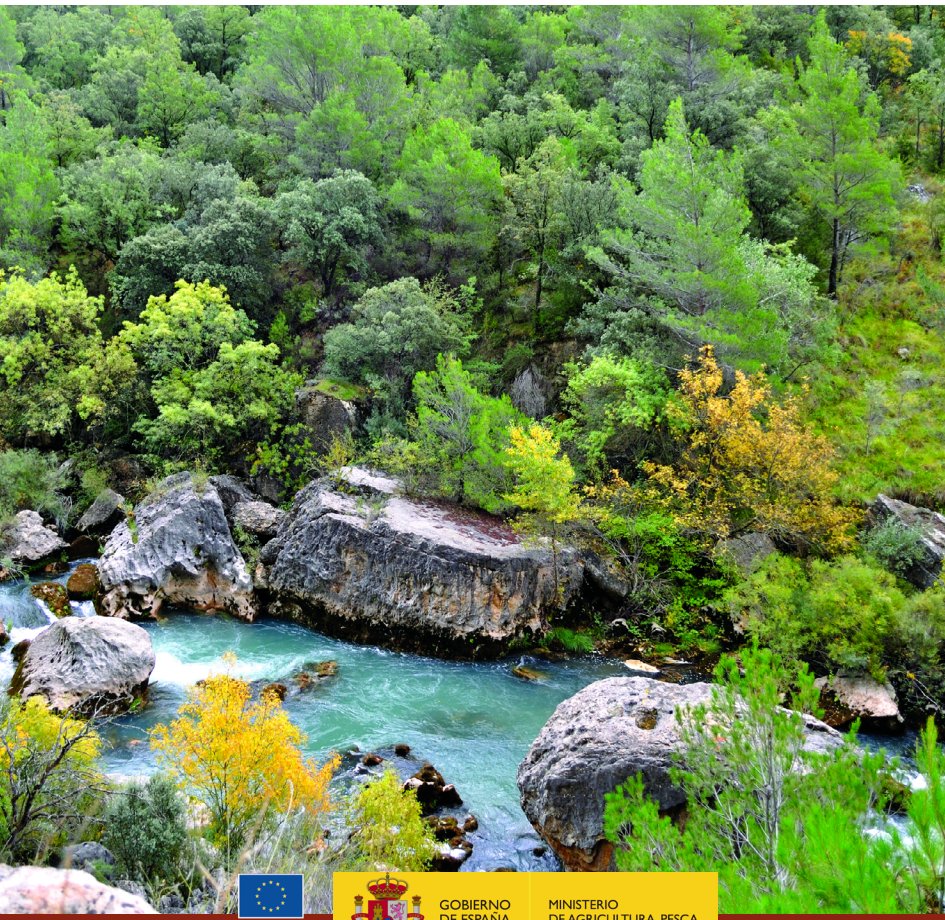
Nature Trails

River Tajo Nature Trail









Unión Europea
Fondo Europeo Agrícola de Desarrollo Rural
Europa invierte en las zonas rurales

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

datos abiertos

Legal Notice: The contents of this publication may be reused, citing the source and, where applicable, the date of the lastest edition.

Title:
River Tajo Nature Trail.

Edit:
© Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación.
Secretaría General Técnica. Centro de Publicaciones.

Proposing unit:
Dirección General de Desarrollo Rural, Innovación y Formación Agroalimentaria
Subdirección General de Regadíos, Caminos Naturales e Infraestructuras Rurales.

Design and layout:
Tragsatec. Grupo Tragsa

NIPO: 003-26-109-9

Online store:
www.mapa.gob.es
https://servicio.mapa.gob.es/tienda/

e-mail:
centropublicaciones@mapa.es

Catalogue of AGE Publications:
https://cpage.mpr.gob.es/

To help protect the environment, it is recommended that this publication be printed only if strictly necessary, either in whole or in part.

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN
SUBSECRETARÍA
SECRETARÍA GENERAL TÉCNICA
DIVISIÓN DE ARCHIVOS Y PUBLICACIONES

Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain

Caminos Naturales

Nature Trail
River Tajo

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

CONTENTS

Introduction 6

MIDE (Excursion Information Method) 10

Recommendations 13

How to use this guide 14

Nature Trails 16

River Tajo Nature Trail

STAGE 1: ALBARRACÍN ➔ VILLAR DEL COBO 21

STAGE 2: VILLAR DEL COBO ➔ ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO 27

STAGE 3: ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO ➔ PERALEJO DE LAS TRUCHAS 33

STAGE 4: PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS ➔ POVEDA DE LA SIERRA 37

STAGE 5: POVEDA DE LA SIERRA ➔ ZAOREJAS 43

STAGE 6: ZAOREJAS ➔ VILLAR DE COBETA 47

STAGE 7: VILLAR DE COBETA ➔ HUERTAPELAYO 51

STAGE 8: HUERTAPELAYO ➔ VALTABLADO DEL RÍO 55

STAGE 9: VALTABLADO DEL RÍO ➔ TRILLO 59

STAGE 10: TRILLO ➔ MANTIEL 63

STAGE 11: MANTIEL ➔ ALOCÉN 67

STAGE 12: ALOCÉN ➔ SACEDÓN 71

STAGE 13: SACEDÓN ➔ SAYATÓN 77

STAGE 14: SAYATÓN ➔ ZORITA DE LOS CANES 81

STAGE 15: ZORITA DE LOS CANES ➔ ALMOGUERA 85

STAGE 16: ALMOGUERA ➔ ESTREMERA 89

STAGE 17: ESTREMERA ➔ VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO 93

STAGE 18: VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO ➔ COLMENAR DE OREJA 97

STAGE 19: COLMENAR DE OREJA ➔ ARANJUEZ 103

CONTENTS

STAGE 20: ARANJUEZ ➔ VILLAMEJOR 107

STAGE 21: VILLAMEJOR ➔ TOLEDO 111

STAGE 22: TOLEDO ➔ ALBARREAL DE TAJO 115

STAGE 23: ALBARREAL DE TAJO ➔ LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN 119

STAGE 24: LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN ➔ MALPICA DE TAJO 123

STAGE 25: MALPICA DE TAJO ➔ TALAVERA DE LA REINA 127

STAGE 26: TALAVERA DE LA REINA ➔ CALERA Y CHOZAS 131

STAGE 27: CALERA Y CHOZAS ➔ ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA 135

STAGE 28: ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA ➔ EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO 139

STAGE 29: EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO ➔ VALDELACASA DE TAJO 145

STAGE 30: VALDELACASA DEL TAJO ➔ PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN 149

STAGE 31: PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN ➔ MESAS DE IBOR 153

STAGE 32: MESAS DE IBOR ➔ HIGUERA DE ALBALAT 157

STAGE 33: HIGUERA DE ALBALAT ➔ SERREJÓN 161

STAGE 34: SERREJÓN ➔ VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS 165

STAGE 35: VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS ➔ SERRADILLA 169

STAGE 36: SERRADILLA ➔ CAÑAVERAL 173

STAGE 37: CAÑAVERAL ➔ GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR 179

STAGE 38: GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR ➔ MATA DE ALCÁNTARA 185

STAGE 39: MATA DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ ALCÁNTARA 189

STAGE 40: ALCÁNTARA ➔ MEMBRÍO 193

STAGE 41: MEMBRÍO ➔ SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA 197

STAGE 42: SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA 201

STAGE 43: HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ CEDILLO 205

Additional information **209**

INTRODUCTION

The river Tajo Nature Trail runs over 1,000 km along the banks of the longest river on the Iberian Peninsula. From its source in Montes Universales, in Sierra de Albarracín, to the Portuguese border in Cedillo, the Tagus traverses through a variety of landscapes and much of the history and culture of the Iberian hinterland, crossing east to west through the provinces of Teruel, Guadalajara, Madrid, Toledo and Cáceres. The Nature Trail has been designated as a long distance footpath (GR-113) by the Spanish Federation of Mountain Sports (FEDME).

The Trail begins at Albarracín, near the headwater of the Tajo, and travels across the upper reaches of the river, along clean and rapid-flowing waters, through a mountain landscape dominated by cliffs and crags with juniper and pine forests. The valley floor is covered with large black pine woods, riparian forests, farmland and olive groves. These protected areas within the Alto Tajo Nature Park, are home to birds of prey such as the golden eagle, Bonelli's eagle, Egyptian vulture, and griffon vulture.

The route descends from the mountain to the plateau, where pine forests are replaced by oaks and junipers, and fields of wheat and barley. The vegetation has adapted to the harsh conditions of limestone scree and cliffs that flank the river. The cliffs, caves and grasslands, with their boundary markers, landmarks and embankments, are populated with a great diversity of habitats and species.



Straw bales found along a stage of the Trail



An open landscape with the canyons of the River Tagus visible in the distance

The meandering river and the tail of the Entrepeñas Reservoir lead the Trail through a rich river ecosystem, flanked by holm and gall oaks. From the reservoir to Bolarque waterfall, the landscape alternates between the valleys and ravines that surround the river Tagus and the plains studded with olive groves, colonised by rockrose and rosemary, walnut and fruit trees, vegetable gardens, pine, holm oaks and kermes oaks.

Leaving behind the reservoir and the impressive Boca del Infierno Gorge, the route passes through the copses of the River Tagus, with its agricultural landscape and unbroken horizon, flanked by hills that confine the river. In this mid-reach section, the river meanders through Castilian lands, leading to unique places like the outfall of Martín Roman Brook, a saline wetland carpeted with reeds and a tamarisk grove.

The route runs along the Tagus, through rolling hills among olive groves and fields of cereal, towards the spectacular Barrancas Ravine and Castrejón Reservoir, a true delight for bird watchers. It continues through grasslands, with a rich and diverse population of steppe birds, and riverbanks covered with ash groves, willows, and reeds, until it meets the Jara Greenway Nature Trail. This Trail runs along the tracks of a railway line to Azután Reservoir, crossing tunnels and a very tall bridge.

From here, the Trail descends to the Tagus plains, through holm oaks and granite blocks, crossing endless fields dotted with olive groves, almond trees and holm oaks, and across hunting preserves. It reaches Valdecañas Reservoir, with its islands, shallow water areas, riverbanks and rocky stretches, home to a rich diversity of wildlife.



Signpost marking the end of the stage at the foot of the track, with the River Tagus in the background

From the reservoir and the Extremaduran "dehesa", the route arrives at the area between Sierra del Frontal and Sierra del Campillo, whose landscape is dominated by Mediterranean sclerophyllous forests of cork and holm oak, with traces of Atlantic and continental vegetation, populated by a wide variety of raptors and mammals. This is Monfragüe National Park.

After passing through the National Park and on leaving the Alcántara reservoir, the route winds through a variety of landscapes, notably the Garrovillas pine forest, the steppe-like areas and the sparse holm oak woodlands. Along the route lies the Sierra de San Pedro, which is considered one of the areas with the richest diversity of flora and fauna associated with Mediterranean woodland and scrub, and which is home to 15 per cent of the world's population of imperial eagles.

The route now approaches Rivera Aurela, notable for its cork oaks, holm oaks and riparian galleries. In the municipality of Cedillo, on the border with Portugal, ends the Trail. This is a very steep terrain where rivers, streams and riverbanks are confined within the International Tagus Nature Park. The typical vegetation found on its shaded slopes are holm and cork oaks, Laurustinus, evergreen privets, strawberry trees, wild olives, and mastic, whereas rockrose and holm oaks dominate the sunny slopes.

All these natural values can be found along the Trail, in the various protected nature areas through which the route traverses, including the Alto Tajo Nature Park, Sierra de Altamira, Tagus River at Castrejón, Islas de Malpica de Tajo y Azután; Rivers on the left bank of the Tagus River and Berrocales del Tajo; Valdecañas Reservoir; Carri-

zal de Villamejor Nature Reserve; Sierra de las Villuercas and Guadarranque Valley; Monfragüe National Park; Canchos de Ramiro y Ladronera; Alcántara Reservoir, Lesser kestrel colonies at Garrovillas; Pinares de Garrovillas; International Tagus Nature Park; Llanos de Brozas; Llanos de Alcántara and Brozas; International Tagus River y Riberos; Ribera de Membrío; Sierra de San Pedro Area of Regional Interest; Rivera Aurela; Cedillo and International Tagus River.

These natural values are complemented by the historical, cultural and ethnographic values found along the Trail, such as monumental cities, archaeological sites, castles, shrines and churches.

The route also traverses through some the most important historical cities of the Iberian Peninsula, including the Real Sitio y Villa de Aranjuez, the imperial city of Toledo, Talavera de la Reina and Alcántara. There are also several convents and monasteries of great cultural and historical value like the Cistercian monastery of Buenafuente del Sistal or the convent of San Benito, as well as many churches and shrines that flank the route, alongside numerous castles such as Fuentiduenya, Montalbán, Malpica, Villalba and Monfragüe.

The route also crosses several bridges, some of which are medieval or Roman, like the bridges of Alcántara and Alconétar, and runs along parts of the Roman road in places like the river Uso. Multiple archaeological sites uncover the early history of the Iberian Peninsula, through cave paintings from the early third millennium B.C. to the fifth century B.C.; prehistoric engravings at Peña Castillo; numerous dolmens, anthropomorphic tombs and palaeo-Christian and late Roman tombs; and the Visigoth ruins of Recópolis.



Marble from Talaverilla at *Augustobriga*

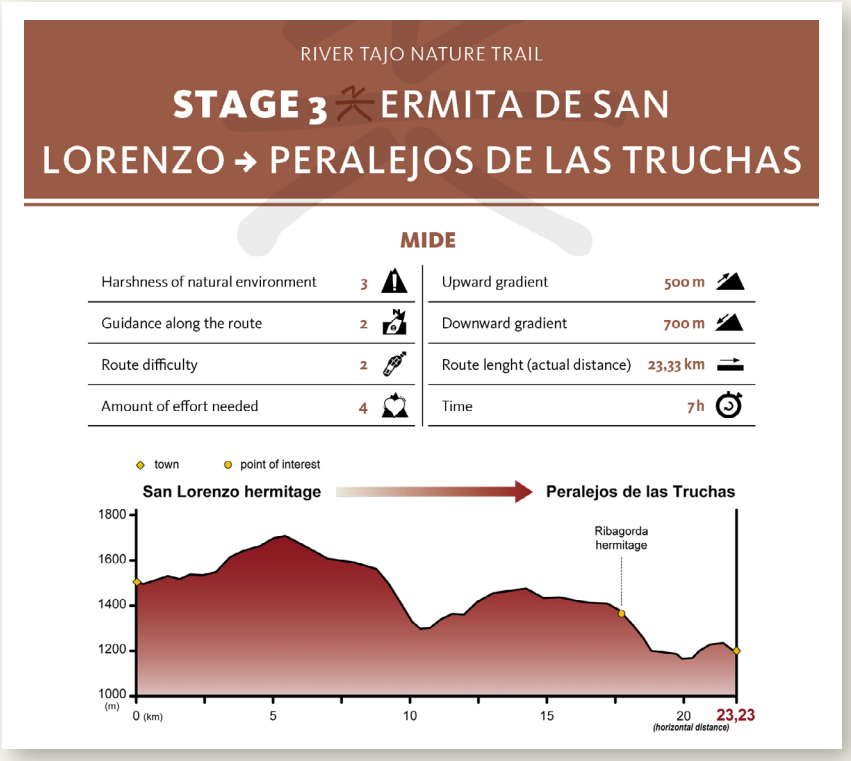
MIDE
EXCURSION INFORMATION METHOD

MIDE is an information system that evaluates and quantifies the technical and physical demands of different excursion routes. The aim is to unify the assessment of the difficulties offered by the different routes in order to allow cyclists, walkers and hikers to make the most informed decisions.

The **MIDE** system is composed of two blocks of information:

Assessment of four different aspects of difficulty: severity of the natural environment, orientation on the route, difficulty of the journey and the amount of effort required. These ratings, from 1 to 5 points and from low to high, are based on different concepts which are interpreted in the table on the following page.

Basic information on each route: timetable, cumulative positive difference in altitude, cumulative negative difference in altitude, horizontal distance covered, annual season in which the assessment is carried out and type of route (outward, return, circular and crossing).



Example of MIDE application

Environment
Severity of the natural environment



1. The environment is not risk-free
2. There is more than one risk factor
3. Various risk factors
4. Substantial risk factors
5. Many risk factors

Route
Orientation on the route



1. Well-marked trails and crossings
2. Pathways or signage indicating continuity
3. Requires the identification of geographic features and cardinal points
4. Requires off-path navigation
5. The route is interrupted by obstacles that must be overcome

Terrain
Difficulty of terrain



1. Flat surface
2. Bridleways
3. Stepped paths or irregular terrain
4. Necessary to use hands or jump to maintain balance
5. Necessary to use hands to progress

Efforts
Degree of effort required



1. Up to 1 hour of total walking
2. Between 2 and 3 hours total walking
3. Between 3 and 6 hours total walking
4. Between 6 and 10 hours total walking
5. Between 6 and 10 hours total walking

Calculated according to the MIDE criteria for an average hiker with a light load

The **MIDE** method is recommended by the Spanish Federation of Mountain Sports and Climbing (FEDME).

More information at **www.euromide.info**

MIDE

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Do not bury rubbish or litter in nature. Keep it until it can be deposited at a collection and recycling site.
- Never light fires or throw away lit cigarettes.
- Remember to always close gates, fences and gates behind you to prevent livestock from escaping.
- Never walk on crops. Use the footpaths.
- Respect the marked trails. Shortcuts only lead to serious erosion that can lead to the disappearance of the traditional path.
- Keep your dog on a lead at all times. This way you avoid disturbing domestic animals and mean you can see more wildlife.
- Respect and care for water sources and streams. Water is life.
- Do not camp outside the designated campsites.
- Defend nature and remember that the extinction of a plant or animal species is irreversible.

HELPING TO CONSERVE THESE NATURE TRAILS IS TO KEEP OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE ALIVE

The stages of the nature trail proposed in this Guide are independent of each other, with the only common link being that they constitute an approach to the habitat they pass

Colour indicative of the Geographical Sector in which it is located

Name of the Nature Trail

Name of the stage of the Nature Trail

MIDE profile of the Nature Trail indicating different degrees of difficulty, slopes of the route, time required to complete the route, highlights of the route and total distance

Introductory text

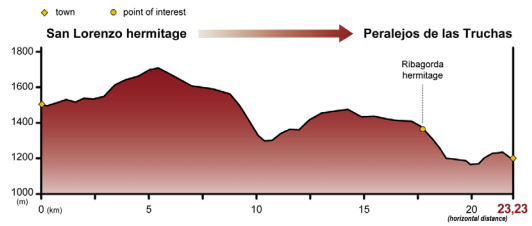
Photograph of the route, layout, monuments or natural highlights, with respective informative caption.

RIVER TAJO NATURE TRAIL

STAGE 3 ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO → PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	500 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	700 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	23,33 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7h



THE RIVER TAGUS CANYON

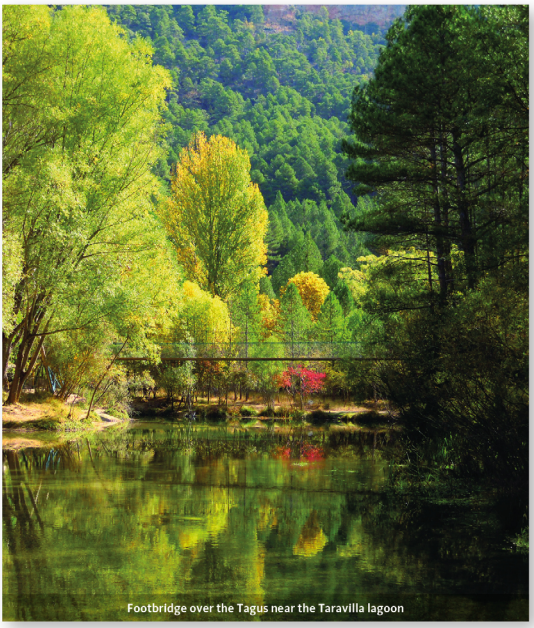
The Stage travels through the River Tagus Canyon, located in the upper reaches of the river. The high ecological value of the gorge and cliffs, and the wildlife within, is reflected in the designation of the site as the Alto Tajo SCI and SPA.

The third Stage of the Nature Trail begins at a recreational area, equipped with tables and benches, near the San Lorenzo Shrine. It heads uphill to Sarguillas along a stony path surrounded by junipers (*Juniperus sabina*). The typical juniper and pine landscape has been shaped by the harsh weather conditions, with cold winters and very hot summers.


Pedregoso camino entre sabinas

through and therefore offer an approach to the nature, history, culture and traditions of our country, while at the same time attempting to promote a call for conservation.

RIVER TAJO NATURE TRAIL



Footbridge over the Tagus near the Taravilla lagoon

Photograph of the route, layout, monuments or natural highlights, with respective informative caption

TARAVILLA LAKE

At kilometre 76 of the CM-210 road, you'll find the footpath leading to the most important wetland in the Upper Tagus Natural Park.

This lake formed naturally through a combination of the chemical weathering of carbonate rocks and the water inflow it receives from the aquifer, which maintains the water body thanks to the presence of impermeable clays in the lagoon bed.

During inflow periods, the water table rises; the excess water flows out through the front spillway and cascades down towards the Tagus River. As it falls, the calcium carbonate-laden water releases much of this mineral, coating rocks and vegetation and thus forming travertine which, acting as a barrier or dam, causes the embankment to grow naturally as the lake fills with sediment from nearby gullies and streams.

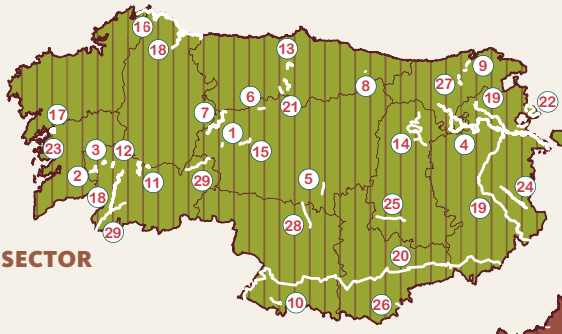
Table with historical or anecdotal information on some aspect of the Nature Trail

STAGE 4 PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS • POVEDA DE LA SIERRA 39

NATURE TRAILS

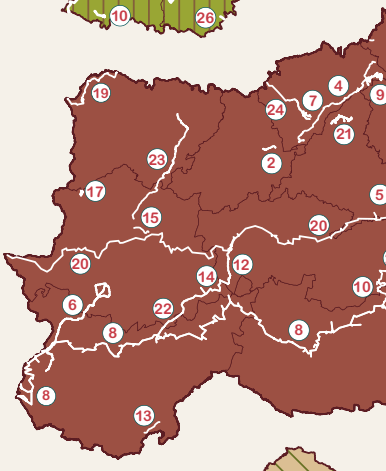
I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

- Cacabelos - Quilós (1)
- Carballeda de Avia (2)
- Dos Arrieiros (3)
- Ebro (4)
- Esla (5)
- Laciana. Villablino to Villaseca section (6)
- Mirada Circular: Ancares Leoneses from Guímara to Balboa (7)
- Muñigo - Covadonga (8)
- Pas (9)
- Sayagués Agricultural Landscape (10)
- La Ribeira Sacra (11)
- River Barbantiño (12)
- River Nalón (Fuso to Tuñón) (13)
- Románico palentino (14)
- Ruta de la Conquista (15)
- Cantabrian Sea Route (16)
- The ecological routes of the Catoira River (17)
- San Rosendo (18)
- Santander - Mediterráneo (19)
- Senda del Duero (20)
- Senda del Oso (21)
- Senda del Pastoreo (22)
- Sendas en Abalo (23)
- Sierra de la Demanda Greenway (24)
- Tren Secundario de Castilla (25)
- Eresma Valley Greenway (26)
- Toranzo Valley (27)
- Vía de la Plata (28)
- Via Nova (29)

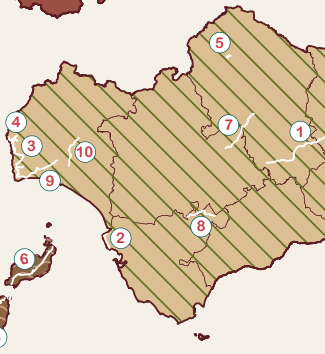


VI. CENTRAL PENINSULAR SECTOR

- Agua Soriano. Antonino Route (1)
- Campo Azálvaro (2)
- Mª Cristina canal and branches (3)
- Cañada Real Soriana Occidental (4)
- Cañada Real Soriana Oriental (5)
- Corredor Cáceres-Badajoz (6)
- Eresma (7)
- Guadiana (8)
- Beech and Oak Forests of Riaza (9)
- Wetlands of La Mancha (10)
- Júcar (11)
- La Jara (12)
- La Jayona (13)
- Las Villuercas (14)
- Monfragüe (15)
- Renacimiento (16)
- Rivera de Acebo (17)
- Santander-Mediterráneo (18)
- Senda del Duero (19)
- Tajo (20)
- Lozoya Valley (21)
- Vegas del Guadiana (22)
- Vía de la Plata (23)
- Eresma Valley Greenway (24)
- Villacañas to Quintanar de la Orden or El Trenillo (25)





