the natural and the agricultural are both present to a surprising degree along the whole walk. This is precisely the main advantage of stage 35 to bear in mind. As the GR gets closer to Málaga, it leaves behind population centres directly linked to tending the fertile fluvial terraces and crops of citrus trees, artichokes, melons and other vegetables and fruit; this is a curious landscape which international flights passing overhead every day. As if trying to postpone the GR's arrival in the urban area, the long ribbon of the Guadalhorce follows the path for quite a long stretch but at a prudent distance, given the unbridled nature of this natural drainage basin which serves almost the entire province.

One of the best options for the walk could be setting off to discover how this major watercourse enters the Mediterranean, creating a true oasis of biodiversity between Torremolinos and Málaga. This site was declared Paraje Natural Desembocadura del Guadalhorce in 1989, preserving this magnificent coastal site to allow birdlife a stop during their transcontinental migratory passage and a place to breed.

- **Starting point:** In the area called Peñón de Zapata, in Alhaurín de la Torre, at the beginning of Calle del Quinto.
- **Access to starting point:** Autovía del Mediterráneo (A-7S) ring road from Málaga passes by very close to Churriana, where there is an exit to Alhaurín (A-404), turn off immediately and take the Carretera de Churriana, A-7052. It passes right through the starting point in the district of Alhaurín called El Peñón. The A-7052 also constitutes another recommended direct connection with Carretera de Cártama (A-357).
- **Finish point:** Kilometre Zero of the Gran Senda de Málaga in el Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas, in front of Diputación Provincial de Málaga.
- **Access to finish point:** In order to avoid crossing all of Málaga you need to walk around its southernmost tip. The exits, sign-posted as Palacio de Deportes Martín Carpena, are a good landmark or, as well, Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas in the area of La Térmica. This is the area where the MA-20 and MA-21 roads lead to, following the old surface of the N-340.
- **Possible "escape routes":** At the beginning of this stage the best escape plan is retracing your steps. Obviously, in the metropolitan area of Málaga it should be quite easy to find alternatives, however there are two obstacles blocking your way: the International Airport and the very Río Guadalhorce, especially when the water level is high. It is recommended to follow the walk until you find a road taking you to an industrial estate or a motorway which are abundant around the GR..
- **No return point:** Having passed the airport (km 7) it is more reasonable to continue ahead rather than trying to go back.
- **Maps:** Use the sheets **1052-IV** (Cártama) for the beginning of the stage and **1053-III** for the end. Additionally it is a good idea to have the **1066-II** (Alhaurín el Grande) and the very tip of **1067-I** (Torremolinos).
- **District boundaries:** El Peñón or Peñón de Zapata is one of the neighbourhoods of Alhaurín de la Torre, constituting an entrance of Málaga district boundaries which starts at km 3 at a major cross-roads.



Cultivated artichokes and an airplane heading for the International Airport

• Enjoy the walk safely

There are very few stretches of road and what's more you can walk on the hard shoulder and pavements adapted for walking. However, these are high-speed roads with plenty of traffic which means you can't be too careful. There is some traffic on the dirt tracks; first it is farm vehicles and then traffic related to the industrial estates and the airport. Normally, country roads which are often used by vehicles are also wide enough so that you can walk safely.

During the design process of this stage the rising water levels of the Río Guadalhorce were taken into account as they can seasonally flood normally passable areas. Should this happen, you should not cross the potentially problematic point which is the pass underneath MA-21 road. In order to continue safely you must cross the road using one of the road bridges (sign-posted as "cambio de sentido") which you will find direction south-west.

There is no source of drinking water anywhere along this stage.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

All of the caminos used during this stage are related to agriculture of the Guadalhorce valley. If the traditional paths used to exist, they have disappeared in the vortex of the big city. Anyway, the Guadalhorce has always acted as a frontier and an obstacle during a large portion

of the year. At km 3.1 there is an intersection with Camino de los Chopos, which crosses the river very close to the Puente del Rey bridge.

When the river water levels rose, there used to be no way of getting to the right bank of the river from Málaga to the fertile gardens and grain fields. This was always a big problem in winter to the point of having caused food shortages. This was so serious that a grand project was started during the first quarter of the 18th century in order to remedy the infrastructure and water supply problems at the same time; however the constriction work of the Acueducto y Puente del Rey was never completed. This stage allows you to get close to this unfinished construction, which is compelling but not at its best where the path crosses it.

On the other hand, the Paraje Natural Desembocadura del Guadalhorce actually is an island between the two branches of the river which split off just as the GR crosses the river. There is public pedestrian access which is best approached from the Urbanización Guadalmar, west of the protected Natural Area, Paraje Natural. The environmental section of the regional government, Junta de Andalucía, has prepared a series of five observatories of the fauna in the lagoons and beaches in the fluvial triangle. They are connected by two footpaths called Senderos de Uso Público, Río Viejo (in the north) and Laguna Grande (in the south). Both are correctly sign-posted and they end at the beach.