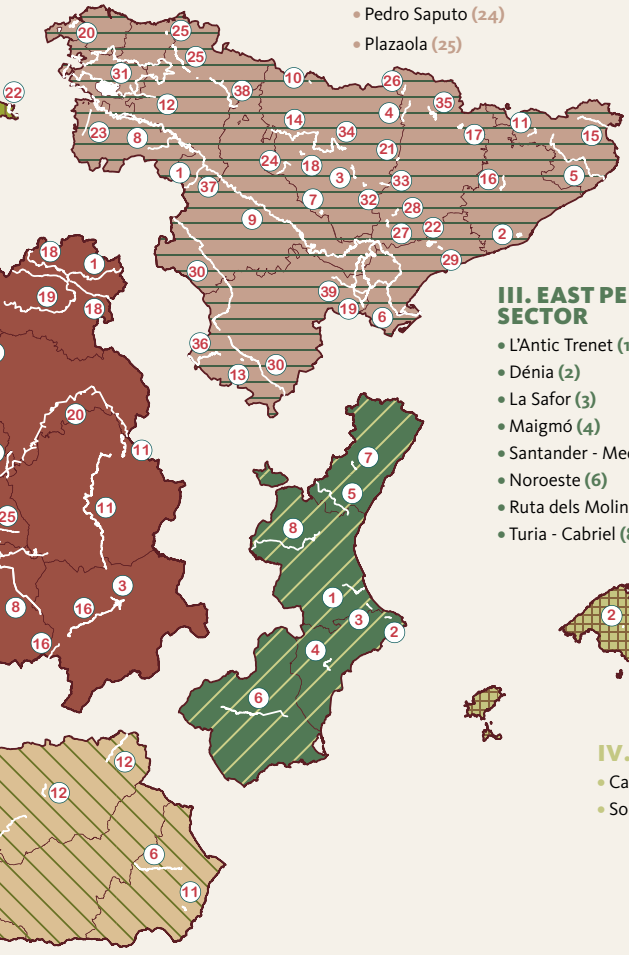


VII. CANARY SECTOR

- Anaga-Chasna (1)
- La Gomera Coasts (2)
- La Gomera Peaks (3)
- Fuerteventura (4)
- La Palma (5)
- Lanzarote (6)
- Traditional Trails of El Hierro (7)

II. NORTHEAST PENINSULAR SECTOR

- Agua Soriano. Antonino Route (1)
- Anell Verd (2)
- Camí de l'Aigua (4)
- Carrilet (5)
- Carrilet de la Cava (6)
- Castejón de Monegros (7)
- Cidacos (8)
- Ebro (9)
- Embalse de Lanuza (10)
- Ferro i el Carbó Greenway (11)
- Basque Navarre Railway Greenway (12)
- Guadalaviar (13)
- Hoya de Huesca (14)
- La Muga (15)
- La Séquia (16)
- Les Mines (17)
- Loreto y el Canfranero (18)
- Matarraña - Algars (19)
- Montes de Hierro Greenway (20)
- Montfalcó al Congost de Mont-rebei (21)
- Muntanyes de Prades (22)
- Oja (23)
- Pedro Saputo (24)
- Plazaola (25)
- Port de Vielha (26)
- River Segre and Utxesa reservoir (27)
- Riu (28)
- Ruta del Glorieta (29)
- Santander - Mediterráneo (30)
- Senda del Pastoreo (31)
- Sierra de San Quílez (32)
- Sifón de Albelda (33)
- Somontano de Barbastro (34)
- Sort i la Vall d'Àssua (35)
- Tajo (36)
- Tarazonica Greenway (37)
- Val de Zafán (39)



III. EAST PENINSULAR SECTOR

- L'Antic Trenet (1)
- Dénia (2)
- La Safor (3)
- Maigmó (4)
- Santander - Mediterráneo (5)
- Noroeste (6)
- Ruta dels Molins d'Aigua (7)
- Turia - Cabriel (8)



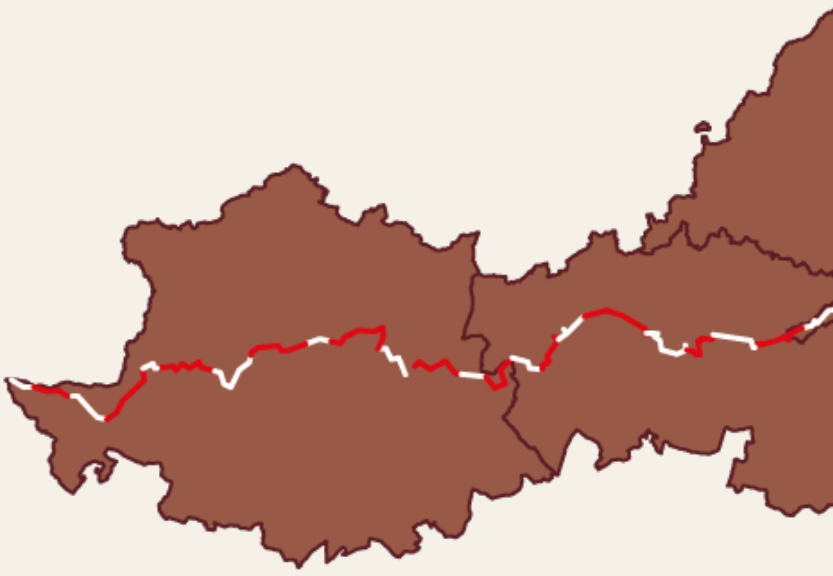
IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

- Camí de Cavalls (1)
- Son Juny (2)

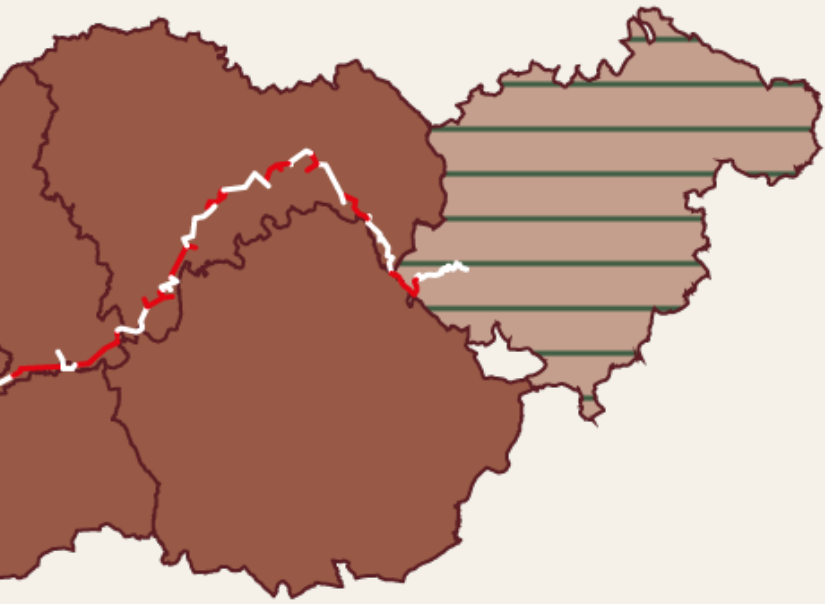
V. SOUTHERN PENINSULAR SECTOR

- Aceite (1)
- Entre Ríos (2)
- Guadiana (Natural Path) (3)
- Guadiana Greenway (4)
- Guadiato (5)
- Guadix-Almendricos (6)
- La Campiña (7)
- La Sierra (8)
- Litoral (9)
- Los Molinos del Agua (10)
- Lucainena de las Torres to Agua Amarga (11)
- Renacimiento (12)

RIVER TAJO NATURE TRAIL



RIVER TAJO NATURE TRAIL	PAG.
STAGE 1: ALBARRACÍN ➔ VILLAR DEL COBO	21
STAGE 2: VILLAR DEL COBO ➔ ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO	27
STAGE 3: ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO ➔ PERALEJO DE LAS TRUCHAS	33
STAGE 4: PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS ➔ POVEDA DE LA SIERRA	37
STAGE 5: POVEDA DE LA SIERRA ➔ ZAOREJAS	43
STAGE 6: ZAOREJAS ➔ VILLAR DE COBETA	47
STAGE 7: VILLAR DE COBETA ➔ HUERTAPELAYO	51
STAGE 8: HUERTAPELAYO ➔ VALTABLADO DEL RÍO	55
STAGE 9: VALTABLADO DEL RÍO ➔ TRILLO	59
STAGE 10: TRILLO ➔ MANTIEL	63
STAGE 11: MANTIEL ➔ ALOCÉN	67
STAGE 12: ALOCÉN ➔ SACEDÓN	71
STAGE 13: SACEDÓN ➔ SAYATÓN	77
STAGE 14: SAYATÓN ➔ ZORITA DE LOS CANES	81
STAGE 15: ZORITA DE LOS CANES ➔ ALMOGUERA	85
STAGE 16: ALMOGUERA ➔ ESTREMERA	89
STAGE 17: ESTREMERA ➔ VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO	93
STAGE 18: VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO ➔ COLMENAR DE OREJA	97
STAGE 19: COLMENAR DE OREJA ➔ ARANJUEZ	103
STAGE 20: ARANJUEZ ➔ VILLAMEJOR	107



STAGE 21: VILLAMEJOR ➔ TOLEDO 111
STAGE 22: TOLEDO ➔ ALBARREAL DE TAJO 115
STAGE 23: ALBARREAL DE TAJO ➔ LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN 119
STAGE 24: LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN ➔ MALPICA DE TAJO 123
STAGE 25: MALPICA DE TAJO ➔ TALAVERA DE LA REINA 127
STAGE 26: TALAVERA DE LA REINA ➔ CALERA Y CHOZAS 131
STAGE 27: CALERA Y CHOZAS ➔ ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA 135
STAGE 28: ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA ➔ EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO 139
STAGE 29: EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO ➔ VALDELACASA DE TAJO 145
STAGE 30: VALDELACASA DEL TAJO ➔ PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN 149
STAGE 31: PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN ➔ MESAS DE IBOR 153
STAGE 32: MESAS DE IBOR ➔ HIGUERA DE ALBALAT 157
STAGE 33: HIGUERA DE ALBALAT ➔ SERREJÓN 161
STAGE 34: SERREJÓN ➔ VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS 165
STAGE 35: VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS ➔ SERRADILLA 169
STAGE 36: SERRADILLA A CAÑAVERAL 173
STAGE 37: CAÑAVERAL ➔ GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR 179
STAGE 38: GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR ➔ MATA DE ALCÁNTARA 185
STAGE 39: MATA DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ ALCÁNTARA 189
STAGE 40: ALCÁNTARA ➔ MEMBRÍO 193
STAGE 41: MEMBRÍO ➔ SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA 197
STAGE 42: SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA 201
STAGE 43: HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA ➔ CEDILLO 205

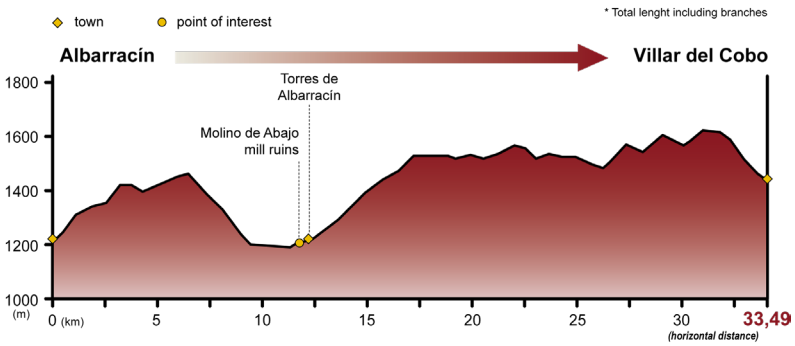


The Nature Trail in the Alto Tajo Nature Park

STAGE 1 ALBARRACÍN → VILLAR DEL COBO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	600 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	400 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	33,94 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	9 h 30 min



SEARCHING FOR THE HEADWATERS OF THE RIVER TAGUS

The Tagus Nature Trail begins a few metres away from the village of Albarracín. Although the headwaters are only a few kilometres away, the town after which the mountain is named, and on whose steep slopes the Tagus rises is well worth a visit. Although its waters initially flow through a mountain landscape punctuated with rocky cliffs and crags, magnificent and vast forests of black pine on the soon appear on the slopes of Sierra de Albarracín. As the trail continues, the landscape becomes increasingly level as it descends towards pastures, farmland and olive groves.


View of the old town of Albarracín and its city walls

This first stage begins in the outskirts of Albarracín, a medieval town set on a hill, in a bend formed by the River Guadalaviar, which once served as a natural moat. It boasts an abundance of artistic and historic monuments, including religious buildings and its houses, streets and squares, which perfectly reflect the population's ability to adapt to the rugged terrain.

The Trail heads northwest passing through an opening in the wall surrounding the village, along the road to Valdemán, which gradually climbs to the top of the hill. Spectacular views of the medieval town can be seen from here.

The landscape seems barren and devoid of life, but nothing could be further from the truth. The moorland is inhabited by many animal and plant species that have adapted to the prevailing environmental conditions.

The path continues along the upper reaches of the moorland, surrounded by farms and a few patches of juniper (*Juniperus thurifera*), until the Rochilla farmhouse, located on the right bank. The descent into the Moñigueros Ravine starts here. After about 1.5 km, the Trail arrives at a junction and turns left onto a wide track leading to Puntal de Antonio. This stage of the Tagus Nature Trail passes through the Sabinar de Monterde de Albarracín SCI.



Veguilla Fountain

ALBARRACÍN

Albarracín is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful villages in Spain. Its charm lies in its narrow streets, lined with houses whose eaves almost touch one another; with their rosy plaster walls and their sometimes visible timber framework and their beautiful ironwork, which, combined with its location perched atop a hillside, offers a variety of stunning views from almost anywhere.

Albarracín boasts one of the finest collections of civil architecture in the province of Teruel. There is also a large number of mansions and palaces dating from different periods. The Brigadiera's house is now the Azagra Hotel; next to it stands the 17th-century Navarro de Arzuriaga house. On Calle de la Catedral stands the Monterde family's house, which features a magnificent coat of arms above the main doorway.

Among the religious buildings, the 16th century El Salvador Cathedral in Albarracín stands out as one of the city's most iconic landmarks. Adjoining the cathedral via a cloister is the Bishop's Palace. Next to Doña Blanca's tower stands the Santa María Church. The San Juan Shrine is situated on the street leading to the church of Santa María.

The Santa Bárbara Shrine was built in the 18th century in the neighbourhood then known as El Arrabal. The Santo Cristo de la Vega Shrine dates back to the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the Romanesque statue of the Virgin.

There is a wide range of museums to choose from. The Toy Museum houses the Eustaquio Castellano collection, which features 7,000 toys dating from 1850 to 1960; at the Cathedral Museum, alongside several significant pieces, the collection of Flemish tapestries is a particular highlight; and visitors can also explore the Martín Almagro Museum and a number of permanent exhibitions, such as the one on ironwork.

The landscape changes as the journey continues, with junipers giving way to pines (*Pinus* spp.).

The path continues downward until it merges with the A-1512 for a few metres, then continues left and crosses a bridge over the River Guadalaviar. It continues along the right bank until it crosses the river again, heading back north until it eventually reaches the town of Torres de Albarracín. On the river, next to this last bridge, are Fuente de Veguilla and its recreational area, with benches, tables and riverside trees that provide shade for rest, and even some refreshment, before visiting the town.



View of the path winding its way down through junipers and pines

IRONWORK

One of the most striking features of the Sierra de Albarracín region is its countless examples of wrought ironwork, which are both sturdy and beautiful. Among the characteristic features produced by the local blacksmiths, we can highlight the external ironwork on large mansions, civil and religious buildings. On the one hand, they play an important role in protecting the dwelling and preventing unauthorised access from the outside; on the other, they act as a deterrent through the depiction of symbolic figures on their ends and serve as decoration in the design of the main façades.

Ironwork is present as well in keys, keyholes, nails and door handles; not to mention the household and agricultural items used in everyday life. The balustrades of many balconies also deserve special attention, as do the studded doors, whose sturdiness is enhanced by the addition of iron fittings, nails, bolts, etc., creating a striking aesthetic effect; these also incorporate decorative elements (engraved marks, crosses, hearts, animal figures, etc.). On these, the door knockers come in a variety of shapes; from simple elongated pieces, mallets or rings, to interesting depictions of animals such as lizards and snakes. Another exterior feature is the weather vanes, which crown the bell towers and add exquisitely beautiful details of excellent craftmanship.

Finally, we should highlight the artistic work of Adolfo Jarreta, who has masterfully decorated the openings and gates of much of Albarracín's architecture and has left his unmistakable mark on numerous wrought-iron details, as a legacy of traditional ironwork techniques.

LIFE IN THE MOORLAND

Vegetation is sparse and steppe-like in the upper, exposed areas, where weather conditions are extreme. Only a few cereal farms and wastelands for cattle dot the inhospitable moorland plains.

Only the best-adapted species can survive in the moorlands and in this terrain, with little soil, extreme temperatures, lack of water and intense exposure to the sun. The plants protect their leaves and branches with spikes to reduce water loss and keep cattle at bay. A good example is the gorse (*Genista scorpius*), whose flowers produce a yellow dye that was used to colour wool; blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) with fruits particularly high in vitamin C that are used to flavour "pacharán"; or thistles.

Some species, such as lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) or thyme (*Thymus* sp.), have small leaves that are bent downwards to avoid direct sunlight and prevent drying out from water loss.

Animals have also adapted to the harsh conditions of the moorland, with brown feathers to camouflage on the ground, a quick flight and elusive behaviour to escape predators in this open space. Curlews (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), Pipits (*Anthus trivialis*), Calendra Larks (*Melanocorypha calandra*), Eurasian Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*), Crested Larks (*Galerida cristata*) and Woodlarks (*Lullula arborea*) are some of the species that nest in the moors.



First rocky outcrops

The stage continues from Torres de Albarracín, retracing the path to cross the bridge again, where it continues south, climbing up Fuentes Gully. At the next junction, the route turns right and skirts around Las Fuentecillas Hill.

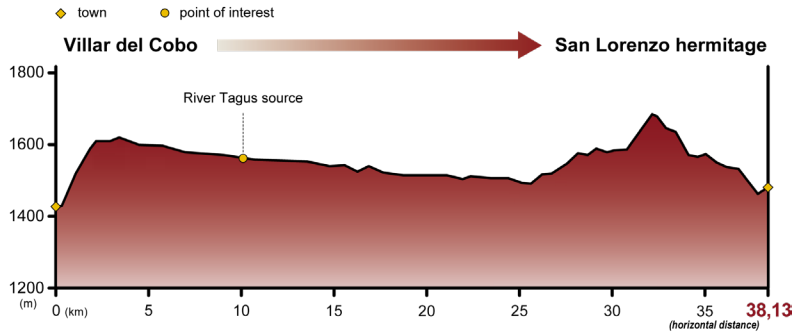
The path continues up and down La Loma Valley until it reaches the River Guadalaviar Canyon, where rocky cliffs and crags form a unique landscape. The flight of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). can be enjoyed from the natural balconies. This landscape is protected under the Estrechos del Guadalaviar SCI.

The path merges onto the road to Villar del Cobo, next to Zarramora, for a few kilometres, until it reaches a sharp bend from where the route continues along a track that passes over the Rollo Stream. At the next intersection, it turns right in a north-westerly direction to return to the road, and continues for a few metres until it reaches Villar del Cobo, the endpoint of this stage.

STAGE 2 VILLAR DEL COBO → ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO

MIDE

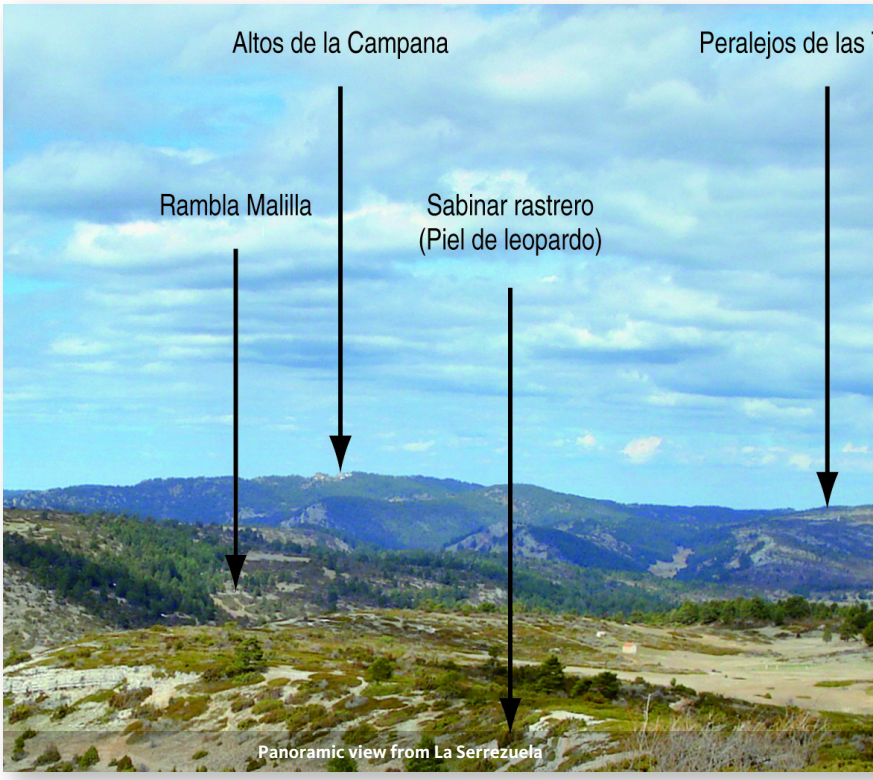
Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	400 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	300 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	38,18 km
Amount of effort needed	5	Time	10 h 10 min



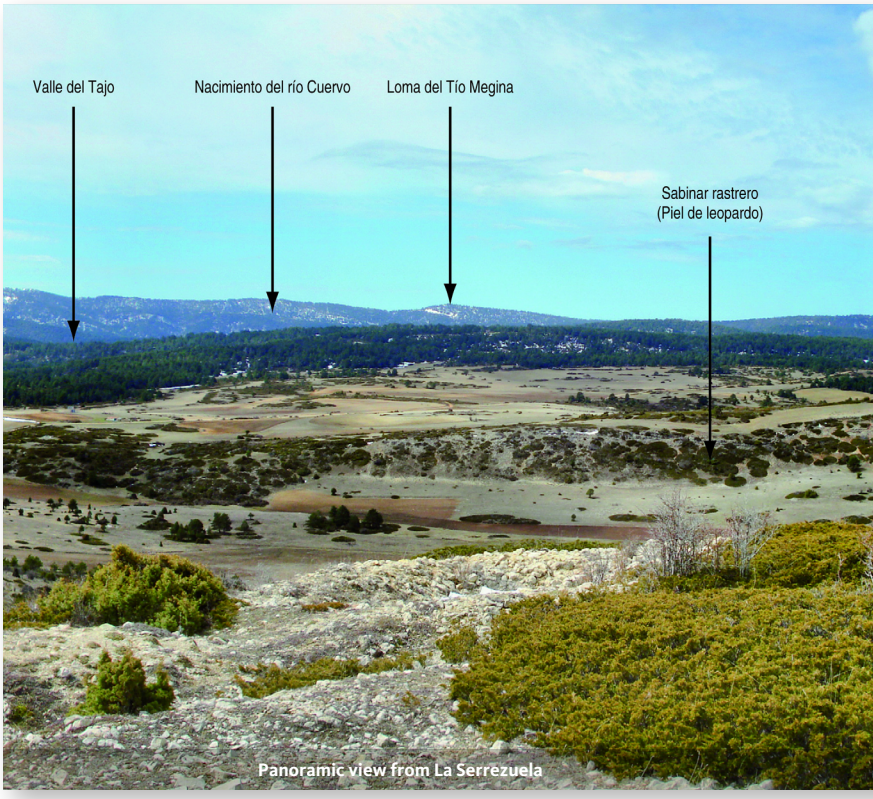
ALONG THE UPPER REACHES OF THE RIVER

This Stage, which begins in the town of Villar del Cobo, traverses through landscapes refashioned by human activity, including farmlands and pastures. As the route draws closer to the headwaters of the River Tagus, the riparian forest gives way to a landscape dominated by white pines. Regardless of the season, you will always encounter nature at its finest in this Stage of the Trail.

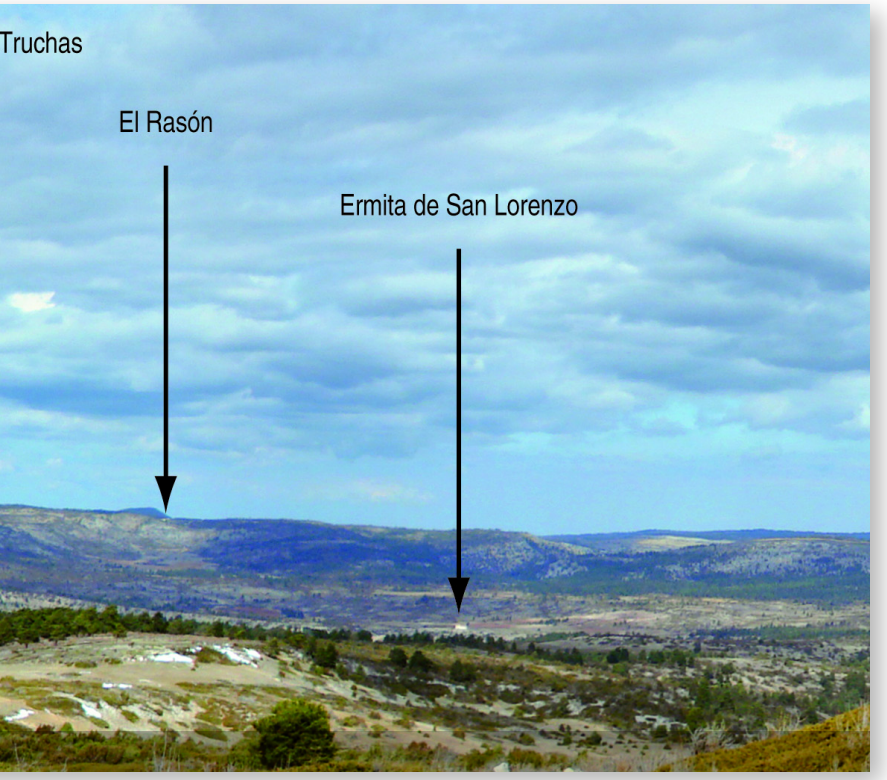

A flock of sheep

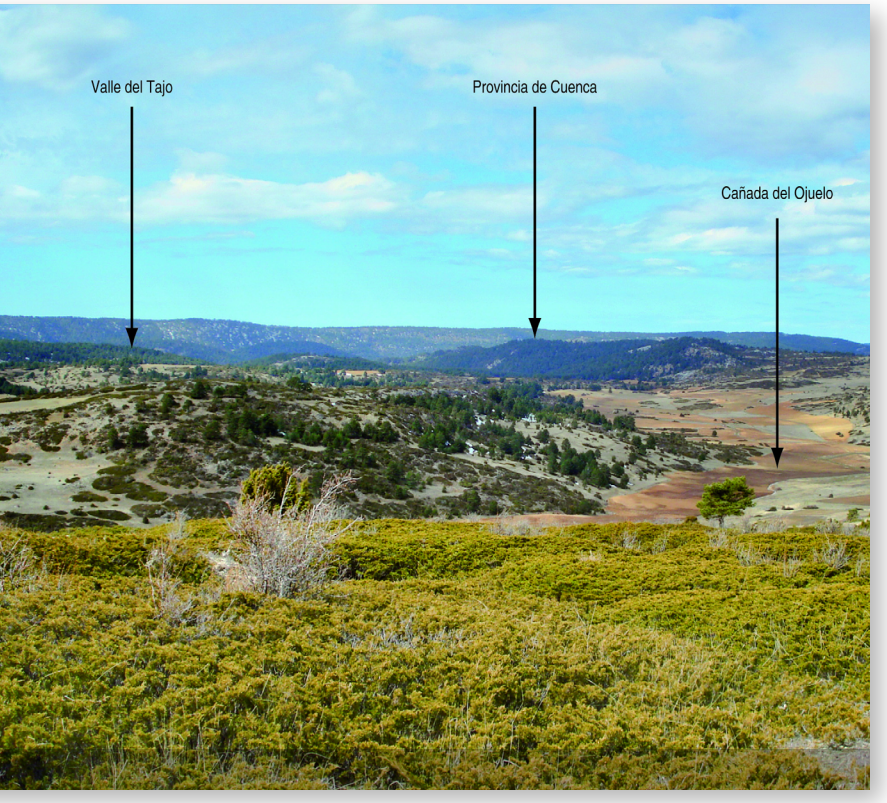


Panoramic view from La Serrezuela



Panoramic view from La Serrezuela


Truchas
El Rasón
Ermita de San Lorenzo


Valle del Tajo
Provincia de Cuenca
Cañada del Ojuelo

NATURAL SETTING OF THE SECTION

This section of the route is set amongst a series of plateaus and hills that rise to over 1,900 metres in many spots. This refers to the southern part of the Iberian System, where the headwaters of the Tagus and Guadalaviar rivers are located; it is an area with great beautiful sceneries.

The vegetation consists of communities of orophilic communities (at altitudes above 1,700 metres), comprising mainly conifers and high-altitude pastureland. The vegetation is characterised by sparse Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) forests and groups of savin juniper (*Juniperus sabina*). Traditional human use of this mountainous area centres primarily on livestock grazing on the mountain pastures, which contributes positively to the maintenance of the pastureland, and, to a lesser extent, on the forestry management of the pine forests. The landscape is dominated by seasonal pastureland with areas of scrub, in which *Juniperus communis hemisphaerica* and *Juniperus sabina* are common. On the carbonate rock faces and slopes, there is an interesting casmophytic vegetation (vegetation that grows on rock faces).

It exhibits a high degree of lithostructural complexity resulting from the variety of environments and substrates that make it up. Traces of intense karstification are evident on the calcareous erosion surfaces. Another of the most striking and characteristic features of this mountain range is its periglacial landforms, notably the boulder-strewn slopes, which are terraced and feature small peat bogs (quaking mires) on them.

Descending into the Tagus River valley below 1,600 metres, terraces crowned by Upper Cretaceous carbonate rocks (limestone and dolomite) come into view; these have contributed to the formation of bowl-shaped sinkholes and funnel-shaped sinkholes.

The unique geological environment not only fosters the development of a rich variety of flora, but is also home to a large number of birds and other animals, notably the Bonelli's eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), the short-toed snake eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*).

Notable examples of the geological diversity in the area include the sinkholes at Villar del Cobo, which are an exceptional illustration of the karst processes in the region. Sinkholes are a very distinctive type of geological depression caused by the ground collapsing over karst cavities. They can be seen by following the path that runs parallel to the road leading to Griegos.

Other unique spots include the area around Fuente Cobeta and the Molino Viejo waterfall, a secluded spot where the water cascades spectacularly over the rocks, with a wooden bridge offering the best views.

This Stage of the Tagus Nature Trail begins in the town of Villar del Cobo, which spreads from the edge of the River Guadalaviar to the slopes of the surrounding mountains. The Trail leaves the town via a southbound road leading to an interseccion where the route continues to the right, turning onto a wide, paved track. The next crossroads is in the area known as La Cañada, which refers to the 15,000 head of cattle that exist in this area. This stretch of Stage 2 overlaps with the final part of Stage 1.

From here, the route continues south, then turns left at the next junction and, further on, crosses the Rollo Stream. At the next two intersections, the path turns right to the southeast until it reaches a fork where it continues left. Further on is a fountain whose water is collected in a unique way, using staggered concrete troughs that discharge into a hollow log.

The Trail ventures through Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) forests as it approaches the headwaters of the River Tagus. The riparian forest is barely evident, or non-existent, in the headwaters of the rivers located at a certain altitude. The route traverses through the Alto Tajo-Muela de San Juan SCI and the Montes Universales-Sierra del Tremedal SPA, which extends to the end of the Stage.

The journey continues northwest from the headwaters through a 1-metre wide track, parallel to the river. The house of Inocencio Blas stands at a crossroads, near a pasture, from where the path continues straight ahead. At the edge of the path is a farm known as Pajar del Cuartillo, and further on, is a recreational area on the opposite side of the TE-V-9032. Scots pines flank the path throughout this stage.

The River Tagus and the Nature Trail no longer run parallel to each other after the interseccion. The Trail turns north along a wide forest track, leading out of Teruel province into Guadalajara. This stretch traverses through the areas known as El Tesorillo, Valdeminguete, La Cerrada and Las Arenillas.

The path arrives at a crossroads, next to grassland, where it turns right, then, further on, to the left towards La Herradura, following a long bend where the forest fire watchtower, Escambronar Tower, is located.

The path becomes stonier as the route ventures into wastelands. A wooden footbridge crosses the Cañada Magosa Brook, and continues to Cuesta del Cañuelo.

The route continues halfway up the hill for 1.5 km until it reaches Huecos Brook, which can be waded using the concrete blocks placed on the streambed. After crossing the river, the Nature Trail merges with the road to Sarguillas, which climbs up its namesake valley, along a path that leads to the shrine of San Lorenzo, where this Stage ends. It should be noted that there is no accommodation or shelters available near the shrine.



Footbridge over the La Cañada Magosa stream

WASTELANDS AND FOREST STEWARDS

Wastelands are fertile grounds used for agriculture in the past. After several years, new small herbaceous plants grow in these barren places. The gorse (*Genista scorpius*), a thorny thicket with grey-green and yellow flowers, is just one of many examples. These types of plants, which cover the land, are the true stewards of the forest, protecting other species from livestock thanks to their thorns.

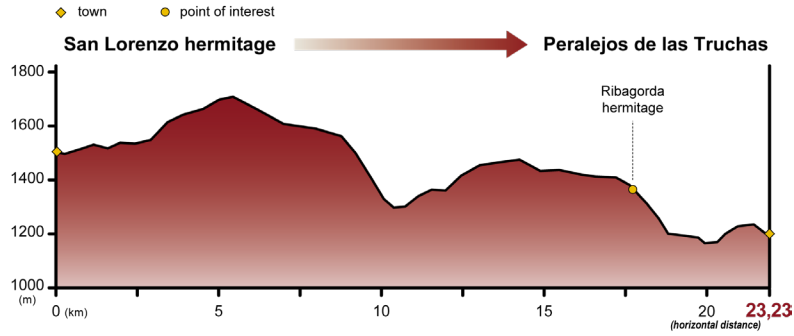
"LEOPARD SKIN" SAVIN

The savin juniper (*Juniperus sabina*) grows in clusters scattered across the high moorlands, close to Pyrenean oak, Portuguese oak and white pine forests. Grazing animals helped shape the juniper clusters, producing a distinctive limestone moorland landscape known as "leopard skin".

STAGE 3 ERMITA DE SAN LORENZO → PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	500 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	700 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	23,33 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7h



THE RIVER TAGUS CANYON

The Stage travels through the River Tagus Canyon, located in the upper reaches of the river. The high ecological value of the gorge and cliffs, and the wildlife within, is reflected in the designation of the site as the Alto Tajo SCI and SPA.

The third Stage of the Nature Trail begins at a recreational area, equipped with tables and benches, near the San Lorenzo Shrine. It heads uphill to Sarguillas along a stony path surrounded by junipers (*Juniperus sabina*). The typical juniper and pine landscape has been shaped by the harsh weather conditions, with cold winters and very hot summers.


A stony path through the juniper trees



Ribagorda Chapel

LIFE IN THE CLIFFS

The territories of the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) the largest Iberian eagle, run parallel to the course of the local rivers, sometimes alternating with those of Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), with which it clearly competes.

Bonelli's Eagle is somewhat smaller than the Golden Eagle, and both species show a predilection for nesting in the rocky cliffs. Their nests can be frequently seen close to those of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). This beautiful raptor, whose populations are declining at an alarming rate, have high juvenile mortality and are highly sensitive to human activity during the nesting season.

The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is a scavenger that feeds on carrion. Although it shares the food with other vultures, unlike these, it does not live in colonies, but rather, each pair has its own territory.

The most typical and abundant scavenger in this area is the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). These birds live in colonies, building their nests close to each other in the limestone cliffs, forming the so-called "buitrera".

The Alto Tajo Nature Site boasts a wide variety of wildlife, evidenced by the existence of more than 200 different species. Indeed, the fact that all levels of the food chain are well represented means that this is a stable community with a rich variety of ecological niches.

The path continues until the tail of Las Sarguillas Ravine, then ventures into the area known as El Navazo, dominated by Scotch or Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) with sabines populating only the areas of highest sun exposure.

THE SAN LORENZO SHRINE

The festivities in honour of San Lorenzo or Saint Lawrence' is celebrated at this shrine every 10th of August. Just past the dry La Sarguilla ravine, this is where all the people of Checa come to celebrate this pilgrimage to the saint's shrine.

This spot is considered one of the areas with the least light pollution on the entire Iberian Peninsula, and one of the best places from which to watch the Perseids (a major meteor shower), popularly known as the 'Tears of Saint Lawrence'.

Several kilometres after, the route reaches a clearing with a viewpoint over the Hoz Seca River Gorge. The majestic views highlight the shapes carved by the river and the vegetation blanketing the slopes.

The route descends to the edge of the river (20 min) along a slightly steep, zigzagging path. The banks are populated with riparian plants and species that grow in shady areas, including holly (*Ilex aquifolium*). The route crosses a wooden walkway over the Hoz Seca Brook to an interseccion, where the path turns left towards an old smithy, and continues along a wide track leading to Peralejos.

The route continues northwest along mostly level terrain, flanked by rocky cliffs. It crosses three brooks, and a few metres after the last one, arrives at an intersection where the Ribagorda Shrine is located. The area surrounding the shrine offers extraordinary views, including the Rochas de Belvalle topped by El Machorro and Poyal de los Corzos cliffs, the two Muelas de Pinariegas , gorges along the Tagus, and the impressive Encarcelados Ravine.

The route heads west from the chapel towards a site known as Quebrantadas. At the next fork, the path veers northwest until it intersects a road with which it overlaps over a long stretch. The route turns right at a sharp bend further down the road to continue north.



Footbridge over the Hoz Seca stream

THE REALM OF MOLINA

In the Middle Ages, Molina was a realm under the rule of a lord with Molina de Aragón as head town. This was a result of the reconquest of a small Muslim *taifa* in the 12th century.

It was founded as an independent realm between the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon by Manrique Pérez de Lara in 1138. From 1321 onwards, the title of Lord of Molina was linked first to the kings of Castile, and subsequently to those of Spain. It retained its *fueros* (the laws specific to a town and its territory) until their abolition in 1813.

This manor, like other Castilian comunidades de villa y tierra (literally, "town and land" communities; towns that were not ruled by a nobleman but by a town council) was organised around a main town – in this case, Molina – surrounded by lands and hamlets divided into "*sexmas*" (one-sixth of a territory); in this case, into four *sexmas* instead of the customary six.

These *sexmas* were El Campo, El Pedregal, El Sabinar and La Sierra. In turn, each *sexma* was divided into around twenty *veintenas* (one twentieth part), each of which corresponded to one of the villages within the *sexma* and its lands. Each of the villages, in turn, was divided into five *quiñones*, units of land allocated for use by the villagers.

La Sierra district is the southernmost one and comprises the villages situated in the Upper Tagus area.

The route continues until it crosses a brook and arrives at a hotel. The last kilometres of this Stage run parallel to the River Tagus along its right bank, with numerous viewpoints from where the meanders, cliffs and crags can be contemplated.

Next to the hotel's parking is a path leading to a dam on the River Tagus with a fish ladder. Leaving the hotel behind, the route continues to a junction where it turns to the right, and just over one kilometre later, looming ahead are the houses of Peralejos de las Truchas, and the end of this Stage.

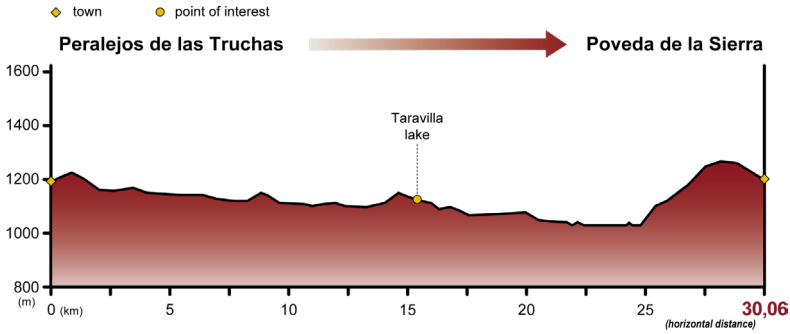


Reservoir water

STAGE 4 PERALEJOS DE LAS TRUCHAS → POVEDA DE LA SIERRA

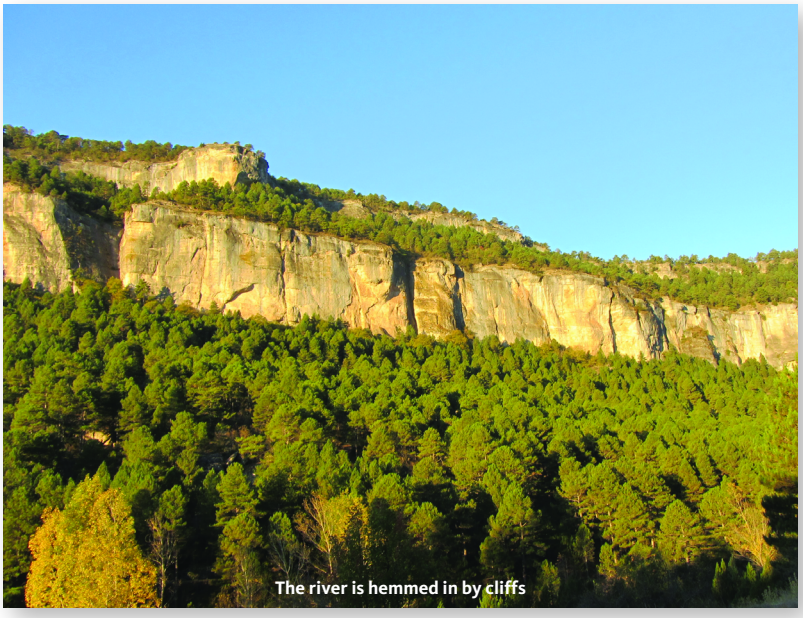
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	225 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	175 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	30,13 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 55 min



UNDER THE GAZE OF VULTURES

The upper reaches of the River Tagus is a lush green garden. Wedged between massive limestone cliffs, the riverside forest flanks the river on both sides. Huge black pines, Portuguese oaks and maples decorate the landscape with colours that change throughout the year, regaling the visitor with a host of sensations and a beautiful memento.



The river is hemmed in by cliffs

A CLIFF LANDSCAPE

Along this stretch, the path winds its way between rocky outcrops on one side and the cliffs and crags that form the river gorges on the other, with a succession of viewpoints throughout this section. In these areas, the presence of riparian woodland is evident, although it has not yet reached full maturity. The crevices, hollows and rocky outcrops are colonised by a multitude of species.

Cliffs are used by birds to nest and breed safely away from predators.

Red-billed Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) forage for insects on the face of the cliffs and Eurasian Crag Martins (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) dive into the river to feed on flies and mosquitoes hovering over the water surface. Larger birds such as the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), hunt rabbits in the moors, and the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) travels great distances to scavenge carrion.

Mammals also find shelter in the limestone cliffs, including weasels (*Mustela nivalis*) and martens (*Martes foina*) and even reptiles like snub-nosed vipers (*Vipera latasti*).

Some plants have adapted to the harsh weather conditions: cold winters, hot summers, scarce water and lack of soil. Cliff narcissus (*Narcissus rupicola*), perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), rock garlic (*Allium* sp.), alpine balsam (*Erinus alpinus*) or madwort (*Hormathophylla spinosa*) are but a few examples of plant species that have adapted to cliffs and crags.

This Stage of the Nature Trail begins in the village of Peralejos de las Truchas, from where it heads southwest towards an intersection. The first stretch of Stage 4 overlaps with the final part of Stage 3.

The path continues to the right, along a narrow track protected by a rope railing and wooden poles. It runs along the right bank of the River Tagus to a small recreational area. The route continues until it merges with the CM-2106, opposite a camping lot. Taking the road ro the right, the rute continues over it for aboute 2 km until it leaves the road taking a detour to de right, just before the Martinete Bridge over the River Tagus. The stage continues ahead along a winding path that follows the meandering course of the river.

In this stretch, the road runs wedged between rocky outcrops, on one side, and crags and cliffs, on the other, that form gorges. There is an abundance of vantage points scattered along the path throughout the journey. Riparian forests, albeit im-



Footbridge over the Tagus near the Taravilla lagoon

TARAVILLA LAKE

At kilometre 76 of the CM-210 road, you'll find the footpath leading to the most important wetland in the Upper Tagus Natural Park.

This lake formed naturally through a combination of the chemical weathering of carbonate rocks and the water inflow it receives from the aquifer, which maintains the water body thanks to the presence of impermeable clays in the lagoon bed.

During inflow periods, the water table rises; the excess water flows out through the front spillway and cascades down towards the Tagus River. As it falls, the calcium carbonate-laden water releases much of this mineral, coating rocks and vegetation and thus forming travertine which, acting as a barrier or dam, causes the embankment to grow naturally as the lake fills with sediment from nearby gullies and streams.

THE TRADITIONAL USE OF RESIN

Although the resin is most commonly obtained from maritime pine, also called resin pine (*Pinus pinaster*), in this are it was harvested from the native black pine (*Pinus laricio*).

Resin was a highly prized commodity, as it was used to produce turpentine and rosin, which were used in perfumery, adhesives and even in the manufacture of chewing gum.

Resin was of great economic importance as its production was labour-intensive and it commanded a high price for decades. However, in the 1970s, with the arrival of imported products and the widespread use of synthetic chemicals, resin harvesting ceased to be profitable in Spain; as a result, it is now carried out only on a token scale in a few regions.

mature, are scattered along the route. Cracks, holes and rocky ledges are colonized by a multitude of species, including the large Griffon Vulture, which can be easily spotted when it flies over this territory.

This Stage of the Trail traverses through the Alto Tajo Nature Park, which is also an SCI and an SPA of the same name. The most common plant species found on its slopes are pine (*Pinus* spp.), juniper (*Juniperus communis*), boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*), Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*) and bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), while the valleys are populated with willows (*Salix* spp.) and poplars (*Populus* spp.).

The route reaches a crossing where it turns right, then further on, it reaches a fork where it proceeds north along the left path to Taravilla Lagoon. This is a karst rock, glacial lagoon, with the unique ecosystem of a marsh environment. A recreation area to relax and recover is located nearby.

From the previous area, the path continues south to the River Tagus, which it crosses via a pedestrian walkway, to continue onwards to a small rural hamlet known as Casas del Salto, a traditional settlement linked to the old hydroelectric power station that has been recently refurbished. The dam on the River Tagus, known as Salto de Poveda, is the only electricity-generating infrastructure that remains in place.

The Poveda Waterfall is a spectacular cascade over 20 metres high, formed following the collapse of an old dam caused by the force of the Tagus. The dam was built by raising an existing travertine barrier. The turbulence of the water in the waterfall causes the dissolved calcium carbonate to precipitate, giving rise to a spectacular travertine formation.



Bridge over the Arroyo de la Hoz

The route continues parallel to the left bank of the river until it converges with the CM-210, crossing first a stream by footbridge, then proceeding towards the recreational area of Fuente del Berro and the River Tagus Nature Park Information Centre.

The Nature Trail overlaps with the CM-210 for about 800 m, then turns onto an offshoot road to the right, near a shelter, which immediately crosses a bridge over La Hoz Brook. In this stage, aside from the vegetation already described above, the traveller will find Montpellier maples (*Acer monspessulanum*) and black pines (*Pinus nigra*). The barks of some pine trees have cuts to drain the sap.

From La Hoz Brook, the path continues parallel to the left bank of the river. At the next intersection, it turns left to the south. The route heads along a wide, paved track through three intersections, first it turns right, then left (second) and again right (third). The vegetation found in this area is linked to human activity, with pine forests giving way to Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*), "dehesas", where livestock coexist and forage along fallow deer (*Dama dama*), deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*).

HORCAJO RAVINE

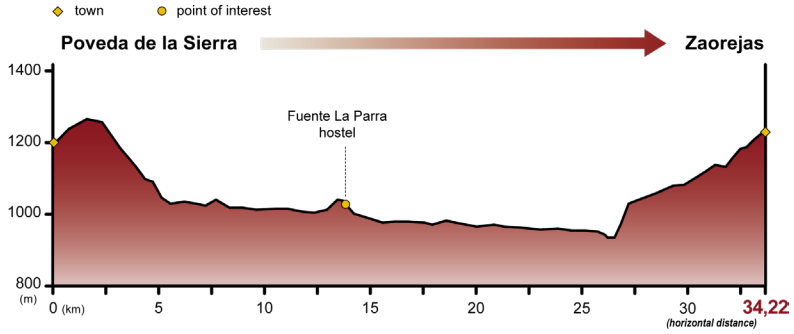
Near the Martinete Bridge, which marks the boundary between the provinces of Guadalajara and Cuenca, after following the CM-2106 for approximately 900 metres from the bridge, there is a walking route that runs through the Horcajo Ravine, a narrow valley through which the stream of the same name flows until it joins the Tagus. The route passes through a large pine forest of Scots pines, where maple trees (*Acer* sp.) are also abundant, along with a few Portuguese oaks (*Q. faginea*), common privets (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and barberries (*Berberis vulgaris*). Spectacular limestone cliffs, small waterfalls with tufa formations and a small forest of mesophilic vegetation of great botanical interest. The presence of rock-dwelling birds such as griffon vultures must not of course be overlooked.

The path gradually climbs towards an intersection where it turns left, then passes through four secondary junctions whose offshoot roads are narrower. It continues south-southeast until it reaches a fork where it first turns right, then left, to proceed along a wide bend that merges with a path that leads directly to the village of Poveda de la Sierra, the endpoint of this stage.

STAGE 5 POVEDA DE LA SIERRA → ZAOREJAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	375 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	350 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	34,29 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	9 h 10 min



BETWEEN WALLS

This Stage runs wedged between massive limestone cliffs. The feeling of walking along the bottom of a canyon, carved over millions of years by the river, with amazing scenery is indescribable.

The Stage begins at Poveda de la Sierra, and overlaps the end of the previous Stage during five kilometres. The Trail heads northwest out of the town, turning first to the right, and then to the left, onto a well-maintained wide track leading to the River Tagus.

As the traveller proceeds down the path, pine forests replace Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*), where livestock coexist with cervids.


Stone needle in the background

POVEDA DE LA SIERRA

The parish church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, in Poveda de la Sierra, is located in the centre of the village. Built in the 16th-century rural style, it underwent major alterations in subsequent centuries. Little remains of its original construction.

In the upper part of the town lies Plaza de Felipe Molina, which features a large open square, a magnificent fountain with twin spouts – where the stables used to water their horses – and the town hall.

At the entrance to the village stands the 2007 statue of a timber rafter, or *ganchero* as they are called in the area, erected to pay tribute to and keep alive the memory of the *gancheros*, who played such an important role in the town's economic development in times gone by.

FIESTA DE LOS GANCHEROS

The Fiesta de los Gancheros has been taking place in the Alto Tajo (Guadalajara) for ten years.