"Acequia" irrigation channel meandering around the crops



THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

» El Acueducto del Rey

The GR-249 takes the visitor to the Acueducto and the Puente del Rey, dated back to 1726, a project which has never been completed but whose grand span is suggested by the arches and cutwaters made of limestone ashlars. Málaga, situated between the rivers Guadalmedina and Guadalhorce, has always had problems with water supply because of seasonal nature of the first river and turbid saline waters of the other. When Sierra de Mijas was being divided, the part of the mountains which was assigned to Malaga city had a major water spring. When the spring was selected to supply water to the city it earned the name Fuente del Rey (King's Spring). The aqueduct has never materialised due to the death of the architect who was the project developer and because of political and economic problems. The city focused its attention somewhere else and concentrated its efforts on the Acueducto de San Telmo, another hydraulic construction work of undeniable interest.

The Puente del Rey had another equally or even more important purpose for the province capital which was connecting the big city with the area of Alhaurín which has always served as a granary for Málaga. The construction has been known as Los Arcos de Zapata but the second, most important function, earned it the name of Puente del Rey (King's Bridge).

As far as the Fuente del Rey natural spring this is situated behind the old quarters of Guardia Civil de Churriana, in an enclosed area. Currently it is not used but forms part of the past (which could have gone differently) and it is a superb historical element infallibly connected to the unfinished aqueduct.

» El Canal de la Margen Derecha

El Valle del Guadalhorce enjoys an enviable climate and a fertile soil thanks to the seasonal flooding of the terraced fields.

Next to climate and soil, the agriculture triangle is made complete by water. The Guadalhorce is a river which carries a substantial volume of water and so seasonal irrigation channels, the "asequías, or the improvised re-directed channels were of no use. Not until the 70's of the last century the so called Plan Guadalhorce was carried out, the river was regulated by the two reservoirs, Embalses del Chorro, and two large channels were constructed. The one which is of interest here is the Canal de la Margen Derecha. It runs in a pipe in some sections, and in some it is excavated in the ground with added concrete walls; this great acequia runs along the final part of the valley reaching Alhaurín de la Torre.

Channelled waters, logically, are at first destined for consumption and only then for agriculture, especially when droughts occur seasonally. The worst affected areas are upstream furthest away from the water source. These are the areas which the GR helps you discover, practically the last stretch before the coast. This is the reason why there are small water stations on each plot of land from where water is pumped from the Guadalhorce aquifer, eliminating this way the necessity for the tricky business of so-called surface (or flood) irrigation.

Main channel's sluice



You will cross the Canal Secundario de la Margen Derecha at the very start, close to El Peñón de Zapata, even before you reach the first kilometre of the walk. Further up at km 1.6, it appears again, with its many sluice gates, and then it disappears underground. The channel reaches as far as Churriana.

» El Río Guadalhorce

El Río Guadalhorce has kept the Gran Senda de Málaga company from its headwaters close to Stage 12 Villanueva del Rosario-Archidona and then from the stage 19 to 22 where it reaches the area of reservoirs. Now, as if symbolically, they both reach their end.

The big river has been undergoing modifications of its course and its appearance since for ever, due to its double facet as a creator but also a destroyer of life. The collective memory of Málaga inhabitants is full of images of the periodical flooding of the city outskirts. Perhaps this is more of a case of having chosen the wrong location for settling, rather than the result of "nature's fury". Whilst nearby and upstream the river maintains the spectacular riparian thickets of tall trees, this is not the case along its final stretch where the absence of trees is striking. The Tamarisk and the White poplar have lasted the longest struggling against the housing estates, retaining quite dense little forests. Other plants which are much more resistant to the current itself and can withstand the pressure of the main riverbed, form carpets which create refuge for the numerous species of fauna: reed beds, clumps of bulrushes and rushes.

The river normally remains somewhat far from the path but there are many occasions where, if you like, you can reach the lower terraces of the terrain and then the river bank. The fish population and aquatic fauna are quite healthy despite of the turbulent waters which are also



Thick reeds in one of the Río Guadalhorce branches

this river's characteristic feature. Moreover, the river's closeness to the sea encourages more biodiversity with the arrival of species tolerant of saline waters.