It is a tribute to the "gancheros"; a craft long lost that consisted in floating the timber down the river. The "gancheros" had to be strong to drag the timbers to the river and, once there, tie and guide them to the riverbank, often against the current.

This feast seeks to keep alive the memory of these men, and pay tribute to traditional rural activities that have shaped the life and culture of our towns whilst fostering coexistence.

The novel *El río que nos lleva* by José Luis Sampedro, which was later adapted for the cinema, describes the perilous lives of the gancheros.

The stretch shared by Stages 4 and 5 ends at the crossing, where the path turns left towards a bridge over the Merdero Brook, with the River Tagus to the right, where it will remain throughout this Stage. Huge forests of black poplars (*Populus nigra*) and rosemary willows (*Salix eleagnos*), flank the river, which provides a steady supply of water. The black pines (*Pinus nigra*) that line the Trail slowly give way to Portuguese oaks, which will soon cover the steep slopes of the valley.

The route runs next to the "El Vivero" recreational area, and continues straight ahead at the fork. Further on, a fountain with untreated water allows the traveller to cool off before moving on. Spectacular views of the rocky cliffs overlooking the clear waters of the upper reaches of the River Tagus can be seen from this vantage point.

The route continues along the same track for several kilometres. The landscape around the path changes with every season. Canadian aspen (*Populus tremula*),



Road signs next to a shelter

hazel (*Corylus avellana*), dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) and dog rose (*Rosa canina*) change colour throughout the year, offering the traveller a different experience each season.

The path proceeds in the shade of an adult pine forest, where Coal Tits (*Parus ater*), Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) and Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) have found an excellent place for living and nesting.

The route reaches Fuente la Parra Hostel, and continues to the left towards Zaorejas, accompanied at all times by the River Tagus, wedged-in and hidden under the dense forest on the left bank. Unlike the upper reaches, fish abound in this part of the river, attracting a large number of fish-hunting animals such as otters (*Lutra lutra*), Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*), Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) or viperine water snakes (*Natrix maura*). The vegetation, lush and diverse, is populated by herbivores such as Southwestern water voles (*Arvicola sapidus*) and provides shelter to Eurasian Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*). Eurasian Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*) and Common Chiffchaffs (*Phylloscopus collybita*), feed primarily on insects, and they, in turn, are hunted by Eurasian Sparrowhawks (*Accipiter nisus*) and Common Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*). The water is populated by different fish species, including Iberian Nase (*Pseudochondrostoma polylepis*), Common Iberian Barbel (*Barbus bocagei*) or "bermejuela" (*Achondrostoma arcasii*) and American Crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*) that feed on small invertebrates and submerged aquatic vegetation. Such rich biodiversity is not fortuitous, since this Stage runs almost entirely through the Alto Tajo Nature Park and the "Alto Tajo" Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA). The contact information of the Nature Park's visitor centre appears at the end of this guide.

Leaving behind the Salmerón Ford, with a rest area and shelter nearby, the path climbs slightly to a large meander where, with a little luck, one can see the slow flutter of barbel and trout (*Salmo trutta*).



A backwater on the river, seen from a bend in the road

The forest track arrives at Fuente de la Falaguera recreation area, equipped with several services, where the traveller may rest before proceeding. The route continues another two kilometres before it climbs up a flight of wooden steps to the left. From here, one can enjoy spectacular views of Ciño Negro Ravine and, at certain times of the year, of its namesake waterfall. The stretch of the Trail shared by Stages 5 and 6 (respectively, entrance to and exit from Zaorejas) starts in the immediate vicinity of this tuff waterfall.

The route continues its ascent to a large rock that serves as a natural viewpoint over the river, from where it is possible to watch the relaxed flight of Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) on the warm air currents. In this part of the Stage, the Nature Trail runs along the same path as a geological route, therefore interpretative panels are a common sight. Nearby are the Escaleruela tuff waterfall and the Mirador de San Pedro.

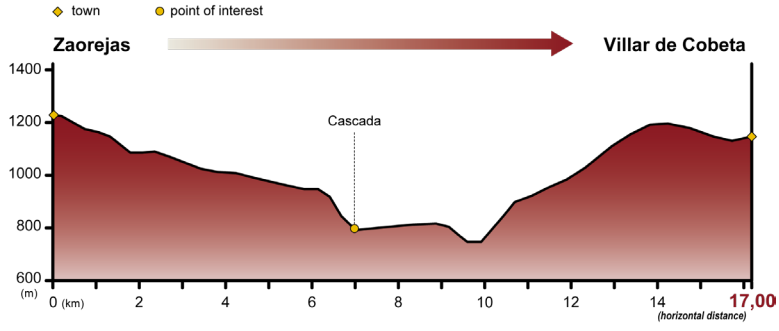
The route continues along a path sandwiched between limestone and tuff walls. It runs along the seasonal Ciño Negro Brook, with huge walnut trees (*Juglans regia*) and small market gardens on the banks. After crossing a wooden footbridge, the route continues another 1.8 kilometres along a wider meandering path, then turns left past a cluster of beehives. From here, the road gradually fades away.

The Trail proceeds up and down along a narrow, stony path surrounded by Spanish junipers (*Juniperus thurifera*), crosses a ravine, leaves behind a farm and arrives at Zaorejas, the endpoint of this Stage.

STAGE 6 ZAOREJAS → VILLAR DE COBETA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	150 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	325 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	17,09 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 30 min



IN THE MIDST OF PINES AND SPANISH JUNIPERS

The route leaves the rocky canyons behind, venturing into woodlands. Pines and Spanish junipers flank the Nature Trail during this sixth Stage.

The first 5-kilometres of Stage 6 (start) overlap with the end of Stage 5 at the town of Zaorejas.

Those who have already completed Stage 5 will have to retrace their steps back through the farm until Ciño Negro Ravine where, once near the banks of the Tagus, the route continues along the wide track used in Stage 5.



Footbridge over the Ciño Negro stream

SAN PEDRO BRIDGE

This is a spot of unique beauty where the Tagus River receives the waters of the Gallo River, which flows from the Molina Realm. At this point stands a white rock known as the Alpetea Castle keeping watch over crossroads and paths.

Legend has it that the Alpetea Castle was once home to a Moorish king who was missing an arm, which was restored to him by a young Christian shepherdess with the help of the Virgin Mary. As a token of gratitude for the miracle, the Moor converted to Christianity and built a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the ravine of the Aradilla River.

The path veers onto the left road at the interStage, which now forms part of Stage 6. The seasonal tuff waterfall carved by the Ciño Negro Brook can be seen depending on the time of year.

One kilometre further from the interStage, the Trail reaches the CM-2015 and turns left, leaving to the right one of the largest tuff constructions in Europe.

At this point, you can take the CM-2015 northwards to reach the San Pedro Bridge, one of the best-known spots in the Upper Tagus, as a stony beach forms in the surrounding area which attracts large numbers of bathers during the summer months. This is where the River Gallo, hidden amongst the undergrowth, flows into the River Tagus.

During approximately 600 meters, the Trail runs parallel to the paved road; hence, caution should be exercised. The Stage then veers off the paved road onto a track to the right leading to the Herrería bridge-dam.



A landmark points the way

LOS SABINARES

Spanish juniper forests are the remnants of the pre-glacial, steppe forests that had their heyday in periods with more arid conditions. This steppe heritage has enabled this species to survive low winter temperatures and summer droughts. Indeed, the largest forests are located in areas with harsh continental climate.

Juniper forests are more or less open. The Spanish juniper is a conical shaped, medium-sized, perennial tree, although the oldest specimens may grow to a height of up to 20 m. The savin juniper, typical of high-level moorlands, grows in clusters, creating a landscape known as "leopard skin".

The forests date back to the Tertiary, about 80 million years ago, when the temperate climate in the Mediterranean began to wane. It most likely widely colonised much of the territory before the great African and European mountain systems came into existence. During the Quaternary, its range was much reduced, making these forests extremely valuable.

Other plant species that coexist with the Spanish juniper include holm oak (*Quercus ilex*), Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*), maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*), Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), black pine (*Pinus nigra*), Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*), gorse (*Genista scorpius*), thyme (*Thymus* sp.).

After crossing the bridge over the Tagus, a sign warns of the dangerous conditions of this part of the route. The Trail narrows and climbs up a rocky hillside, leaving the river to the right. As the path gradually gains height, it veers away from the river. The views of the river and waterfall are spectacular, especially when seen from one of the natural viewpoints that overlook the canyon

After climbing about 400 m along a meandering path, as the contour becomes gentler, the cliff and the views of the river are left behind.

The juniper (*Juniperus communis*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*), that covered the slopes give way to black pines (*Pinus nigra*) and small clusters of boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*). Indeed, the Stage runs almost entirely through the Alto Tajo Nature Park, and entirely within the namesake Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

Caution should be exercised not to stray from the path as the trail is less defined, and the only signs are milestones and red and white GR marks. Three hundred (300) meters further on, the path arrives at a junction where an arrow indicates that the Trail continues to the left towards the CM-2113.

Once on the road, the Trail veers left and continues several kilometres parallel to a paved road. After 500 m, a sign indicates an offshoot road to Puntal de la Rocha viewpoint (2 km away) with excellent views of the mountain range.

The route ascends gradually but steadily until it reaches the heights of the moorland. The landscape here is dominated by Spanish junipers (*Juniperus thurifera*), the only species to survive the local weather conditions.

Leaving the juniper forest behind, the route reaches a fountain-basin and a sign indicating the end of the Stage at Villar de Cobeta.

Zaorejas

This town boasts unique natural surroundings within the Upper Tagus Natural Park, and is one of the most important municipalities in the area. Through the numerous archaeological remains found within its municipal boundaries, visitors can take an extensive journey through its history, shaped by the Celts, the Romans and the Muslims.

Several sites that have only just been excavated provide evidence of Celtiberian settlements. Next to the Celtiberian settlement known as the 'castle', the town of Zaorejas grew during the Roman period as a defensive and residential settlement during the conquest of Hispania. Two secondary Roman roads ran through the municipality, but the most important remnant of Roman presence is undoubtedly the aqueduct.

Following the Reconquista, in the 12th century, Alfonso VIII appointed friars of the Order of St Augustine to establish a monastery, granting them the Campillo estate in return.

Zaorejas originally belonged to the province of Cuenca, but the municipality was incorporated into the province of Guadalajara in 1833 following the territorial reorganisation carried out by Javier de Burgos.

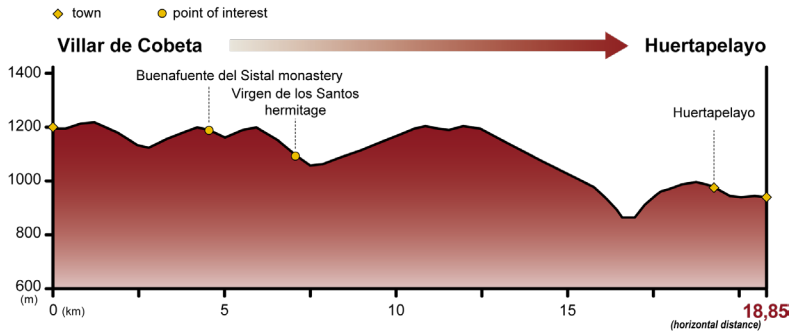


Walk up to the La Rocha viewpoint

STAGE 7 VILLAR DE COBETA → HUERTAPELAYO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	500 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	875 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	18,96 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h



FROM THE MOUNTAIN TO THE PLATEAU

The dense pine forests that flanked the path make way to holm oaks and Spanish junipers, better adapted to the high temperatures and low rainfall found in Stage 7 of the Tagus Nature Trail.

This Stage begins in the upper edge of Villar de Cobeta. During the first 450 m, the path runs along the CM-2113, then turns left to venture through several crop farms.



Sabina with a continuity symbol



Tagüenza Bridge

The Trail passes through a small juniper forest, crosses Los Molinos Ravine and reaches the CM-2113. It continues along a narrow path parallel to the road. It gradually gains height for about 1.25 km until the path bears to the left, and starts a steep descent towards the town of Buenafuente del Sistal.

VILLAR DE COBETA

Like all the districts of the town of Cobeta, it came to be established in the 15th century as a realm independent of Molina. During the 19th century, the population far exceeded 300; today, it stands at fewer than 20.

Throughout its history, the town has belonged both to the Lord of Molina and to the Bishop of Sigüenza, which placed it under the jurisdiction of the Monastery of Buenafuente del Sistal. In the mid-14th century, a new power asserted its jurisdiction over the town: Francisco de Tovar, who seized the fortress of Cobeta by force and established himself as lord of the realm.

Following disputes between the nuns of the convent and Tovar's relatives, Íñigo López de Tovar finally was established as Lord of Cobeta in 1444 following a grant from the king, which marked the realm's definitive independence from Molina.

The town enjoyed a period of stability until the fire at the Casa Curato (1809), which was started by the French during the War of Independence; the members of the Guadalajara Council, who were resisting the invaders, had taken refuge there

Later, during the Carlist War, General Balmaseda brought the Tierra de Cobeta region over to the cause of Carlos María Isidro. Throughout this period, Villar de Cobeta established itself as an independent municipality, until, in 1975, owing to its diminished status, it was eventually incorporated into the municipality of Zaorejas.

WILDLIFE IN WHEAT FIELDS

While ploughing the land for sowing, hundreds of small invertebrates become exposed to the mercy of Northern lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*), Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*), European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Eurasian Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) and European White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*).

The stones removed and stacked create "majanos" where rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), least weasels (*Mustela nivalis*) and Little Owls (*Athene noctua*), can build their nests.

In addition to crops, different species thrive on the boundaries and slopes, producing seeds and fostering the growth of insects. These resources are used by Northern Wheatears (*Northern wheatear*), Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*), Eurasian Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) and small rodents, which in turn attract larger predators such as Northern Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) and Eurasian Hobbies (*Falco subbuteo*).

The route continues up steep slopes through an area flanked by Mediterranean cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*) until it reaches a wide track. An arrow indicates that the town of Huertapelayo, the endpoint of this Stage, is less than fifteen kilometres away.

The track descends to a small rest area with tables and a fountain, close to the shrine of Virgen de los Santos. However, the route veers right towards an interStage, and continues along the right track that climbs up through the forest.

It proceeds along this path for a few kilometres until it reaches a wide forest track, on which it continues until the end. After a number of bends, an arrow indicates that the Nature Trail will turn right to descend, skirting around farms, towards a river valley covered with boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*). The route has advanced about seven kilometres from the rest area next to the shrine of the Virgen de los Santos.



A landscape shaped by water



Buenafuente del Sistal Monastery

The stony path leads to the River Tagus, which it crosses via the Tagüenza Bridge. The bridge, built in the early 1940s, has a single arch and is literally embedded in the rock, without any other foundation but the slender walls that confine the river.

Having crossed the bridge, the path climbs up a scree, skirting around the peak of Cabeza la Fuente, to merge with a track leading to Huertapelayo. This last stretch is common to Stages 7 and 8.

If you wish to proceed directly to Stage 8, take the track to the right; however, if you want to reach the end of Stage 7, take the path to the left from where you can enjoy amazing views of the valley. Further on, the path crosses over Vega Brook towards downtown Huertapelayo. As you have seen for yourself, the beauty of the landscape has been enduring throughout this Stage, which runs almost entirely through the Alto Tajo Nature Park, Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area (SPA) for Birds.

BUENAFUENTE DEL SISTAL MONASTERY

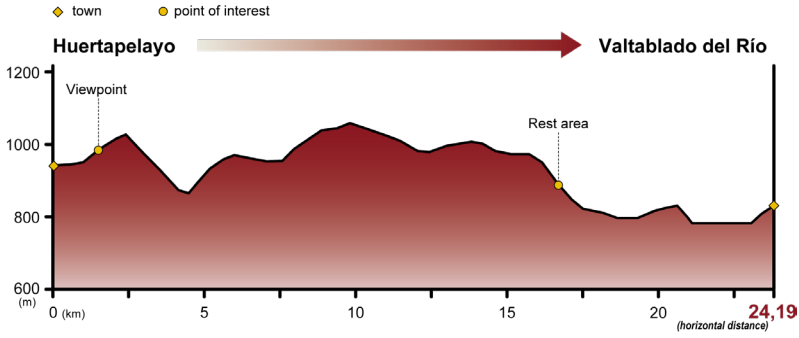
It is the only active Cistercian monastery in the province of Guadalajara. This monastery, founded in the Middle Ages, belongs to the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. Over time, it became property of the Cistercian order. Although it was never classified as an independent monastery, in the Middle Ages, it was registered as a farm or a chapel owned by the Monastery of Ovila, the great abbey located downstream on the right bank of the Tagus.

The monastic compound consists of a monastery, a temple and a sort of hamlet with a nursing home, gym, youth centre and a multipurpose building which provides different services to the community.

STAGE 8 HUERTAPELAYO → VALTABLADO DEL RÍO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	300 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	450 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	24,19 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 45 min



LIFE IN THE CLIFFS

The breath-taking rocky cliffs will amaze the visitors. These apparently barren and lifeless stone blocks are, indeed, an ideal environment for hundreds of animal and plant species that have adapted to the harsh conditions of the screes and limestone cliffs flanking the River Tagus.


The path leads towards the cliffs



Signpost indicating possible directions

This Stage begins at the Huertapelayo bus stop at the entrance of the town. Almost immediately, the route crosses over La Vega Brook and bears right, leaving the hamlet of Huertapelayo behind. The track ascends gradually, but steadily, offering extraordinary views of the valley.

Poplars (*Populus* spp.) on both riverbanks add a splash of green and yellow to the landscape in early autumn before the leaves begin to fall. The caves that dot the limestone cliffs and escarpments, with their delightful fancy shapes, are home to numerous species. If you completed the previous Stage, you will recognise the path common to both Stages, which ends at the interStage where a sign marks the beginning of Stage 8.

HUERTAPELAYO

It can be described as a "village carved out of the rock", something that becomes immediately apparent from the spectacular village "gates". Also worth noting is its single-nave parish church, built of masonry, which dates from the 17th century, as does its high altarpiece.

Apart from the intense and long-standing timber industry, and the agriculture and livestock farming common to all the towns in the area, the village's economy has also been characterised by the truffle and honey sectors – both of which are now well established – as well as rural tourism.

EL HUNDIDO DE ARMALLONES

One of the Alto Tajo Nature Park's georoutes ventures into the river canyon, leading the visitor towards one of the most interesting geological sites in the area, the "Hundido de Armallones".

The route sets off towards the river canyon at Ocentejo, a small town in the Hoz Ravine, reaching a site where huge boulders that fell during the great Lisbon earthquake, in the sixteenth century, block the river.

Young black pines (*Pinus nigra*), junipers (*Juniperus communis*) and gorse (*Genista scorpius*) alternate with Portuguese oaks (*Quercus faginea*) and holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), found in the more exposed areas.

After nearly eight kilometres, the route reaches another crossroads where it veers 180º to the right onto a track that climbs slightly in parallel to the previous route until it reaches a new junction. The path to the left leads to a rest area with tables, a fountain and a stone shelter. However, this Stage continues to the right, descending gradually until the path becomes a narrow track.

The route descends through a rocky area where caution should be exercised. Boxwood bushes (*Buxus sempervirens*) and strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*) accompany the traveller in this stretch.



The Armallones Shipwreck

The path continues up-and-down until it reaches a rest area next to the ruins of a stone bridge known as "El Pontón". A wide forest track can be seen next to the bridge, along which the route continues for 500 m, before bearing right, at a bend, down a path leading to the Hocino Ravine. The route crosses a wooden footbridge, shown in the image, and turns right onto a narrow path that ventures through a pine forest.

This area floods frequently at times of heavy rainfall, therefore the path may be covered with water.

The landscape along the path remains unchanged for more than five kilometres: a beautiful trail surrounded by rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and strawberry trees, and shaded by pine trees. The Trail approaches and drifts away from the Tagus several times; however, as in other Stages of the Trail, it never completely loses sight of the river. At the end of the Stage, the path runs very close to the left bank of the river.

Near the end of the Stage, the route passes by the ruins of the Molino del Valle, and crosses the Repechos Ravine, to arrive at Valtablado del Río, flanked by crop farms dotted with huge walnut trees (*Juglans regia*). Valtablado lies on the westernmost edge of the Alto Tajo Nature Park, which is why the area is popularly known as the "Puerta del Alto Tajo" (Gateway to the Upper Tagus). This Stage of the Trail runs through the Alto Tajo Nature Park, Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA). From here, the Trail no longer ventures through these protected sites, although the river continues its course towards an equally interesting area: the Alcarria.

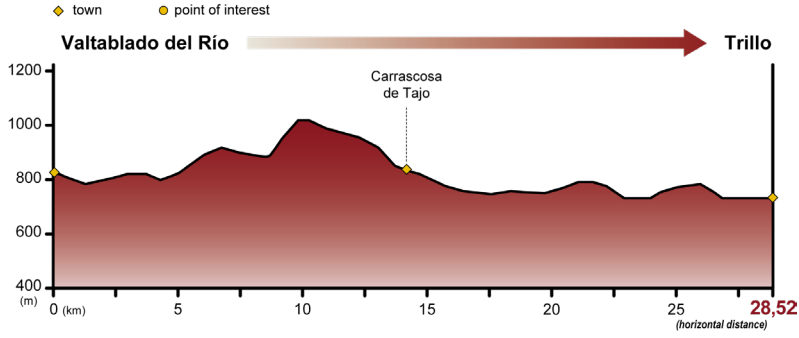


Footbridge along the path

STAGE 9 VALTABLADO DEL RÍO → TRILLO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	300 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	450 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	28,59 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 55 min



VEGETABLE GARDENS, WALNUT TREES AND THE BRIDLE PATHS

From the ancient and mostly abandoned bridle paths to state-of-the-art technology at Trillo nuclear plant. A Stage that brings together past and present.

The path leaves Valtablado del Río behind along the GU-929. The first few metres run near the paved road, with Gallego Fountain to the left, and continue onward until it cross the Tagus via the Valtablado stone bridge. Immediately after crossing the bridge, the route moves away from the paved road onto a vehicle track leading to town of Oter. Black pines (*Pinus nigra*), holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and rosemary bushes (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) alternate with crop farms and small market gardens.


Fountain next to the rest area



A bridle path on the rocky hillside

Although Portuguese oak forests dominate the land, a few pine trees dot the forest, towering over the smaller oak clusters. Despite many interStages, the route continues ahead always on the main path, which runs wedged in by, and very close to, streams that empty into the Tagus. This area is physically characterized by impressive gorges and canyons formed by the river. Although the route leaves behind the Alto Tajo Nature Park, much of it still traverses through the namesake Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

The track crosses over the Hoz Brook and arrives at the town of Oter. This town, blessed with areas of great natural beauty, is part of the GR-10 that connects the neighbouring towns of Valtablado del Río and Carrascosa de Tajo. Although the traveller can rest in this town, the route itself continues, exiting the town near a farm building.

VALTABLADO CASTLE

All that remains of this castle are the ruins that formed part of a defensive network built by the Christian kingdoms during the Middle Ages to consolidate their borders with the Muslims. Examples of this defensive line, some more substantial than others, can be found at Ocentejo, which is in a similar state of preservation; better preserved examples are at Arbeteta and Beteta (Rochafrida Castle).



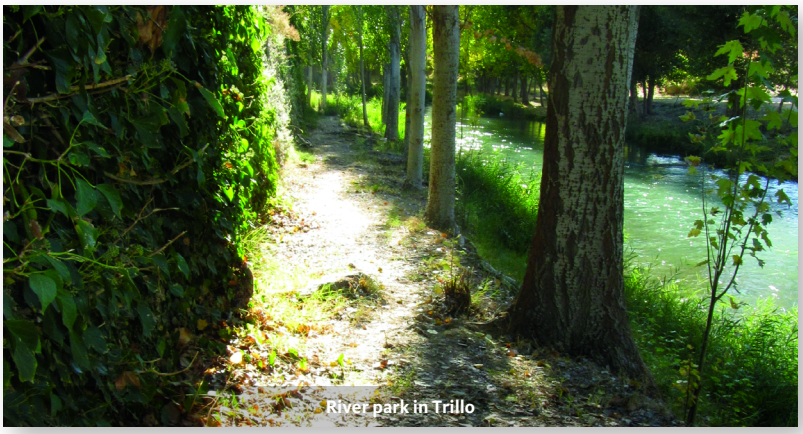
Carrascosa de Tajo

About 500 m further on, flanked by farms on one side and a mountain slope on the other, the Trail arrives at a junction where it bears right onto a path that traverses through a more homogeneous forest landscape. Further on, the Trail narrows and merges onto a bridle path that was used to link villages and transport supplies and goods on horseback, as it is too narrow for vehicles. The route continues to climb along the slope with the steepest gradient, zigzagging until it levels at almost 1,050 m above sea level.

The route continues along a trail that runs for more than three kilometres along this line until Carrascosa del Tajo; a small town with a rich history, successively inhabited by Celts, Romans, Visigoths and Muslims. The current town was founded in the twelfth century. The Trail enters the town via the GU-942, and exits onto the road leading directly to the River Tagus.

The route will cross three waterways in this part of the journey: twice the Palomar Brook, the second time near the Roman ruins at Murel Bridge and the new dam, and once the River Tagus. It then arrives at the Fuente recreation area on the left bank of the Tagus, and to the right of the bridge, where one can rest and recover under the shade of black poplars (*Populus nigra*).

The Trail continues parallel to the Tagus, always along the left bank, and even though it sometimes drifts away from the river, it is still the best guide to reach Trillo, the endpoint of this Stage.