» El Paraje Natural Desembocadura del Guadalhorce

La Red de Espacios Naturales Protegidos (Network of Protected Areas) of Andalucía was enriched by adding this small site of 67 hectares which harbours a outstanding ecosystem, a small delta, like an island within an island, which encompasses a series of lagoons and isolated river bends. In reality the area is more influenced by humans than one might imagine as the lagoons are actually old gravel pits where sands and gravels used to be extracted. This does not seem to bother the large number of visiting water fowl which sometimes establish permanently in the lagoons. The beach, completely free of human activities, is no less interesting. About 1.5 km long, it stretches between the two branches of the mouth of the river. Such isolation as it is achieved here is doubly important for the breeding coastal species of birds, especially given the continuous interference the birds suffer during that natural process along the major part of the coast.

WALK DESCRIPTION

» Las Huertas del Guadalhorce

The GR leaves from la Avenida Gran Canaria del Peñón de Zapata, an area of pretty gardens which shortly enters a dirt track leading through farmland. The history of these settlements, the Peñón (or Peñón de Zapata) and the Zapata, situated nearby, is closely connected to the fertility of the flood plains of the Guadalhorce. Crossing the Canal Secundario de la Margen Derecha marks the passage to the productive terraces covered with citrus trees and seasonal fruit and vegetables.

The tracks which are now being used correspond to the designed right angled-grid plan of the roads and the huertas (vegetable gardens and orchards). As a result, whilst you are walking along the irrigation channels you make several turns while maintaining your direction north-east.

As you cross the channel for the second time you end up on a slightly more elevated track from where you have a good view of irrigated fields, mostly of herbaceous plants. The first large obstacle you encounter is the



El Paraje Natural is a good refuge for the fauna

Autovía del Mediterráneo A-7 motorway; pass underneath its slender double bridge. Some distance later, arrive at a major intersection of tracks where you need to follow the one direction Zapata to see the Acueducto and Puente del Rey (km 3.9). Many of its arches are taken up by houses sheltered underneath.

A little detour takes you to a bridge over the recently channelled and regulated stream Arroyo de Ramírez Bienquerido. Little by little keep on approaching the coast eastwards, passing underneath another very low bridge.

El Puente del Rey, unfinished construction destined to connect and provision the province capital



Río Guadalhorce splits into two as the path crosses it



»El Río Guadalhorce and the Aeropuerto Internacional de Málaga

The airport's take-off and landing runways follow the direction of the river. The GR-249 leads along both the airport and the river for many long kilometres, a landscape of cosmopolitan Málaga and natural Málaga, both of which you can discover thanks to the Gran Senda. The river bed tends to be quite close and always to your left. It is crossed by a section of pipeline and then the train line at the level of the Industrial Estate Polígono Industrial del Guadalhorce. The airport runways and utility buildings used both for transit of passengers and goods are separated from the GR by tall fences and service roads until you arrive at another road, the MA-21. In order to overcome this new obstacle the path takes you underneath the road, very close to the river, making a loop which serves to take you to the other side of the motorway where you can use the pedestrian hard shoulder.

It is worth stopping at the bridge as this is the place where the Río Guadalhorce (km 9.5) branches into two, with reed beds on

both river banks, also some tamarisks and a few dispersed white poplars. This is a busy area: bicycles and people are passing to the other side of the Paraje Natural and enjoy a personalised outing on the outskirts of the large city.

A short section of a dirt track takes you underneath the MA-20 in the vicinity of Palacio de Deportes José María Martín Carpena, where you walk along the pavement of Calle Pacífico up to the roundabout Rotonda de Sacaba, where you turn northwards and off the pavement (km 11.5) and walk along the beach.

One of the greyish chimneys belonging to the area of la Térmica, brings back with its presence and its very name the industrial times of the Málaga coast and also welcomes the walker to the Paseo de Antonio Banderas, where Kilometre Zero of the Great Málaga Path is located. The Gran Senda de Málaga has managed to guide the visitor during its 35 stages through the authentic Málaga province, which has been built by all of the "malagueños" throughout the millennia in a privileged natural environment. ○



The Great Málaga Path ends at the Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Calle del Quinto en el Peñón de Zapata, street	30S 0362678 4060809	25 m	2 Passage along the channel on the right bank of the Guadalhorce	30S 0362962 404061385	10 m
3 Underpass of Autovía del Mediterráneo motorway	30S 0363793 4061927	15 m	4 Puente and Aqueduct del Rey, bridge and aqueduct	30S 0364315 4061655	10 m
5 Mouth of the Arroyo Ramírez Bienquerido stream	30S 0365278 4061831	11 m	6 Aeropuerto Internacional de Málaga, airport	30S 0366890 4061092	9 m
7 Bridge of Autovía MA-21 over the Guadalhorce	30S 0368358 4060228	6 m	8 Passage under the Autovía MA-20 at the Martín Carpena	30S 0369252 4060367	3 m
9 Chimney and Breakwater of la Térmica	30S 0370766 4060667	2 m	10 Kilometre Zero at el Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas	30S 0371113 4061373	5 m