River park in Trillo

Strolling downstream, the route climbs along a track with a quarry to the right, until it reaches a sign indicating a path to the right leading down to the river. The route temporarily moves away from the Tagus, turning left towards a farm, and further on, continues along a narrow path during approximately 1.3 km. The path widens on arriving near the river, and continues forth. After a long walk along the left bank of the Tagus, sometimes on a narrow angler's path, the Stage drifts away again from the river to arrive at the CM-2115, on which it proceeds until nearly the end of the Stage.

Finally, the Trail turns away from the CM-2115 onto a paved road to the right leading to Trillo, the endpoint of this Stage.

TRILLO

Trillo, located at the border between Carpetania and Celtiberia, was already a famous town in Roman times. The settlement, consolidated after its conquest in the late eleventh century, in times of Alphonse VI, became a part of the "Común de la Villa y Tierra de Atienza", and was governed by a charter.

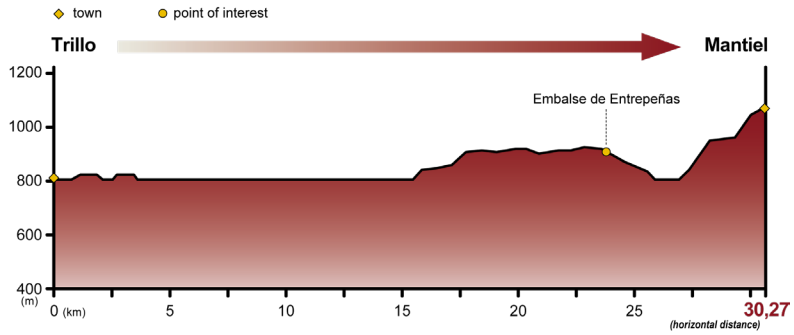
Infante Don Juan Manuel built, in 1325, the castle whose ruins crown the town. In mid-fifteenth century, it fell under the jurisdiction of the Counts of Cifuentes until it was declared, in 1630, Villa with its own jurisdiction. During this time, the region was populated with awe-inspiring Romanesque architecture, including the churches of Viana and La Puerta. Cistercian architecture, with the Monastery of Ovila at its centre, spread across these frontier lands producing unique examples like the shrine at Morillejo.

The magnificent churches of Trillo, Azañón and Morillejo were built in the sixteenth century, during the heyday of Renaissance. The towns and cities became a showcase of exceptional popular architecture made from stone with adobe and wood frameworks, the main examples being the well-preserved manors at Trillo and Azañón.

STAGE 10 TRILLO → MANTIEL

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	250 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	50 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	30,32 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 55 min



A WALK WITH VIEWS

Stage 10 runs almost entirely through a wide forest track. This stretch of the Nature Trail is characterised by constant views of the river. The path winds between the meandering river and the tail of the Entrepeñas Reservoir, flanked by holm oaks and Portuguese oaks.

This Stage begins next to Trillo's stone bridge, along the road shared with the Meandros del Tajo Local Path. The Trail turns left and begins to climb at the sports centre, leaving to the right the paddle tennis courts and a pool.



Signs indicating distances to nearby towns


Tetas de Viana

Further 500 m down the road, the path reaches the Ermita Dam that feeds water to Trillo nuclear plant. The vehicle track located next to the weir is the road to Vivero, along which the Trail continues.

The path ventures into a young pine forest whose trees provide shade for several kilometres. The Trail runs along the left bank of the River Tagus, veering closer or farther from the river with each bend. Virtually since the beginning, this Stage of the Trail traverses through the Alto Tajo Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

THE STONE BRIDGE

It is one of Trillo's most iconic spots, situated at the confluence of the Tagus River and the Cifuentes River. While bridge was first built in Roman times, the present-day bridge dates from the mid-16th century, although it was blown up by the French in 1810 and rebuilt in 1826. Due to its strategic position, between the two plateaus, attempts were made to blow it up again during the Civil War, and the holes in the sides where the explosives were to be placed can still be seen.

TETAS DE VIANA

The Tetas de Viana Natural Monument is located between Trillo and Viana de Mondéjar, although it is acknowledged as a reference point across the district. They are two limestone wheels against a clay background, eroded by flash floods caused by the rivers.

This type of hill formation can be found in many places, but what makes the Tetas de Viana special is that two wheels, with similar dimensions, are aligned in twin formation.

THE HOUSE OF THE MILLS

It is perhaps the oldest building in Trillo. Although it is first mentioned during the reign of Ferdinand IV of Castile and León, in the late 13th century, it may date back to the 12th century.

Trillo's links with energy production and the construction of the nuclear power station in 1987 (the most modern in Spain) have enabled the town to recover from the ordeals of the past and establish itself as a leading centre in La Alcarria. The House of the Mills (Casa de los Molinos in Spanish) is currently home to the Prometeion Energy Museum, which takes its name from the Greek hero Prometheus.

The museum offers an interactive, multimedia experience that traces the history of humankind's mastery of energy and how it has shaped our lives.

The river gradually widens. When the water level drops, many birds can easily feast on the exposed banks. Large populations of fish, including carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) and barbel (*Barbus bocagei*), feed on organic debris and seaweed. The presence of many freshwater invertebrates attracts waterfowl. Some remain indefinitely, while others only stop temporarily to rest during their migration.

Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*), Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) eat what they catch; Red (*Milvus milvus*) and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) scavenge dead or dying fish; and various ducks feed on plants and invertebrates. The waders, as its name indicates, find food in the mud and silt that form the banks. Other bird species, including Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) and Pied Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) can also be seen frequently on the banks of the Tagus.



Meanders of the Tagus



A wooded island in the Entrepeñas reservoir

The trail reaches a junction with an information panel describing the species inhabiting these cliffs. The path continues to run near the river until it begins to climb, leaving it behind. From here, the end of this Stage is twelve kilometres away. After a few bends without a view of the river, it reappears as a huge meander close to the Entrepeñas Reservoir.

The Trail continues downwards to the CM-2053 road, where it turns left and then right, onto the road to Cereceda. After a few more bends, the signs indicate that the path leaves the paved road to venture upwards towards La Morucha along a track surrounded by olive trees. Although the slope is very steep, it is not difficult to climb. In just three kilometres, the trail reaches the village of Mantiel where this Stage ends. This Stage is frequently used by the inhabitants of Trillo.

LIFE IN THE GRASSLANDS

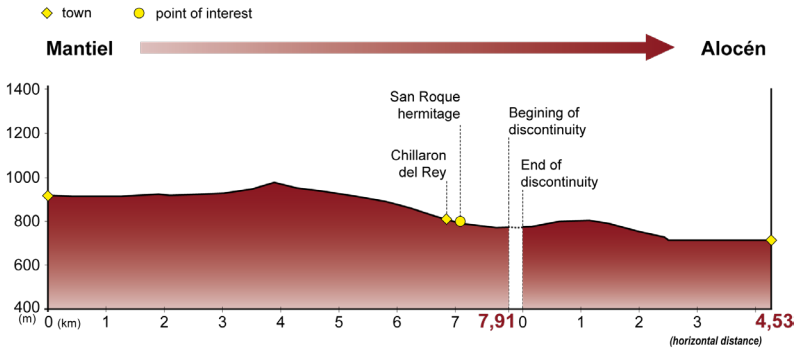
If there is ever an animal that is perfectly adapted to this habitat of pastures and scotch brooms, it is the rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). Hidden among the brooms (*Cytisus* sp.) it only takes to the open space to feed on herbaceous plants, an opportunity that Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Bonelli's Eagles (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), overflying the open plains, take advantage of to dive down out of the sky to pluck their daily meal..

Cows are also perfectly adapted to this environment, provided they have a watering place. Although the most common breed of cattle in the region is "Morucha", the "Sayaguesa" breed, originally from the region of Sayago (Zamora), can also be frequently found. The latter was used as a working animal for its hardiness and adaptability to changing conditions; however, the mechanisation of farm work led to their decline, and they are now bred for meat, widely appreciated by consumers.

STAGE 11 MANTIEL → ALOCÉN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	500 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	300 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	12,43 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h



THE OLIVE TREE PATH

Olive groves have been grown in plantations along the Tagus for over 600 years ago. The difficulty in mechanising farming terraces, emigration and labour shortage in rural areas, have led to the abandonment of these farms.

This Stage begins in the lower sector of the town of Mantiel, next to the sign indicating the starting point of the route. The Trail winds through old houses and a stone wall on the left, and olive, apple, cherry and other fruit trees on the right.

The Trail becomes gradually steeper with fantastic views of Entrepeñas Reservoir. Olive farms, abandoned some years ago, still preserve the silhouettes of the trees that once yielded many kilos of olives.



The Entrepeñas Reservoir in the distance



View of Chillarrón del Rey

During this first part of the Stage, the Nature Trail runs parallel to a local path; therefore, it is common to find green and white marks on trees and rocks.

The woods surrounding the trail are dominated by Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), with rockrose (*Cistus* spp.) and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*).

The Trail reaches a widening and becomes a path. For about 100 m, the route continues along this path, but immediately turns onto a slightly wider track.

Attention must be paid to the signs here, as the route will continue along a narrow path to the right.

ALTERNATIVES TO AGRICULTURE

Mantiel and the surrounding area did not enjoy favourable conditions for agriculture, and farming was of low productivity, despite the fact that its lands were irrigated by the Tagus.

Nevertheless, it managed to make up for its shortcomings and capitalise on its abundance of healing waters to become a retreat for clergy and kings. Alfonso VIII consolidated his control over the area from 1177 onwards and, from then on, the region's economy was driven by the ancient 'Wool Route', one of the main trade routes of the Middle Ages. Despite its distance, it belonged to the municipality of Cuenca, a city which was granted extensive lands to enable it to continue its struggle against the Muslims. The area took on its final form during the Modern Age, with the town's definitive layout being established in the 17th century.

The Bourbons took an interest in the area and established spa resorts in both Trillo and Sacedón (towns equidistant from Mantiel); recognised as royal estates, gardens and luxurious retreats were built there. A spa was also eventually established in Mantiel for people from lower social classes.

THE OLIVE TREE AND OLIVE OIL

Olive groves have covered much of the plantations along the Tagus for over 600 years.

They were a fundamental part of the area's economy, where olive oil was used for local consumption and for trading with the other towns of the Penillanura and both Castiles.

This trade contribute to the sustained growth of olive farms, while the new times called for greater specialization. Thus, in the mid-twentieth century, olive groves alternated with orchards and, in some towns, terrace farming and hunting reserves predominated.

Nonetheless, given the labour-intensive nature of olive production, and despite the income earned from its trade, it was greatly affected by emigration. Like the rest of the crops grown on terraces, they were abandoned or neglected due to labour shortage and the physical impossibility of using machinery.

The Trail rapidly proceeds to the town of Chillarón del Rey, protected by a modern, well-kept fence. During the descent, it is possible to see hundreds of mica crystals, a mineral characterised by easy exfoliation into thin, flexible, elastic and very bright sheets.

The Nature Trail leaves Chillarón via Mayor Street, through bushes and walnut trees (*Juglans regia*) and arrives at San Roque Shrine, where a rest area and an information panel on this long-distance footpath can be found.

A sign alerts that, from here, the path runs parallel to a road, but only for a short distance (300 m), at which point it crosses the road to La Puerta and ventures into an olive farm.



San Roque Chapel

HOLM OAK

The holm oak is a symbol of adaptation to the Iberian Peninsula's climate. Its leaves, thick and hard, are dark green above and whitish beneath. When the trees are young, the leaves have spikes to prevent herbivores from foraging.

Rarely do they reach great height, although this region boasts several large trees.

The scrubland on the slopes, where there are fewer holm oaks, is home to many herbs that infuse the famous Alcarria honey.

The Trail climbs up the hillside surrounded by holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and Portuguese oaks (*Quercus faginea*). Leaving behind the streambed, the slope disappears almost completely and the path becomes easier to walk.

Following a rapid descent, the route reaches the N-204. Running parallel to the road, the Trail approaches the shore of Entrepeñas Reservoir.

This Stage is interrupted when it arrives at Pareja Bridge, and continues on the opposite shore, after crossing the viaduct, where the road turns left and proceeds along the contour of the reservoir until it reaches the GU-999. For safety reasons, it is advisable to use a vehicle in this stretch. The route passes through the Sierra de Altomira Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

The path continues several hundred metres along the paved road until it reaches a bend, where it turns onto a narrow path that climbs through the forest. A larger path appears soon after that leads the Nature Trail to the village of Alocén, and the endpoint of this Stage.

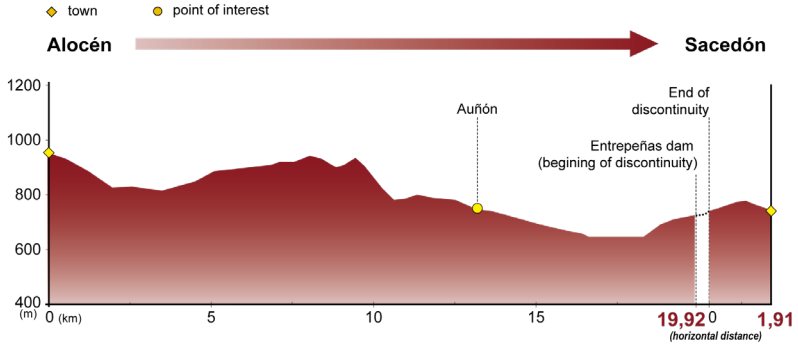


Pareja Bridge

STAGE 12 ALOCÉN → SACEDÓN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	250 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	375 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,91 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 15 min



FOLLOWING THE COURSE OF THE RIVER

This Stage begins at Alocén, a village that sits over the Entrepeñas Reservoir. Outdoor activities may be practiced in the surrounding area and along the route, blessed with a landscape dominated by river banks, olive groves, walnut trees, orchards and market gardens. The Trail runs along vehicle tracks and paths, alternating with a few paved roads, where caution should be exercised. The traveller can enjoy flatlands, cliffs, black pine, holm oak and kermes oak forests, as well as several 16th and 17th century shrines and churches.



Arrows pointing to the nearest towns



Locked door leading to the track

THE LA ALCARRIA LANDSCAPE

At this stage, we find ourselves in La Alcarria, a region comprising a vast expanse of moorland, valleys and associated landscapes of spectacular beauty. Despite having been a region heavily altered by human activity, there are still places where examples of botanical relics can be found.

This is a group of moorlands (flat, elevated areas reaching altitudes of between 700 and 1,000 metres) that are cut through by the valleys running through them: the Henares River, the Tajuña River, the Tagus River and their tributaries. The vast plains (low-lying, flat areas at the bottom of the valleys) are linked to the moors by steep slopes, whilst there are many other landforms resulting from complex geological processes.

The vegetation of La Alcarria is dominated by holm oak, Portuguese oak and juniper woodlands, alongside which scrub such as lavender thickets and and plants adapted to gypsum-rich soils grow on gypsum outcrops; there are also small forests of Pyrenean oak or their substitute scrub, heather and/or rockrose.

The most characteristic vegetation in the area is the Portuguese oak woodland (found on the north-facing slopes), which coexists with holm oaks (found in the drier areas).

Within this landscape, there are also areas of pine forest, which have been encouraged by extensive reforestation programmes. The most common species used for this purpose are the black pine (*Pinus nigra*) and the maritime pine (*P. pinaster*), although small stands of stone pine (*P. pinea*), Scots pine (*P. silvestris*) and Aleppo pine (*P. halepensis*) can also be found.

Finally, it the riparian vegetation, mainly poplars and willows, found along river courses is also worth mentioning.

This Stage begins in the upper sector of the town of Alocén, a village on the banks of the Entrepeñas Reservoir. The Trail climbs down the GU-998 road until it reaches a bend where it turns left and runs into a metal gate. The gate remains unlocked, allowing the traveller free passage, but must be left closed as found.

From here, the Nature Trail continues a few kilometres along the road leading to the Escuela Provincial de Vela (Provincial Sailing School), until it reaches another metal gate, which can be passed through one of the sides.

The Trail continues its gradual ascent along the paved road, until it merges with the GU-999. Some one-hundred meters further, the road turns onto a forest track on the left that ventures into the forest. Black pines (*Pinus nigra*) flank the route along this stretch.



Shrine of the Virgin of Madroñal

TWO ARCHITECTURAL GEMS

In the nearby hamlet of Córcoles, situated to the east of Sacedón, there are two true gems of medieval architecture from the Alcarria region: the spectacular Monsalud Monastery, founded in the 12th century (now uninhabited), and the 13th-century parish church.

The monastery was founded by Alfonso VIII and was inhabited by the Cistercian Order until the 19th century. The church features a transept with magnificent ribbed vaults and capitals in the central nave, and a Romanesque nave on the outside.

The cloister originally had four rows, although only three of them remain today. The structure of the chapter house is based on two central columns that support the vaults.

Furthermore, the convent has a Renaissance-style façade featuring the coat of arms of the order in Castile. Standing alone, in front of the monastery, is the gatehouse; whilst the cellar still retains the recesses where the earthenware jars once stood. In 1931, it was designated a listed building and it has recently been restored.

After an intense, yet short, climb, the Trail comes to an interStage where it turns right, then left to continue through the forest. Another fence blocks the way, but as on previous occasions, it can be sidestepped. Next to the fence, hanging from the branches, are wooden boxes used as nests.

Once through the gate, the path continues along a track next to some stone tables. Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) flank the route, forming a beautiful natural tunnel. The Stage reaches again the GU-999, along which it runs for several hundred metres. It arrives at a junction where it turns left onto the road leading to the town of Auñón.

After a couple of kilometres, it reaches a bend in the road, and the Trail continues along a vehicle track that ventures into a pine forest leading to a car park. The Sanctuary of the Virgen del Madroñal, built in the seventeenth century, can be found here. According to the legend, the shrine took its name from the appearance by the Virgin Mary on the trunk of a strawberry tree.

The Trail continues to the left of the Sanctuary, turning onto a path that climbs up through the pine forest. The path reaches, soon after, the top of the mountain, and begins to descend. The pine forest gradually gives way to large olive groves and kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*) woods.

On reaching the paved road, the Trail turns left, climbing up towards the hamlet of Auñón, home to the 16th century church of San Juan Bautista.



View of the Entrepeñas reservoir

The route leaves Auñón behind, and continues along a road that traverses through market gardens. It crosses a stream, and proceeds towards huge walnut (*Juglans regia*) farms.

Next to a few houses, the Trail merges with the N-320 for some fifty meters, where it turns onto a path to the right. The route advances through an area with many market gardens and olive groves, in a place known as Pinillas, until it reaches the CM-2009, where it crosses to the opposite side and over the Auñón Stream. From here, this Stage shares part of the route with Stage 13. On its way to the Entrepeñas Reservoir, the route always continue upstream, parallel to the River Tagus, first along the right bank, then on the left bank, after crossing a stone bridge over the river..

NESTS OR NEST BOXES

Nest boxes can be found hanging from the trees. Contrary to popular belief, these boxes are not cages. It is a proven fact that many forest birds, especially Chickadees and Blue Tits (Family *Paridae*), use them as breeding sites.

Strategically placed in the forests, it favours the presence birds, especially young ones, that feed on insects that usually feed on trees. This prevents the use of insecticides, which contaminate the environment, and enables the natural control of insects that could multiply into pest proportions.

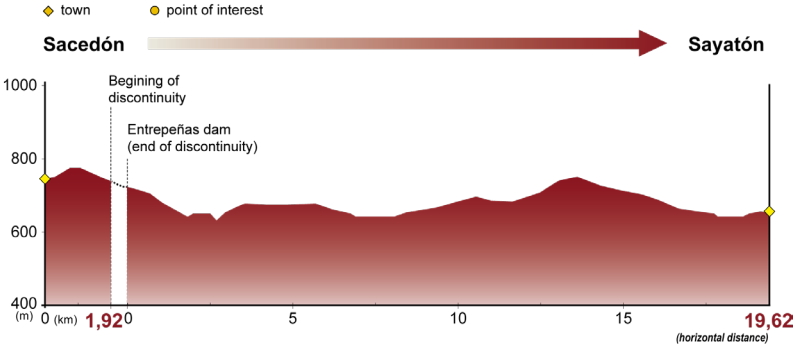
There are different types of nest boxes. The most widespread are designed for small birds, but there are also larger boxed for bats or Tawny Owls (*Strix aluco*), which control small rodent populations.

A rest area with benches and tables can be found near the reservoir, before turning right onto a paved road that runs along the edge of the body of water. The route continues along a paved road to a tunnel that provides access to the N-320. Just after the tunnel, the Trail is interrupted during approximately 450 m as it runs along the N-320. Stage 12 continues from here, where a paved road that passes under the N-320 intersects with the road to Cuenca, leading the traveller to Sacedón, the end point of this Stage. For safety reasons, it is advisable to use a vehicle in this Stage.

STAGE 13 SACEDÓN → SAYATÓN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	125 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	200 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,53 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 50 min



NEAR ENTREPEÑAS RESERVOIR

This Stage of the Trail runs along the right bank of the River Tagus, from Entrepeñas Reservoir to Bolarque Waterfall, near Sayatón. The landscape alternates between valleys and ravines surrounding the River Tagus, and flatlands where crops, pine forests and olive groves coexist.

Stage 13 starts in the town of Sacedón. Several viewpoints can be found just few metres after the start, with excellent views of the Entrepeñas Reservoir. Information on the water sports practiced at the reservoir is available at the village of Sacedón.



View of the Entrepeñas reservoir



Roman bridge between Auñón and Sacedón

The route leaves the town via the road to Cuenca leading to the reservoir. Travellers who have already completed Stage 12 will find this part of the route familiar as it is a shared Stage. You will also be aware that the Stage is interrupted for about 450 m, when it merges onto the paved road leading to the N-320 and continues along the N-320 itself.

Once this stretch along the N-320 is completed, (it is advisable to use a vehicle in this Stage for safety reason), the Trail continues to the right, just after the tunnel. This route skirts around the massif, to the left, and the reservoir, to the right. A rest area with benches and tables can be found near the reservoir.

ENTREPEÑAS RESERVOIR

Located in the Lower Alcarria (Guadalajara), the waters of the Tagus flow into this reservoir inaugurated in 1955 to produce electricity. It was one of the greatest works of its kind in Europe in those years. The reservoir holds 804 cubic hectometres of water, and irrigates the lands of the municipalities of Sacedón, Alocén, Pareja, Durón and Trillo. It is a favourite of many anglers from central Spain.

The reservoir is connected to the Buendía Reservoir by a 4-kilometre tunnel. Surrounded by abundant pine and holm oaks, both reservoirs together have over 100 km of shoreline, and are popularly known as the "Mar de Castilla" (Sea of Castile).

The dam above the reservoir is located on a narrow crag, wedged between the municipal districts of Sacedón and Auñón, next to the town that gives the reservoir its name.

It is the first town that is fed by the River Tagus, whose water are diverted to the Segura Basin and the "Tablas de Daimiel".

ROYAL PALACE OF LA ISABELA AND THE BATHS OF SACEDÓN

The La Isabela Spa Resort (1826–1955), also known as the Royal Palace of La Isabela, was a spa town situated on the banks of the Guadiela River. This was a spa area that was already well known in Roman times; however, it was in 1666 that Queen Mariana of Austria built a palace and laid out beautiful gardens.

Later, Ferdinand VII and Isabel of Braganza visited it, and she was charmed by the loveliness of the place. The project was then improved, and a village and the Royal Estate were established. The site subsequently fell into disrepair until it was submerged by the Buendía reservoir in 1955; although some ruins bearing witness to its former grandeur can still be seen today.

SHRINE OF NUESTRA SEÑORA DE SACEDÓN

It is located in the San Cristóbal Mountain Range, between the Bolarque and Buendía reservoirs. The beautiful landscapes of the River Tagus, the Bolarque Reservoir and the Anguix Castle can be seen from here.

The large, elongated building has an arched door on the west wall, topped with a triangular frieze with three pinnacles. The numerous modifications made until the mid-eighteenth century have defined its architecture as we know it today..

The image of Nuestra Señora del Socorro, patroness of the town, can be found inside on the altarpiece. Legend has it that José López Heredia, who commissioned the construction of the shrine in the early 17th century, prayed to the Virgin Mary for protection from the beasts when he was stranded without shelter when the night fell; since the Virgin came to his assistance, he promised to build a shrine.

Leaving behind the reservoir, the Stage continues along the foothills of Entrepeñas Valley, on the left bank of the river, at about 20-25 m above the riverbed; therefore, extreme caution should be exercised to avoid any falls. Once in the valley, the path reaches a medieval stone bridge from where you can contemplate the beauty of the river and its banks. Although there is some risk of landslides, the areas are properly marked.

The route passes through the Sierra de Altomira Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

From here, the Stage runs almost entirely along the right bank of the river. The route reaches the interStage with CM-2009, and crosses the Auñón Stream. The stretch shared with Stage 12 ends at this point, when the route turns left.

This part of the Trail alternates between local roads, forest tracks and paths, where loose stones will slow down the pace and prevent the use of bicycles. The largest height differences have been levelled out with properly marked stairs.



Rest area near Sayatón

The CM-2009 plays a key role in this Stage, as the Trail runs along this road for about 7.5 km.

This first part of the Stage features narrow valleys and many ravines along the lower reaches of the river Tagus. The middle and final part of the Stage consists of low-lying areas with few slopes, covered with large groves of olive trees, walnut (*Juglans regia*), pines (*Pinus* ssp.).

Before reaching the village of Sayatón, and after leaving the CM-2009 to venture through large cereal fields, there is a small rest area with tables and benches, as well as barbecue grills.

The Castle of Anguix can be seen from the road between Sacedón and Sayatón, sitting atop a rock on a high hill, near the River Tagus. The Stage ends in Sayatón, which boasts the shrine to its patron saint, San Roque, and a sixteenth century church.

THE FUNNEL MUSEUM

Located in Sayatón, this unusual museum in a small village in La Alcarria houses a collection of around 600 different types of funnels: Sayatón. Here, visitors can see unusual funnels made from all sorts of materials, such as copper, zinc and clay, as well as porcelain, glass and plastic.

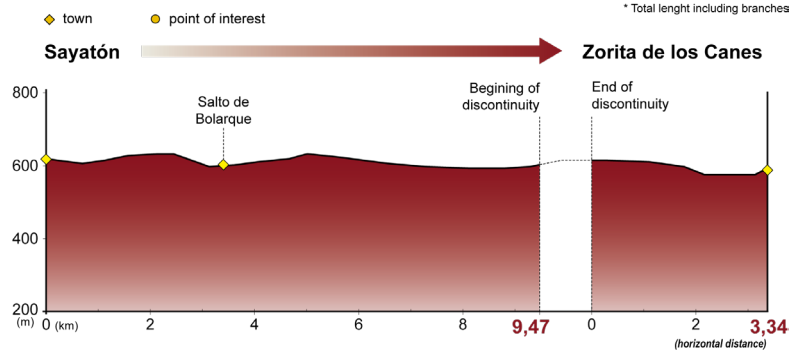
You can see pieces from other countries such as Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, France and different Spanish provinces, as well as pieces of different sizes.

Throughout the visit to the museum, visitors can gain a good insight into the historical development of the town through the evolution of such an everyday object as the funnel, which is found not only in homes but also in numerous industrial activities. This is an interesting walk that showcases this very useful, everyday object.

STAGE 14 SAYATÓN → ZORITA DE LOS CANES

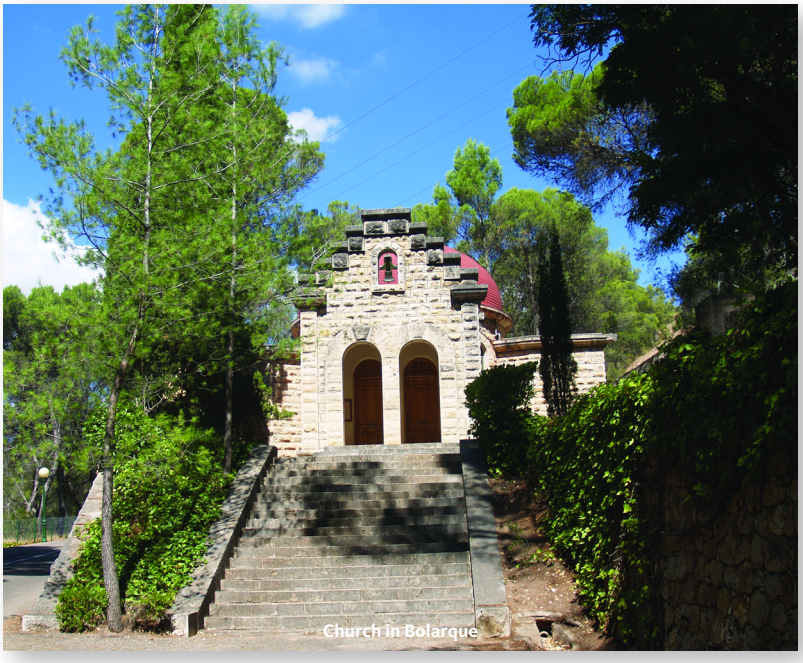
MIDE

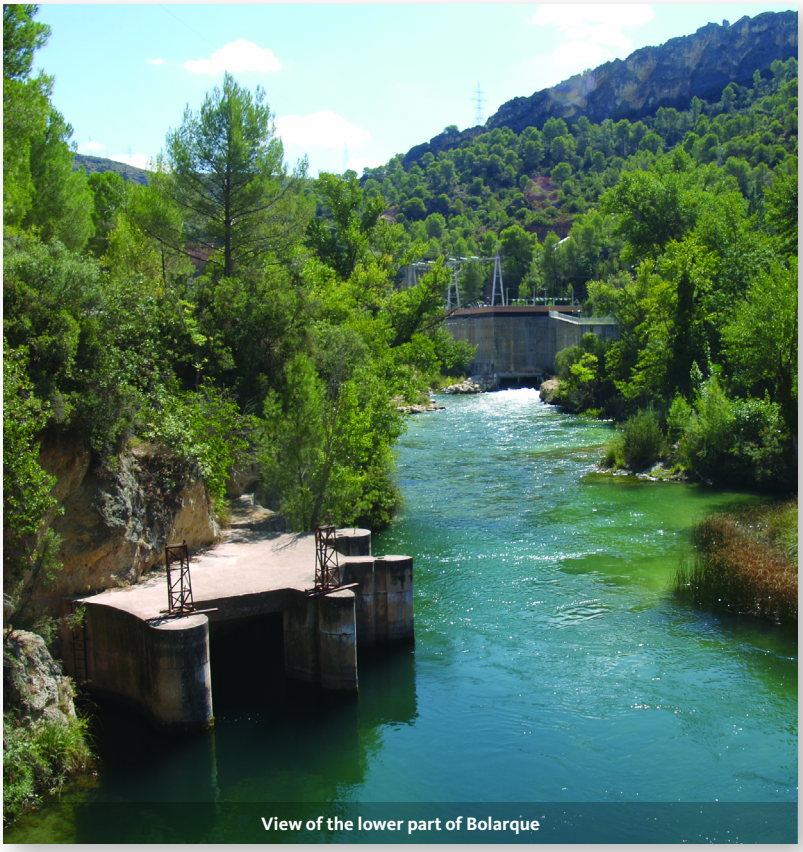
Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	75 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	125 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	12,83 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 30 min



NEAR ZORITA POWER PLANT

This Stage runs from the village of Sayatón to the vicinity of the impressive Zorita nuclear power plant. The unique course of the Bolarque can be seen during the pleasant walk, which takes the Trail back to the lowlands of the Tagus towards the town of Zorita de los Canes.


Church in Bolarque



View of the lower part of Bolarque

This Stage begins in the town of Sacedón, climbing down the road to the interStage with CM-2009. Before arriving at the junction, there is a fountain to the left, although the water may be untreated.

ZORITA NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

This was the first nuclear plant built in Spain, next to the River Tagus, in the municipality of Almonacid de Zorita (Guadalajara). Having outlived its operating cycle, the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade mandated its definitive shutdown on April 20, 2006, and disconnected the plant from the grid on April 30, 2006. The decommissioning of the plant began at that point.

Building work begun in July 1956, and was completed in record time in March 1968. The core was loaded and initial criticality was reached in June 1968. The official opening took place on December 12, 1968. It had an installed capacity of 150 MW with a pressurised water reactor. The mixed cooling system combined cooling towers and water from the Zorita Reservoir on the River Tagus.

ZORITA DE LOS CANES

The origins of Zorita are tied to its castle (declared a Historical-Artistic Site in 1931). The first written reference dates from 886, when Calib Ben Hafsum's domains extended until Zorita, from where he plundered the lands of Toledo, taking over Caliph Abd al-Rahman III. The fort was later conquered by the Christian King Alphonse VI, who named Minaya Alvar Fanez, a friend and lieutenant of the Cid, as the head of the government.

It was given to the Order of Calatrava in 1174 to defend the area against the Muslims stationed at Cuenca. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Zorita was the "Seat" of the Order of Calatrava (1211-1212), after the loss of Calatrava and Salvatierra.

With the rise of the absolute monarchy, Zorita was alienated and Philip II sold the town in 1565 to Ruy Gomez de Silva, Duke of Pastrana. In 1572, he established an entailed estate that included Zorita and its castle. It was later passed to his son Rodrigo de Silva and Mendoza, and subsequent male heirs of the Duke of Pastrana until 1732, when the Dukes of the Infantado sold it to Juan Antonio Perez de la Torre, a predecessor of the Count of San Rafael.

From the interStage, the path ventures close to a quiet road between Sayatón and Bolarque Waterfall, through a pleasant environment, in the shadow of the trees that cover the mountain. Along the path are amazing buildings associated with the waterfall and the electrical substation. Notable is the church to the left with an impressive dome covered with red tiles. The Trail now traverses through the Altomira Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA)..

In the next stretch, the road is devoid of shade for several kilometres; therefore, it is advisable to stock up on water when near the Bolarque Waterfall. Leaving the town behind via the GU-226, along which the path continues for approximately two kilometres, it then turns right onto farmland that is clearly marked with imaginary lines.



Directional signpost on the road



Aerial view of Zorita de los Canes

Following the sign, the Trail reaches a junction from where one may take an offshoot road (clearly indicated) to visit Almonacid de Zorita, a beautiful town located down a wide track flanked by olive groves and a few areas reforested with Aleppo pine forests (*Pinus halepensis*). This road runs about 2.5 km along the Cifuentes Barca path.

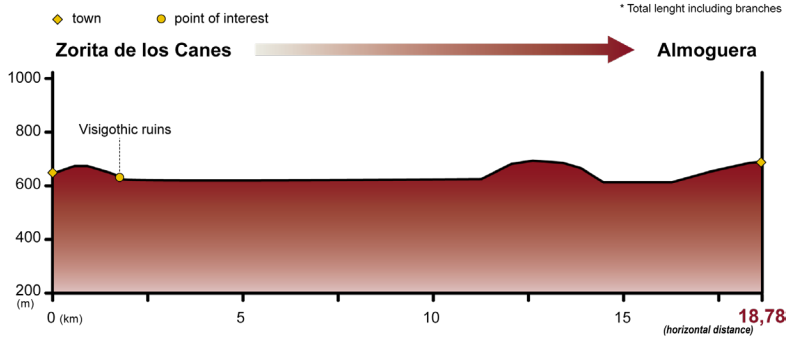
The famous Zorita nuclear power plant becomes visible on the horizon. The traveller may even come across one of many flocks of sheep grazing in these meadows. The main path disappears near the interStage where the road to Almonacid began, only to reappear again one kilometre further, after crossing the paved road of the town near the nuclear plant, where it crosses the CM-200. It is advisable to use a vehicle in this Stage for safety reasons.

This Stage continues along the westbound track, leaving behind the village, to proceed towards the town of Zorita de los Canes along a well-marked path. Near the town, an interesting bridge can be seen to the right, unfinished at the time of drafting this guide, of which only the pillars stand. However, the one thing that really stands out at the edge of Zorita de los Canes is the impressive ruins of the Mozarab castle, which stands atop the town like a crown. One can find shelter under the shade and fresh water in the town's fountains. It also has several information signs about the ruins of the castle and the Recópolis Archaeological Park, which is included in Stage 15 of this guide.

STAGE 15 ZORITA DE LOS CANES → ALMOGUERA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	200 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	100 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	18,80 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 5 min



WALKING THROUGH GROVES ALONG THE RIVER TAGUS

This Stage leaves behind the town of Zorita de los Canes and its beautiful ruins to venture along the Tagus along riverside paths surrounded by giant reeds. The route heads to the village of Almoguera, with a rich historical heritage, which is manifested in the ruins of an ancient castle.

The route heads out of Zorita de los Canes, skirting around the old Mozarab castle (please refer to Stage 14), where the traveller can see the wonderful ruins in all their glory. Crossing to the opposite side of the road, the path climbs up the hill adjacent to the town. By looking back during the climb, one can enjoy a panoramic view of the castle with the side buttress. The view from here is truly impressive.


Panoramic view of Zorita and the castle

RESERVA FLUVIAL DE LOS SOTOS DEL RÍO TAJO

This is a protected nature area located in a well-preserved riparian forest were tamarisks (*Tamarix* spp.) clearly dominate the landscape, together with mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), herons (*Ardeidae*), Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) and other beautiful waterfowl.

This Stage proceeds to the Visigoth ruins of Recópolis where an interpretation centre can be found. This track leads back to a landscape of olive groves (*Olea europaea*).

The route continues to zigzag down the hill. From here starts a spectacular stretch that runs along the Reserva Fluvial de los Sotos del Río Tajo. Most of this Stage winds through the "Sierra de Altamira" Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA). The path runs just a few metres from the riverbed, where you can observe wildlife close-up, especially birds. The Trail proceeds confined by giant reeds (*Arundo donax*), with a few scattered beehives. The path leaves the road, crossing to the opposite side at the bend, and continues to wind parallel to the river.



A meander of the River Tagus

Several kilometres further on, the path reaches a junction from where the traveller may visit the town of Albalate de Zorita taking the offshoot road. This solitary and narrow road to the town is flanked by olive groves. A derelict shrine to St. John the Baptist (1611), welcomes the visitor to the town, where a fountain and some shade provide respite. This offshoot road is 4.3 km long.

Back on the main road, once near the river, it continues along a colourful riverside promenade that gradually drifts away into farmland. However, it first passes next to the shrine of Santa Cruz de San Pedro, with a shaded rest area equipped with benches. From this vantage point, one can see how sparsely populated with trees the Trail is, therefore, it is advisable to stock up on water.

The path gradually approaches a large bend in the river, which it crosses via a winding track, to the left, that climbs up the hill. A breathtaking view can be seen from here.

From here the road heads down to the interStage where Stages 15 and 16 run together along a canal off Almoguera Reservoir. The path reaches the GU-249, which first crosses the canal, then turns right and runs across Almoguera Reservoir. Caution should be exercised when crossing, using only the available walkway.



Chapel of Santa Cruz de San Pedro

The Stage along the GU-249 is short. Merely 300 m from the reservoir, the path turns left first, then right towards the town of Almoguera. The Church of Christ and the castle that crowns the town can be seen from three-kilometres before the Stage ends.

The narrow streets of Almoguera welcome the visitor with its shade and fountains. The ruins of the castle and the Church of Christ can be accessed from the village.



Artisans' area and the altar of the church at Recópolis

VISIGOTH RUINS OF RECÓPOLIS

The only newly founded Visigoth town in Europe (Declared a Historical-Artistic Site in 1946) lies atop Oliva Hill, in the municipality of Zorita de los Canes. The archaeological remains of the Visigoth town of Recópolis (6th century), built by King Liuvigild for his son Recaredo, are located in Sierra de Enmedio. The city, where ceramics and utensils from the period were unearthed, has a wall and about a hundred buildings.

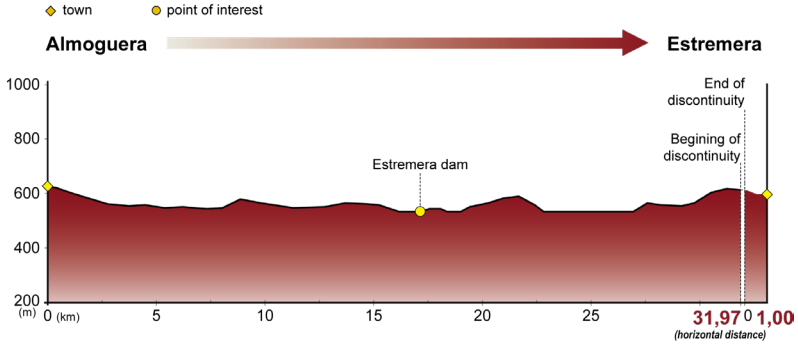
It was built in 578 A.D. after the military campaign at Oróspeda. This city was significant in its time, and even minted its own coins. Worthy of note are its dimension (thirty acres) and the early Christian basilica, built in two distinct phases, first as a 4th century Roman church, and later, as a basilica when the ancient Hispano-Roman settlement became a city. Other buildings of interest include walls, aqueduct, residential area, and streets.

It is currently part of the Network of Castile-La Mancha Archaeological Parks, with an on-site interpretation centre.

STAGE 16 ALMOGUERA → ESTREMERA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	175 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	125 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	32,97 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	8 h 20 min



WALKING THROUGH FIELDS OF GRAIN AND CORN

This Stage between Almoguera and Estremera traverses through an agricultural landscape dominated by alternating fields of cereal (yellow) and corn (green).



Ruins of Vallega Castle



Hydraulic installations from the rest area

This Stage begins in the town of Almoguera (please refer to Stage 15 for further information). The Trail leaves the ruins atop the town to the left, and continues along a mostly straight track towards the River Tagus. The silhouette of the Church of Christ, strategically located on high ground between the river and the town, can be seen from here.

The path runs into the River Tagus at the Almoguera Reservoir, which impounds and channels its waters a few hundred metres downstream to generate electricity. The stretch of the path shared with Stage 15 leads away from this area onto another path that is exclusive to Stage 16.

It first runs along the canal for about 700 m, then shifts to the left bank of the River Tagus, still on GU-249, passing next to an power plant, which generates electricity using the water channelled from the reservoir, and a fish farm located at the foot of the ruins of a castle, with a sign indicating the access road.

Leaving the fish farm behind, the Stage drifts onto an offshoot road to the right that steadily climbs away from the river, although the waterway remains visible throughout most of the journey. The farmland that the Trail will traverse can be seen from here. Depending on the season, it is possible to enjoy the beautiful contrast between the yellow and green fields that embellish the landscape. The Stage also runs through several intensive livestock farms. It should also be recalled that this part of the Stage traverses through the "Sierra de Altamira" Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

The Trail is dotted with water infrastructures, such as the old Estremera Dam, located high up the hill, which contrasts sharply with the modern version. The house of the Conde de la Cumbre Hermosa stands proud atop this hill, as well as a rest area with beautiful views of the reservoir.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF ESTREMERA

Evidence of human presence, dating back to prehistoric times, has been found in the Pedro Fernandez Cave, or "Sima de las Yeseras", within the municipal limits of Estremera. This natural cave system is riddled with about 4 km of horizontal galleries, and is home to a priceless archaeological site, in which excavations have been ongoing.

Archaeological studies have found (early and middle) Bronze Age remains dating from 1600 to 1200 B.C. The caves were not only used as a necropolis and a sanctuary, but also inhabited by the dwellers who lived interchangeably between the caves and the huts built along the riverbank, where they hunted, fished and gathered food. Indeed, they began to grow crops on the meadows, where their sheep and goats also grazed.

A number of archaeological remains can be found inside the Pedro Fernandez Cave, including "engravings" on the clay walls of some galleries, and several natural "shelves" with fragments or even whole pieces of pottery

The cave was declared a Historical-Artistic Monument in 1972. However, the Government of Madrid closed the site a decade ago as a precautionary measure, and access is currently prohibited.



Chapel of Our Lady of the Assumption in Illana

From here, the traveller ventures into a spectacular landscape of a narrow gorge on the river. Metal handrails have been placed in the more exposed places, therefore, if you are cycling, it is advisable to get off the bike and walk, as some areas are quite narrow and winding.

Following the river along the left bank, the path reaches the interStage with GU-282, which will guide the traveller in the approach to and transit through the residential developments (Soto, Río Llano and San Joaquin) located on the outskirts of Illana, where one may visit the shrine equipped with a rest area and a playground.

The Trail now crosses the river to continue along its right bank until it reaches a bend where it first turns right, and then left, to continue along a road, through the gentle fields, that lead to the gates of Estremera.

From here, the town of Estremera is only a few kilometres away along the Nature Trail, which now ventures into the administrative border of the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Please be advised that the Reguero Brea, which the Trail crosses, may carry large volumes of water depending on the season. Several concrete blocks have been placed to make crossing easier.

Near the end of this Stage is an interStage with the M-222, which cuts off the Trail about 200 m before reaching Estremera. Having covered this distance (the use of a vehicle is recommended for safety reasons), the path leading to the destination reappears on the shoulder to the left.

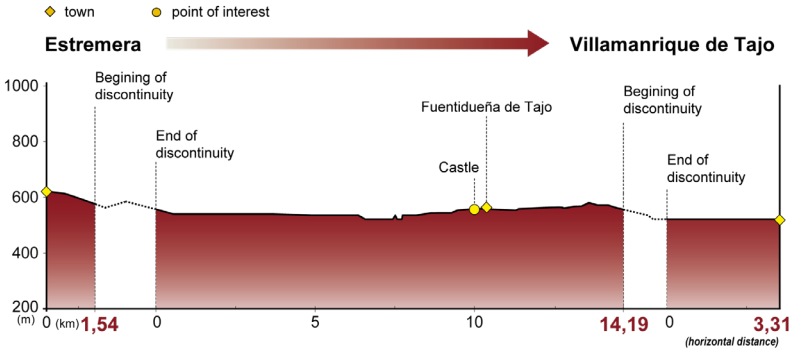


Bridge over the River Tagus

STAGE 17 ESTREMERA → VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	50 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	75 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	19,04 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 30 min



THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE RIVER TAGUS THROUGH MADRID

Estremera is the first town in the Autonomous Community of Madrid that gets a glimpse of the River Tagus. From here, the route traverses landscapes with wide horizons, dotted with hills that channel the river.



Close-up of the commemorative cross



Livestock track on the outskirts of Fuentidueña

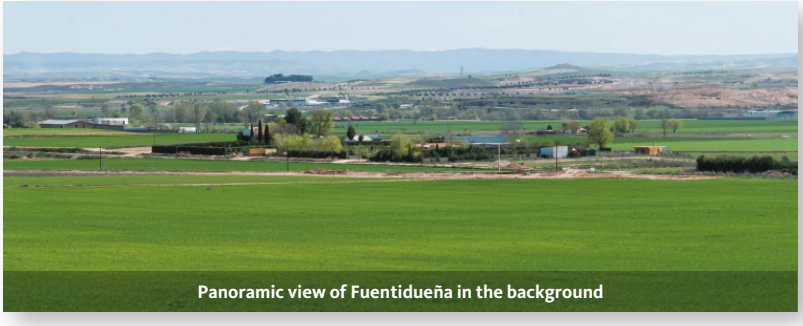
The Trail leaves Estremera behind via a track on the southern edge of the town that leads to the M-241. The tracks in this Stage are all wide and easy to walk. On the way out of the town, Estremera's wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) can be seen on the left.

In the next stretch of this Stage, the Trail is interrupted twice by the M-241: first during 400 m, after which the route continues again during 300 m on the Trail, and the second time during 1.3 km long.

The route continues again along the Trail at the junction with the M-240. Please pay attention to the signs on the Trail and exercise caution when on the road. It is advisable to use a vehicle in this Stage for safety reasons.

There is a memorial stone cross at the access point to a number of crop fields. It should also be noted that, from the very beginning, this Stage ventures in and out of the "Vegas, Cuestas y Páramos del Sureste de Madrid" Site of Community Importance; hence, one must be especially mindful of the environment.

The Trail leaves the road momentarily near the village of Peñarrubia to access a wide track leading to several different routes, including "Ruta del Norte del Tajo y el Canal Channel" or "Camino del Cercado". These tracks allow travellers to avoid briefly the M-240 due to safety reasons; however, despite these interruptions, the Trail always heads back to the road.



Panoramic view of Fuentidueña in the background

FUENTIDUEÑA CASTLE

There is some indication that it could have been built in the twelfth century, and later expanded or rebuilt in the fourteenth century. Its history is tied to the "Reconquista" and kings Alphonse VI and Alphonse VIII. The former reconquered these lands from the Moors and married Zaida, a Muslim princess, while the latter granted the city charter and founded the market.

It was designated the seat of the kingdom under Doña Urraca, the wife of Alphonse I, the Warrior. During the War of Independence, in the nineteenth century, the castle suffered great devastation when many of its stones were used to erect other buildings.

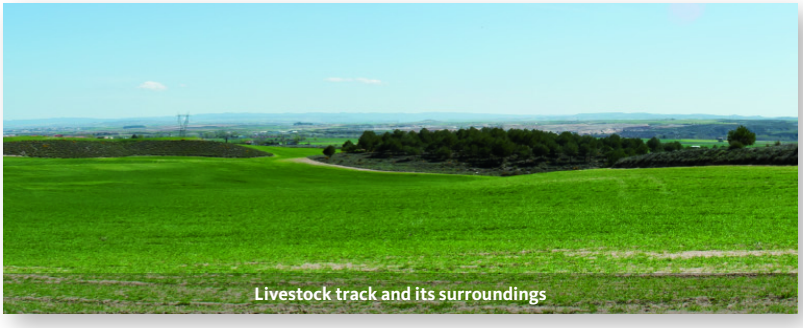
This castle was home to several famous prisoners including Alvaro de Luna, Marquis of Villena.

Large and irregular in shape, it consisted of two building separated by an inner moat. Currently, only a wall and part of the two cylindrical towers on the sides remain standing. The outside of the keep, located on the opposite side of the city, can still be seen.

The first interruption occurs just 80 m after reaching the road, and covers only 110 m. The route is interrupted again (for 250 m) after about 1 km. The Trail continues its normal course as soon as the route leaves the M-240, when it veers to the left through Colada de Valdecañas.

Back on the road, after the stretch through farmland, the route is interrupted again during 650 m. Fuentidueña is accessed via the Perchel district, crossing a footbridge over the A-3 motorway linking Madrid and Valencia.

Fuentidueña boasts picturesque monuments such as the Fuente Salobre or Fuente de la Dueña, the Church of San Andrés Apóstol, and the ruins of Fuentidueña Castle. The route leaves this beautiful Madrilenean town via a cattle track located on the upper edge that leads to Villamanrique de Tajo, the final destination.



Livestock track and its surroundings

FUENTE SALOBRE

Fuente Salobre, also known as Fuente de la Dueña (Fuentidueña), is located behind the church, at the foot of the castle. Its owner, Doña Urraca, controlled this fountain; although an inscription from 1883 states that it was built later. It consists of a stone basin with a single spout that collects water from a spring through a vault.

The route continues for a few more kilometres through a landscape of rolling hills of cereal fields and a few olive groves. The comfortable walk is interrupted by an interStage with the M-326. This stretch of the road overlaps with the Trail during 1.2 km. The Trail continues along a track that first runs perpendicular to the right shoulder of the M-326, then continues parallel to the road until, 1.5 km further on, it reaches an interStage. From here, it continues towards another junction with the M-319.

The last part of the route runs mostly through farmland. Villamanrique de Tajo, which is very close, is accessed via a path that runs along the southeast face, wedged between the town and the river. The attention is first drawn to the steeple of the Church of Jesus el Nazareno that dominates the horizon. Once in town, the traveller may stock up on fresh water from different fountains, while the River Tagus, the partner in adventure, flows nearby.

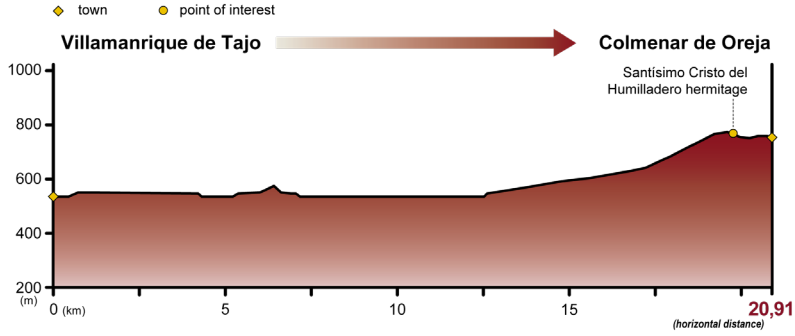


Bell tower of the church dedicated to Jesús de Nazareno

STAGE 18 VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO → COLMENAR DE OREJA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	275 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	65 m
Route difficulty	3	Route lenght (actual distance)	20,93 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h

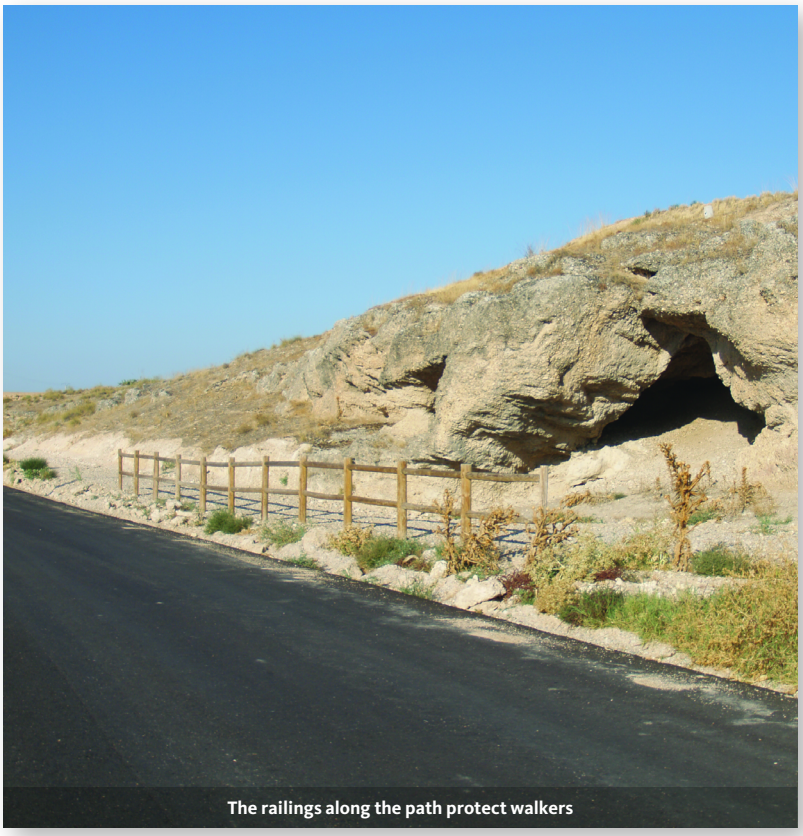


THROUGH VALLEYS AND QUARRIES

This Stage of the Nature Trail offers a different landscape from the meadows of the earlier Stages. Here, ancient remains of abandoned quarries alternate with modern mining operations. Open pit mining activities can be seen until Colmenar and, from there onwards, the route traverses the beautiful Valdegrederos Valley.



Wooden bridge in Villamanrique de Tajo



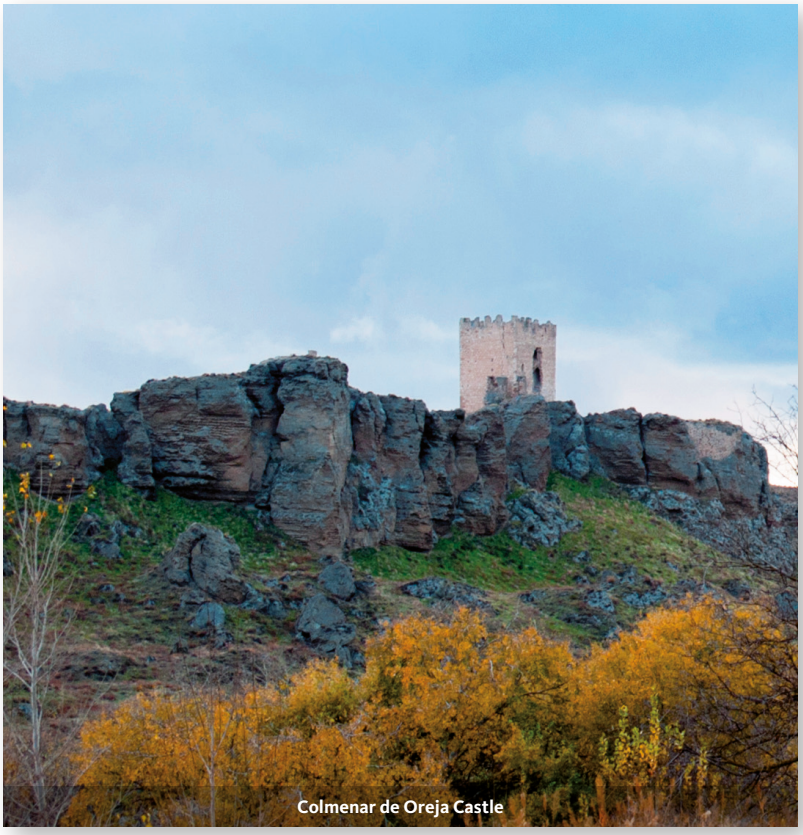
The railings along the path protect walkers

This Stage, which begins in Villamanrique de Tajo, takes the path closest to the river, which skirts around the southern edge of the town. From the beginning, the Nature Trail shares the route with another path, the "Ecological Path of Ribera del Tajo".

VILLA AURELIAE

This ancient village has been closely linked to the history of Colmenar de Oreja since Roman times (as evidenced by its name, *Aureliae*) and subsequently through the Muslim conquest and the Christian *Reconquista*. At this point, the Muslims built a castle that formed part of the Kingdom of Toledo's defensive line; its strategic position allowed them to control the ford on the Tagus River from its southern bank.

During the *Reconquista* of Spain, Christian King Alfonso VII fought a very important battle against the Muslim Arabs at Oreja Castle (*Aureliae*), on 31 October 1139, laying siege for seven months to the 30,000 Almoravid Arabs, who were forced to retreat "without victory and without honour", according to Modesto la Fuente in his *Historia general de España*. All these areas surrounding the castle fell within the new *Encomienda* of Oreja in the Province of Castile, under the jurisdiction of the Municipal *Fuero* of Oreja.



Colmenar de Oreja Castle

The route crosses a wooden bridge, the last shade in several kilometres; therefore, it is advisable to stock up on water..

After crossing the M-325, the Trail continues along a cattle track that runs between large cornfields. This stretch of the route is very quiet as vehicle access is restricted. To the right, the Trail is bound by hills, where erosion over the centuries has carved whimsical shapes that provide shelter from sun or rain.

The Trail is flanked by farmland and pastures, which bring a mix of green and yellow, according to the season, and where herds graze and rest. The first quarries appear further on. These modern, small-scale quarries are in sharp contrast with the remains of the old mines.

Close to the quarries, the route moves away from the track and continues along paved roads. Soon after, one can see the refinery and heavy machinery of the quarries. From here, the Trail ventures through narrow paths that run parallel to the access road for lorries, avoiding the dust and noise made by these vehicles..

After a couple of kilometres, the route reaches a crossroads leading to the town of Colmenar de Oreja (right) and the road to Aranjuez (left). From here, Stages 18 and 19 overlap until Colmenar.



Chapel of the Holy Christ of the Humilladero

The Trail continues north to the right. As the route advances towards the top of the plateau, one can sense that the end is near. From the very beginning, the landscape of the climb up to Colmenar de Oreja is dominated by sunflowers, olive trees, corn and even vineyards. The track winds through reeds, which is proof that the land is waterlogged and muddy.

Pine trees appear soon after, while the valley narrows as it advances towards Valdegrederos. The ascent gradually becomes steeper, confined in the depths of this beautiful valley. The track climbs higher and higher with every bend.

SHRINE AND GARDENS OF CRISTO DEL HUMILLADERO

It consists of two chapels, one from the 16th century, and the other from the 17th in Baroque style, with stone masonry walls.

It holds within the image of the patron of the city: Cristo del Humilladero. A pleasant walk from the Plaza Mayor takes the traveller to the gardens and pine forest near the shrine. Every year, during the first week of May, a procession takes place at night on the feast day of the patron. The endless rows of long candles, which seem to move on their own, produce an almost ghostly vision.

The gardens of the shrine of the Cristo del Humilladero offer an impressive and sweeping view of the town, with the silhouette of Oreja Castle and Montes de Toledo in the distance.

GLAUBERITE

Glauberite is a calcium-sodium sulphate from which sodium sulphate is extracted; this is mainly used as an inert excipient. It was formerly known as 'Glauber's salt', named after the German alchemist Johann Rudolf Glauber (1604–1668), who discovered the properties of this mineral in the mines at Villarrubia de Santiago.

Spain is the only country in the European Union with sodium sulphate mines (primarily thénardite, glauberite and mirabilite) and ranks second in the world, surpassed only by China, which gives an idea of the tremendous relevant of this mineral and of the Spanish mines.

Domestic production is intended for domestic consumption and export. The main use of anhydrous sodium sulphate is in the manufacture of washing powder, but it is also used in the production of glass, paper pulp, textiles, enzymes, steelmaking processes and others. It is also worth highlighting the applications in products for human and animal consumption, as well as in pharmaceutical products, given the stringent quality requirements we must meet.

During the fieldwork to describe the route, it was found that several Stages were difficult to pass owing to the poor condition of the road surface (gullies formed by concentrated runoff).

Although far from being impassable on bicycles, it is a challenging ride that is only fit for experienced bikers. Further on, after the Vadegrederos Stage, there is a well-equipped rest area in the upper levels of this site, where one can rest in the shade.

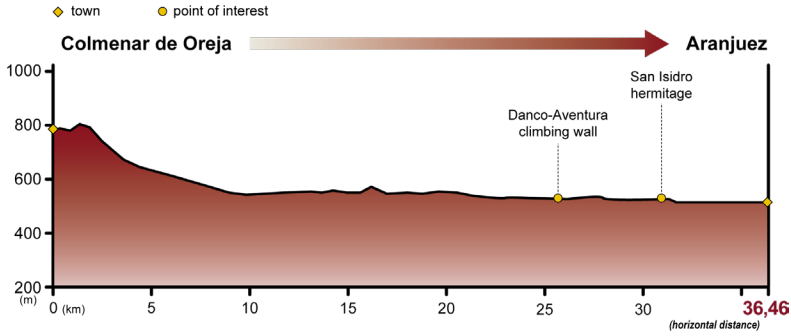
The route continues along the opposite side of the road, with Colmenar de Oreja on the horizon. The route enters this beautiful town from the south. Colmenar de Oreja boasts multiple fountains and an amazing panoramic view over the River Tagus lowlands that is well worth the effort made during the ascent..

The shrine of the Santísimo Cristo del Humilladero, which proudly stands at the entrance to Colmenar, is the crown of this Stage.

STAGE 19 COLMENAR DE OREJA → ARANJUEZ

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	80 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	330 m
Route difficulty	3	Route lenght (actual distance)	36,47 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 45 min



THE TAGUS ON ITS WAY TO THE REAL SITIO

This Stage begins in the high mountain town of Colmenar de Oreja. The Trail descends towards the Tagus, which unfailingly rolls towards the Real Sitio y Villa de Aranjuez.



A recreational area in the shade of the pine trees at the start of the stage



Ferry crossing at Carpio del Tajo

PASO DE LA BARCA

Ferry crossings were a common sight in the Tagus; indeed, there were more crossings than bridges. They did not require large investments and were economically profitable. These wooden platforms, supported by ropes, were used by pedestrians to cross the river in both directions.

WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The city of Aranjuez was designated a UNESCO Cultural Landscape and World Heritage Site in 2001.

UNESCO recognised the exemplary interaction between humans and the natural environment in this region. Indeed, the wisdom and respect shown by humans in their interaction with nature resulted in a diverse and rich landscape; a territory where human activity has been decisive in transforming the environment to meet their needs, albeit without compromising the livelihood of countless forms of life that live in this diverse, ideal habitat.

The Paseos Históricos were the focal point of an elaborate plan that sought to recreate a natural world (gardens, woods, paths, streets and orchards) full of leisure activities and wildlife for the aesthetic enjoyment of kings. When one walks along these promenades, of which only the layout and ancient trees survive, it seems as if time comes to a standstill, and one realises that it is possible to live in harmony with nature.

The Stage begins in the southern edge of the town, next to the shrine of Santísimo Cristo del Humilladero, where the traveller can stock up on water. Further on is a rest area with pine trees and picnic tables.

After a short descent, the track reaches the top of the plateau from where it is possible to view much of the route. After crossing the M-322, one can see the spectacular beauty of Valdegrederos, which this Stage will traverse in perpendicular in an enjoyable descent towards the River Tagus. The Trail meanders through olive groves and pine forests.

Special caution should be exercised when cycling this Stage, as some parts are very challenging and should be attempted only by experienced bikers. It is always possible to walk when it is not cyclable. Once in the bottom of the valley, the Trail is less strenuous, as it traverses through reeds and olive trees. Nine kilometres further on, the route arrives at an interStage that leads directly to the River Tagus..

PALACIO DE ARANJUEZ

The origins of this palace date back to 1561, when King Phillip II commissioned its construction to the architect Juan Bautista de Toledo, although Juan de Herrera completed the work. The palace was ravaged by fires in 1660 and 1665, as most of the buildings were made of wood. It was rebuilt by Santiago Bonavia in times of King Ferdinand VI. King Charles III commissioned the two side wings to Francisco Sabatino. The ornamentation of the building is made of brick with plinths, angles, cornices, window frames, balconies and doors made of stone from Colmenar de Oreja.

The other great attraction of the Real Sitio is its gardens. They were considered the most beautiful of their time, and still continue to captivate visitors. The Jardín de la Isla and Jardín del Rey blend Spanish concepts with Italian, Flemish and Muslim styles. The Jardín del Parterre, a French design, was built in the early eighteenth century, in times of Phillip V, the first Bourbon king.

The Jardín del Príncipe was built on a whim of Prince Charles IV, and is characterised by the large variety of plants it holds, with species from Asia and America, and myriad stone and marble fountains topped with statues of classical mythology. This is the largest garden.

The Real Casa del Labrador, commissioned by Charles IV, stands within this garden. One of Europe's most important neoclassical complex is housed in this small palace



The Royal Church of San Antonio, 18th century, in Aranjuez

This Stage, which straddles the provincial border, passes under a bridge on which runs the CM-322. After turning left, it traverses through fields of grain. The Trail continues westward, passing next to several hydraulic facilities associated with the River Tagus, including the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).

The route drifts away temporarily from the river, but soon returns to its side via livestock trails. Fruits and vegetables (zucchini, peppers, tomatoes and melons) grow on the fertile lands surrounding the river. Indeed, the town of Villaconejos is renowned for the quality of its fruits and vegetables. The ruins of the Oreja Castle, perched atop the hills on the opposite bank, can also be admired.

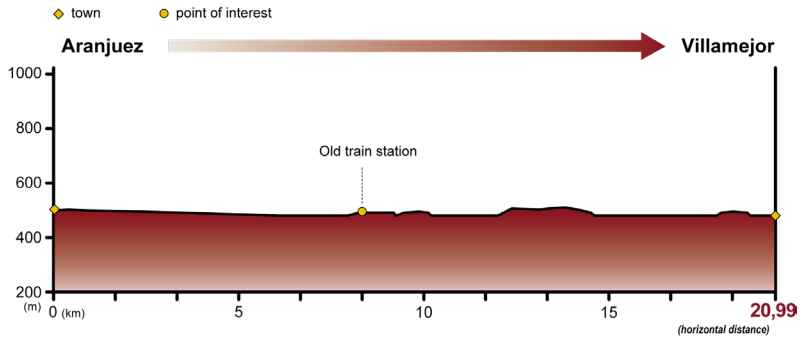
The shaded areas that abound are welcomed on hot days. The first interesting architectural ensemble that appears is Las Casas del Reloj. The route continues on a paved road flanked by large trees leading to Real Cortijo de San Isidro, home to its namesake shrine, situated in the Plaza Mayor..

The road veers south heading again towards the Tagus, which is about to reach the Real Sitio de Aranjuez. The entrance to this majestic city, a World Heritage Site, is through a 2-kilometre long straight road known as Calle de la Reina, which runs next to the Jardines del Principe. This large avenue is a feast for the senses of the traveller who has walked nearly 28 km from Colmenar. The wonderful monuments, including the Royal Palace, the churches of San Pascual, Alpajés and San Antonio, the former Barracks of Pavia, the Palacio de Godoy, and the bullring, are located in the city centre.

STAGE 20 ARANJUEZ → VILLAMEJOR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	0 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	25 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,00 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 15 min



THE RIVER TAGUS THROUGH THE REAL SITIO DE ARANJUEZ AND THE LARGE CASERÍOS (FARMHOUSES)

This Stage leaves behind the Real Sitio and its awe-inspiring monuments to meander along the Tagus. It irrigates the lands of large farmhouses on its way to Villamejor.



View of the Tagus in Aranjuez



Rest area in Villamejor

CARRIZAL DE VILLAMEJOR NATURE RESERVE

This nature reserve (56 ha) is located at the mouth of the Martin Roman Brook. This saline wetland sits in the northern edge of the brook, and consists of thick reed beds with an African tamarisk (Tamarix africana) grove in the centre.

The Decree 21/1991 of March 21 extends protection to this wetland rich in flora and fauna. The most representative plant species include glaucous glasswort (*Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*), an endangered species endemic only to these reed beds. These wetlands are also an important habitat for bird species, including Northern Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) and Western Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*).

The route leaves the Real Sitio via the large avenue that starts at Plaza de Armas and continues towards Toledo on the M-416. There is an information panel near the exit from Aranjuez. Further on, the Trail crosses over the railroad through an overpass, and follows the signs until it reaches an interStage in the outskirts of the city. Please exercise caution when approaching interStages due to heavy traffic.

The route continues mostly west to the next crossing at Los Infantes. After crossing a roundabout with a direction sign and the AVE tracks, a perfectly straight road with little traffic leads to the Apeadero de Las Infantas.



The former "Las Infantas" railway station

THE ROYAL OF ARANJUEZ

For a long time, Villamejor was an important crossroads, as the route linking Toledo with Aranjuez (one of the most important on the peninsula) made Villamejor a strategic stopping point in the area. Furthermore, the transport of livestock was boosted by the abundance of water in the area, reaching its peak when the Royal Palace of Aranjuez was established in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Over time, the relocation of the capital to Madrid led to a shift in strategic focus towards the north, which occurred in parallel with the economic stagnation of the entire southern region of La Mancha. The process culminated in the 20th century with the rural flight, and today the area is of great ecological interest.

Human activity and the proximity of the River Tagus have enabled the use of the land for agricultural development. Additionally, the richness of its fertile soil makes this land one of the most productive Stages of the river. Indeed, the region is named Las Vegas because of the breadth and width of the fertile lands and the number of rivers and brooks.

The Trail proceeds along a wide and easy track that skirts around the many farms and farmland that dot the area.



Gardens at the hamlet of Villamejor

During two kilometres, the route runs parallel to the rail tracks, from which it drifts away after a few bends to continue west along a rarely travelled road, evidence by the large bushes of up to two metres in height that flank the Trail. Further on, the route borders a large farming estate, closed with metal crash barriers, until it reaches the River Tagus again. From here, it proceeds a few metres, and then turns south.

The new direction leads back to the rail tracks, where the path turns right and continues along a perfectly straight road from where one can glimpse the large structures of the local quarries. Gradually, the Trail draws closer to the quarries, even sharing the track with lorries. Extra caution should be exercised due to heavy traffic.

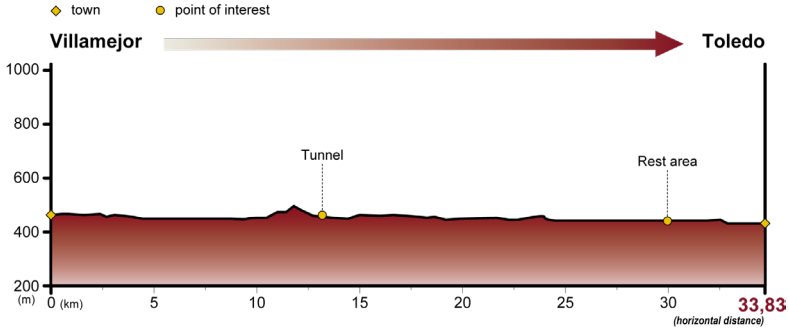
Just past the quarry, the path reaches an interStage with the CM-4004. A number of wide tracks lead to the hamlet of Villamejor, the endpoint of this Stage, which is accessed after a right turn.

Further on, to the right of a large farmhouse surrounded by 1,500 ha of land, the route ends in a place surrounded by beautiful gardens that provide shade and rest.

STAGE 21 VILLAMEJOR → TOLEDO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	115 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	145 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	33,96 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 20 min



ESCORTING THE RIVER TAGUS TO THE IMPERIAL CITY OF TOLEDO

This Stage escorts the River Tagus on its way back to Castile-La Mancha through the lands of Toledo, arriving at the impressive Imperial City via a river promenade with stunning views.



Section of the path with a wooden balustrade



Footbridge on the path

The route leaves Villamejor crossing the tracks on its way to the N-400. Further on, it changes direction, and continues towards a Stage specially adapted for this Nature Trail. This specially adapted route is closed to vehicle traffic with bollards, and runs parallel to the national road for about three kilometres. Wood and stone walkways have been built to enable easier crossing of rivers and streams, which run dry in summer.

A sign at the end of this Stage indicates the northbound route that the Trail takes to venture into a cropland equipped with a circular irrigation system. A hydraulic infrastructure of great importance to the area can be seen in this stretch. Another sign indicates that the Imperial City is 27 km away.

The Trail traverses through the ruins of ancient hydraulic systems and buildings used by day labourers in ancient times. The image is often rather melancholic. The Trail runs parallel to the N-400 for some time, until it arrives at a large roundabout at Algondor. Here is the old railway station that served as a transit point for trains running from Madrid to Toledo.

The route continues along livestock trails until it reaches another area with quarries; caution should be exercised again due to heavy vehicles and lorries. The large olive plantations are interrupted only by steep railroad embankments, which the route circumvents through a tunnel with panoramic views and the silhouette of Toledo.

The path crosses a river at Vereda del Rey, the last bridge before reaching the industrial buildings on the outskirts of Toledo. The first building to the right is a well-known ceramic factory. At the end of this building, the Trail crosses the N-400 again and enters Toledo through this industrial estate. The route runs along Jarama Street, and then continues along a large avenue popularly known in Toledo as the "Avenida del Tajo". After several twists and turns, the route crosses the rail tracks again.

TOLEDO: WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Toledo was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986. It is unique in that the three monotheistic religions and cultures -Muslim, Jewish and Christian- left their mark in the city.

The city offers plenty to explore from the architectural, cultural, artistic and gastronomical to routes of convents, churches, bridges and towers, artistic routes and, even, unknown heritage. It is possible to discover paintings by El Greco, Titian and Goya, admire mediaeval military architecture, or visit ancient Roman caves and Arab baths.

Baños de las tenerías

The Muslim water-related structures made of brick consist of several rooms whose roofs no longer exist.

La Torre de San Cipriano

Located in the primitive church of San Cipriano, one of the oldest in Toledo, it is first mentioned in 1125, although it may have been first a mosque.

Roman vaults of Nuncio Viejo

The Roman baths and the cisterns of the water supply network located in the basement of the Tax Office are the two most important Roman remains of the city.

Gateways and Walls

Several interesting gateways can be found throughout the city, including the Puerta de Alfonso VI; the Renaissance Puerta de Bisagra, built in 1550; the Puerta del Vado, discovered in 2002, and the Mudejar Puerta del Sol, built in the 14th century.

Bridges and Towers

The city also boasts bridges and towers worth visiting, including the Puente de San Martin, a perfect example of medieval military architecture; the Puerta del Cambrón, in Renaissance-style but Arab origin; and the Torre de los Abades, built in Muslim times.

Both the Municipal Tourism Council and the City of Toledo Consortium organise free tours of the lesser-known monuments, archaeological sites and other attractions that have been recovered after many years, in some cases centuries.

Alternatively, it is possible to take a small “train” at the Plaza de Zocodover, in the city centre, to tour the city, including the traditional panoramic views from the Tagus Valley..



Panoramic view of the city of Toledo

From here, the route leaves behind the paved roads and follows the meanders closest to Toledo. The Trail becomes a path that runs along the river during a few metres, with magnificent views of the flora and fauna that inhabit its banks. The route gradually approaches the Imperial City, following the course of the river, with frequent rest areas and shade to enjoy the scenery.

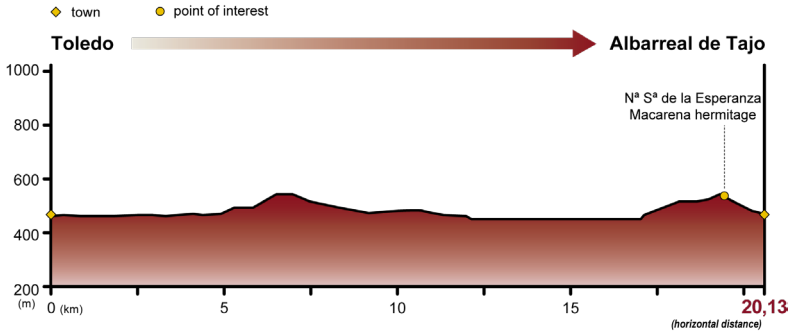
The views of the Alcázar and the cathedral from the river are spectacular. Crossing the new Alcántara Bridge at Paseo de la Rosa and Juanelo roundabout, the route draws closer to the buttresses on which the city is built. The path barely runs on paved roads. Indeed, from here, it turns left venturing onto the Route of Don Quixote. The spectacular suspension bridge over the cliffs located between the river and the city provides an exceptionally rewarding experience.

From here, the route reaches the Casa del Diamantero and the Paso del Barquero. Although the walk continues at lower heights, closer to the river and the rest areas and parks that dot its course, the beauty of the views remains undiminished. The endpoint of this Stage, between the bridges of San Martin and Cava, leads to the monumental area of the city via the Bajada de San Martín.

STAGE 22 TOLEDO → ALBARREAL DE TAJO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	175 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	150 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	20,15 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	6 h 30 min



THE TAGUS FLOWS TO ALBARREAL DEL TAJO THROUGH ROLLING HILLS

This Stage leaves the Imperial City behind and heads towards the nearby town of Albarreal del Tajo, home to the Shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Macarena. The Trail ventures through rolling hills covered with olive trees and cereals, which add a colourful nuance to the landscape throughout the year.



View of the start of the stage



Shaded area along the nature trail

The route leaves the Imperial City crossing an area under the bridges of San MartÃn and Cava, then proceeds along a beautiful river promenade. It continues along old workshops that have now been transformed into a recreational area and promenade. Some buildings, with walkways that jut out over the River Tagus, allow the traveller to see places that are laden with history, including the Polvorines Bridge, at the edge of Toledo.

Two kilometres further on, the Trail reaches a road and continues to the left towards the CM-40. The route passes through three roundabouts before reaching the road. It takes the second exit at the first roundabout, passing next to Toledo's wastewater treatment plant.

At the second roundabout, it again takes the second exit, crossing a bridge under which the CM-40 passes. Finally, at the third roundabout, it takes the second exit, moving away from the paved road onto a track with a sign indicating "Camino de Albarreal".

The route passes next to a quarry with heavy traffic of lorries from the mine; however, the Trail only runs along this road for three kilometres. There is no possibility of error as the track is well signposted, indicating the direction towards La Vega de la Cruz.

The climb gradually leads up to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Hope Macarena, which stands imposingly on the horizon, overlooking fields of olive trees and cereal crops where, at the end of summer, shades of yellow, grey and ochre blend together. The final ascent leads to the foot of the sanctuary, which can be viewed up close and where there is also an information panel.



Details of the signposting along the nature trail

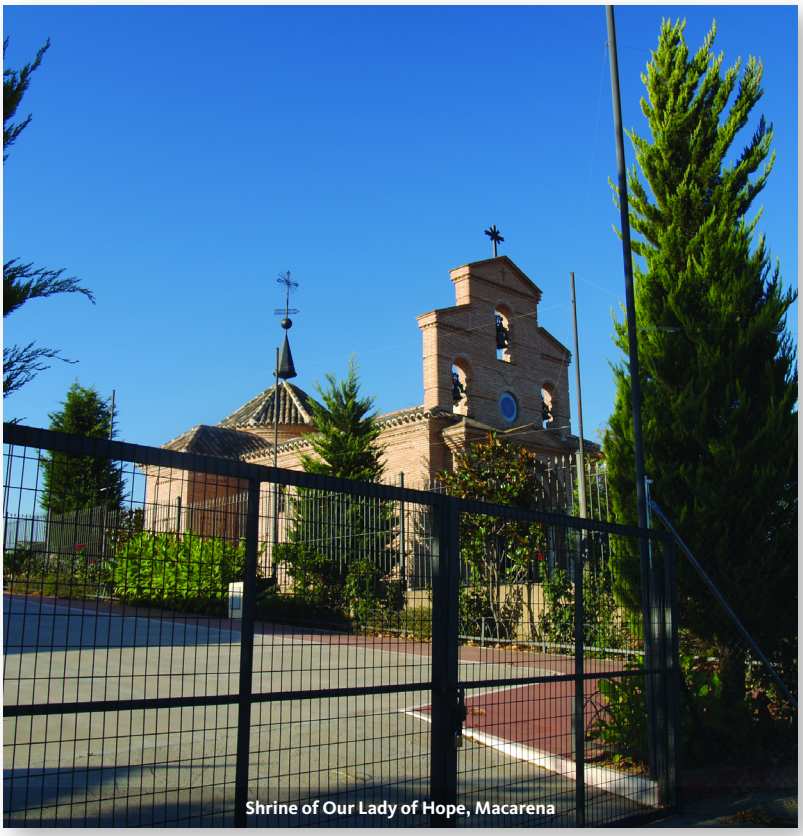
ALBARREAL DEL TAJO

The origin of the name appears to come from the Celt word "albiga". However, in the 11th century, when Alphonse VI donated the village to the Monastery of San Servando de Toledo, it was known as Albalat, which in Arabic means "the road". In the sixteenth century, the name was changed to Albarreal, and then Alcalá del Río, with only 55 inhabitants who lived in earthen houses. It was granted a city charter in the 17th century, changing its name to Alba Real, in accordance with the title of their new masters, the Counts of Alba Real.

The parish church of Asunción is worth visiting, as well as the city centre dotted with small whitewashed houses. The feast in honour of the patron saint, Saint Augustine, takes place on August 27, 28 and 29.

From this fabulous vantage point, you can see the end of the stage, which involves a direct descent to the village of Albarreal de Tajo via its southern entrance. As soon as you reach the village, you can take a break in the rest area next to the children's playground and refresh yourself at the village fountains.

This Stage traverses through large private farms that are usually fenced and marked as private game reserves. Indeed, it is possible to hear gunshots when walking through this area. Another interesting element of this Stage of the Nature Trail is that it overlaps during 5 kilometres with the Way of Saint James (GR 239), the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, that also runs through here. One must greet the pilgrims with the traditional "Buen Camino"



Shrine of Our Lady of Hope, Macarena

The path skirts around several large farms, including Bergonza, Viznagas and Vega de la Cruz. The route climbs a small hill before it reaches the latter farm. On top of the hill are a beautiful viewpoint and several picnic tables where the traveller can enjoy a well-deserved break.

The route continues to skirt around the farmlands of Vega de la Cruz along its southwest border. It is possible to see the chapel and olive groves of the farm. The Trail veers west towards the River Guadarrama, which it crosses via a narrow, yet sturdy bridge. From here, it gradually descends the rolling hills covered with fields of grain.

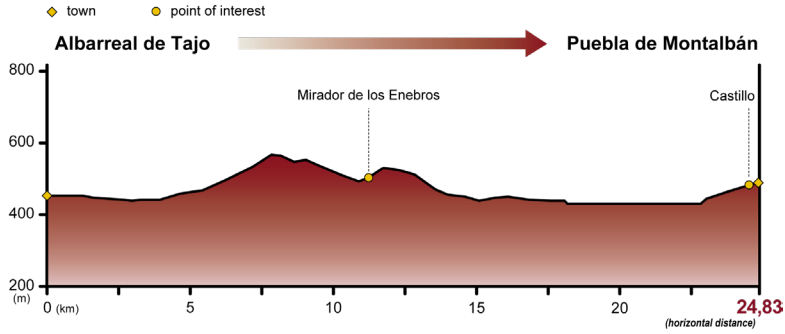
The gradual ascent leads to the Shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza Macarena, which dominates the horizon with its grandeur, surrounded by olive groves and rows of grain that paint the landscape yellow, grey and ochre hues in late summer. The last ascent leads to the shrine, which has an information panel that allows one to enjoy the building up close.

From this fabulous vantage, it is possible to see the endpoint of this Stage. All one has to do is descend directly towards Albarreal de Tajo and enter the village from the south. There is a rest area on the outskirts, next to a playground, and the village has several fountains where one can rest.

STAGE 23 ALBARREAL DE TAJO → LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	200 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	175 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	24,89 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 40 min



SPECTACULAR VIEWS OF THE RIVER TAGUS THROUGH LAS BARRANCAS AND CASTREJÓN RESERVOIR

This Stage traverses through some of the most spectacular landscapes of the Tagus: the Barrancas and the Castrejón Reservoir with its large canal. The route ends at Puebla de Montalbán, a beautiful town with wonderful places to discover.


Barcience Stream

LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN

This town has a rich artistic and cultural history, evidenced by its designation as a Property of Cultural Interest. It boasts the Plaza Mayor and the Montalbán Palace, as well as the Montalbán Castle, the Church of Nuestra Señora de Melque and the Montalbán Bridge with eleven arches and granite ashlars.

Notable are the arches of the Plaza Mayor supported by granite columns and the gateway that gave access to what in its day was the Mesón Grande de la Plaza, mentioned in "La Celestina" by the author Fernando de Rojas. The town hall is located on the west side. The Palace of the Dukes of Osuna occupies the southern façade, and the parish church of Nuestra Señora de la Paz is on the western end.

The Montalbán Palace was built in the fifteenth century by the master from Santiago, Juan Pacheco. The three-floor building has a square plan. The main façade has a Plateresque, trabeated door emblazoned with the Montalbán family's coat-of-arms. The wrought-iron balconies, typical of Castilian manors, are rectangular. Magnificent coffered pine ceilings in three different styles -Moorish, Gothic and Plateresque- can be seen inside.

A signpost that points to the west-southwest indicates the exit from Albarreal. The road crosses a bridge over the TO-7741, and proceeds over a track for several kilometres.

Large farmhouses surrounded by sprawling olive groves and a few intensive livestock farms flank the route. Veering to the right, it crosses the Barcience Brook over a beautiful wooden bridge. In the summer, the brook is mostly dry; however, in the rainy season, it can carry a significant flow of water, as can be inferred by the height of the arch.



Bridge on the road to Puebla de Montalbán



Castrejón Reservoir

From here, the route leads to an interStage with the CM-4000, where caution should be exercised owing to heavy vehicle traffic. Even after crossing the interStage to the opposite side, caution must continue to be exercised as lorries from nearby quarries, which abound throughout this route, also travel along this Trail. One must remain vigilant for the next two kilometres during which the route is shared with motorised vehicles.

The track makes a right turn on a clearly marked interStage, passing next to a fighting bull breeding farm. With a little luck, one might catch a glimpse of the bulls grazing in the meadows within the farm.

From here, the route climbs steadily up the rolling hills covered with fields of grain for about three kilometres. The climb is gentle but long; hence, it is advisable to carry adequate water supplies. Once on the top, there are wonderful views of the area, including the main attraction of this route: Castrejón Reservoir.

For a few kilometres, the Trail continues up-and-down through breath-taking landscapes of rolling hills and beautiful colours. At the next interStage, the route veers left towards a sign indicating the proximity of Las Barrancas. A few kilometres further on, the path arrives at the upper reaches of this spectacular site, the Castrejón Reservoir itself. Railings have been installed in the access area to allow the visitors to peer down and enjoy the stunning geological formations carved by water and wind.

The view of the reservoir is no less spectacular and, much to the delight of bird watchers, it is the habitat of a huge number of bird species. This enclave, together with the Malpica de Tajo and Azután Islands, has been declared a Site of Community Interest owing to their special nature.

LAS BARRANCAS

Las Barrancas comprise the municipalities of Albarreal de Tajo, Burujón and La Puebla de Montalbán, on the northern shore of the Castrejón reservoir. These spectacular clay cliffs were formed by wind and water erosion from the Tagus River acting on sediments dating back 25 million years.

These reddish clay gullies stretch for approximately one kilometre in length and reach a height of over a hundred metres in places, specifically at their highest point, known as the Cambrón Peak.

The route descends next to the viewpoint of Los Enebros, equipped with several tables to sit and rest. The descent continues through a scarcely populated area owing to the sandy soil where only a few scattered bushes can grow. Careful attention should be paid to the signs and the path in this area. The route continues to climb down until it arrives close to the private farming estate of Alcubillete, situated on a beautiful ledge over the reservoir. The path continues along the CM-4050 for about 1.5 km, until it reaches another viewpoint over the reservoir with tables to rest and enjoy some refreshment.

From here, the Trail drifts away from the reservoir, running parallel to the canal for about five kilometres along sand tracks flanked by bushes and olive groves. This canal connects the reservoir with the Castrejón-Carpio Waterfall that can be visited in Stage 24. It may be possible to see anglers testing their skills in the canal. At an interStage two kilometres from the endpoint of this Stage is a sign indicating that the Trail continues to the right (north), directly towards the town of La Puebla de Montalbán, via a pleasant path through olive groves.

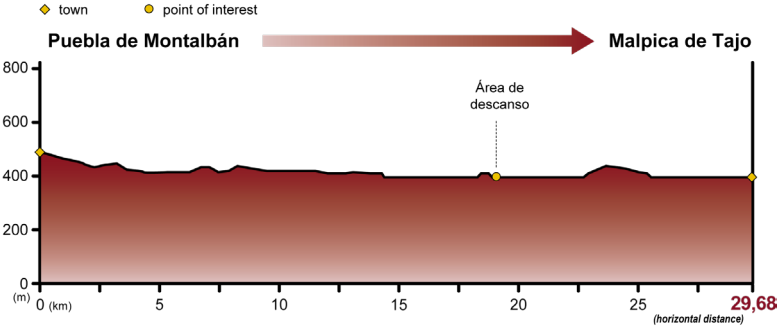


Rest area with views of the Castrejón reservoir

STAGE 24 LA PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN → MALPICA DE TAJO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	50 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	125 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	29,69 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	7 h 30 min

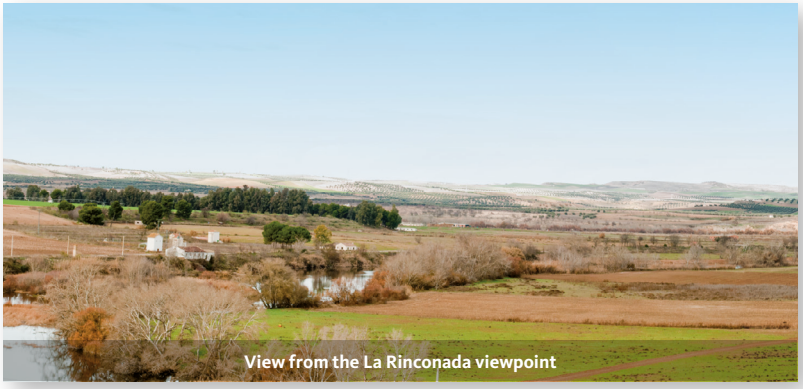


BETWEEN CASTREJÓN AND CARPIO RESERVOIRS

The Tagus offers many ways to produce energy, and seldom are they squandered. This Stage is yet another example of how humans have used the river to meet their energy and irrigation needs.



View of the canal on the way to Malpica de Tajo



View from the La Rinconada viewpoint

The Nature Trail leaves La Puebla de Montalbán by its southern edge, along a beautiful sandy road, flanked by large olive groves, that runs straight towards the canal connecting the Castrejón Reservoir and the Castrejón-Carpio Waterfall. About two kilometres further on, there is an interStage with a sign indicating a turn to the right, from where the town of Malpica de Tajo is 27 km away. The path parallel to the canal is wide and easy. A view of this major engineering feat can be seen during the first few metres of the gradual climb.

After a rapid descent to a bridge that crosses the canal, the route continues towards the CM-4009. The route crosses another bridge over the Tagus, formerly used by motorised vehicles, before it reaches the road.

From here, the Trail runs 1.5 km parallel to a road up a small hill leading to «La Rinconada». This route crosses over Torcón Brook and continues towards the farming estate where an information sign is located. The path heads west along a wide track that passes next to an aggregates depot.

LA RINCONADA DE TAJO

Along the course of the Tagus River in the province of Toledo, particularly after passing the provincial capital, the number of newly built villages has increased significantly thanks to the introduction of irrigation and gravel extraction. An example of this can be found in La Rinconada de Tajo, a village in the municipality of La Puebla de Montalbán which was founded in the 1950s when workers settled there to carry out those activities. This colonisation was further driven by the need to make use of the new water infrastructure (canals and dams), which enabled improvements to be made to the agricultural system, thereby increasing its productivity many-fold. Other examples of this type of settlement can be found in Talavera La Nueva and at Alberche del Caudillo.

The Castrejón Canal, situated on the right bank, runs parallel to the river's hypothetical course and bypasses its meanders; it has helped to underpin the local economy in the area where we are now.



Typical meanders of the Tagus as it flows through La Rinconada

The perfectly straight paths that divide the vast croplands, both rainfed and irrigated, on both sides of the Trail lead slowly towards the Castrejón-Carpio Waterfall. The route first passes through hamlets with large farms where it is possible to rest under the shade on hot days. This track reaches the road and crosses a bridge on the Tagus, heading towards the waterfall that one can already glimpse. The Trail runs parallel to the road for about two kilometres along the right bank of the River Tagus. Further on, a sign indicates that the route veers left onto a farm road. There is a rest area with an information panel about the river, where one can rest after the long walk.

The Trail continues along the river until it reaches an interStage where it veers right, then left in less than one kilometre, then drifts back and runs parallel to the river during several kilometres more.

The path turns yet again towards the CM-4000, running parallel to it for about 150 m. Caution should be exercised here as an access used by quarry lorries is located closeby.

The route is once again surrounded by fields of grain, then crosses a wooden bridge at the confluence of three ravines: Carrascales, del Molinillo and Grande.

LAS TAMUJAS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Roman remains have been found at Las Tamujas archaeological site, near Malpica de Tajo. The ruins of rooms with elegant mosaic floor tiles are proof that a villa existed here in the past. A sort of clay column has also been found that may have been used in thermal baths.



Bridge on the nature trail towards Malpica de Tajo

The last stretch to Malpica is an agricultural road that runs parallel to the CM-4000 for 1.5 km. The route passes next to an electricity substation and cornfields, then reaches an interStage with the TO-760, from where one can see the castle of Malpica, this city's landmark on the River Tagus. The iron bridge at the entrance to Malpica de Tajo is the best balcony to observe the castle.

It should be mentioned that this Stage passes through the "Río Tajo en Castrejón, Islas de Malpica de Tajo y Azután" and "Ríos de la Margen Izquierda del Tajo y Berrocales del Tajo" Sites of Community Importance (SCI), and the "Río Tajo en Castrejón, Islas de Malpica de Tajo y Azután" Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).



Views of Malpica de Tajo Castle from the bridge

MALPICA CASTLE

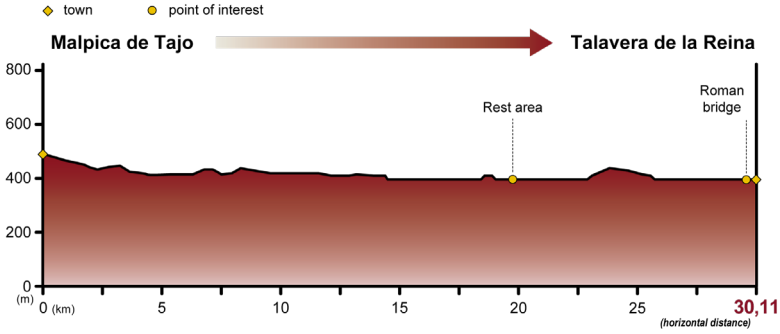
It is a Moorish fortress with a square plan. The keep, which is also square, is located at the southwest façade. A chapel with an octagonal dome covered with Mudejar-style ceramics is located under the keep.

One of the sides of the castle is protected by the Tagus, a natural barrier, whereas the other three sides that do not border the river have a moat. The castle is made of bricks and adobe.

STAGE 25 MALPICA DE TAJO → TALAVERA DE LA REINA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	30 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	25 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	30,12 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 30 min



ALONG THE PATHS TO TALAVERA

This Stage of the Nature Trail continues its course through the stunning landscapes of the Tagus valley in La Mancha. The entrance into Talavera is via a comfortable and beautiful promenade used in bygone days to travel to the neighbouring towns, the so-called “Vereda de Talavera”.


The iron bridge at Malpica de Tajo

The route leaves Malpica via the main access road TO-760, which crosses an iron bridge on the Tagus. A last glimpse of the monumental castle of Malpica can be seen from here.

The path continues until an interStage where a sign points to the left towards Talavera. There is another sign that indicates that the town of Puebla is upstream to the right.

The Trail proceeds along the right bank of the river, amidst cornfields and lush vegetation that thrives from the moisture of the Tagus. This Stage heads west along the right bank of the river. It is worth mentioning that the Stage initially traverses through the "Río Tajo en Castrejón, Islas de Malpica de Tajo y Azután" SCI (Site of Community Importance) and SPA (Special Protection Area for Birds).

The signs along the route point out interesting geological features, including the Val de Mora Ravine, near the river. The towns of Cebolla and Montearagón can be seen in the distance, as well as their olive groves and farmland.

The path ventures through croplands and olive groves, as well as almond and fig orchards, which illuminate the landscape with a bright palette of colours. Occasionally, one can get a close-up view of the river and the abundant fauna through a gap in the bushes.

Several kilometres further on along this Vereda de Talavera, is a junction next to a bridge that one must cross to continue parallel to the busy CM-4000 road. It gradually drifts away from the road and ventures into croplands with a circular irrigation system.



View of the River Tagus

LAS BARRANCAS DE TALAVERA SCI

This Site of Community Interest, located in the Tagus Trench, has interesting geological features that are not only unique but also fragile. It is an area with steep slopes populated with well-preserved juniper (*Juniperus oxicedrus*) groves.

Cliff-nesting species, including Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*) find here an optimum habitat.

The route drifts back to the road, along which it runs for a few metres. One can rest at a rest area equipped with picnic tables and an information panel when the route approaches the river for the last time before reaching Talavera de la Reina.

As the Trail approaches its destination, one can see in the distance a suspension bridge and Talavera's industrial park, which reminds us that the "City of Ceramics" is near. The path avoids the industrial park by taking the so-called "Cordel de Ganados" via a wide track. This stretch heads towards the access road to Talavera, alongside which it runs 200 m, i.e. the length of the bridge over the River Alberche. Caution should be exercised due to heavy traffic. On the opposite end of the bridge, the Trail turns 90° to the left, and continues along a pedestrian path and "bike lane".



Rest area on the way to Talavera de la Reina

TALAVERA DE LA REINA

The *Caesarobriga* Forum, under the old Misericordia Hospital, is one of the ancient Roman ruins that still exist in Talavera. Notable amongst its features are the remains of an ancient domus (1st century) and two Roman temples overlapping the domus.

The sheer size and monumentality of the medieval walls of the original town, which run along different streets, including Carnicerías, Corredera del Cristo, Charcón, Entretorres, Avenida de la Real Fábrica de Sedas and Ronda del Cañillo, make it one of the most important of its kind in Spain. Although part of the southern wall no longer stands, most have survived in very good condition.

It is thought that it was built over an existing fortress in times of Muhammad I, and later reformed by Abderrahman III. Following the conquest of the city in 1085, Alphonse VI ordered the addition of the Albarrán towers, the large granite arches with ashlar corner blocks, and the barbican.

Also well preserved are the canvas, several semi-circular cubes and gates of Seville and Zamora located in the wall of the second enclosure. These were probably built in the twelfth or thirteenth century to protect the new neighbourhoods outside the perimeter of the first enclosure.

The arrival to the city is via a comfortable promenade along the River Tagus, which is several kilometres long and crosses Palomarejo Street, Madrid Avenue and Castile-La Mancha Avenue, and ends near the Roman bridge, where there are several parks to rest and recover.

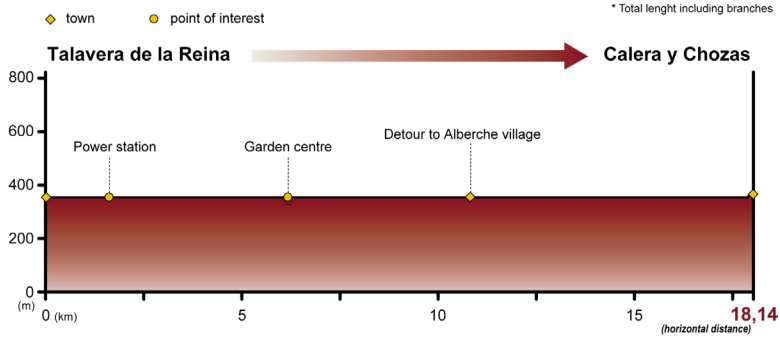


View towards the bullring in Talavera de la Reina

STAGE 26 TALAVERA DE LA REINA → CALERA Y CHOZAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	0 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	0 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	20,37 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 35 min



THE TAGUS THROUGH LARGE CROP PLAINS

The Nature Trail leaves the "City of Ceramics", venturing into vast irrigated fields where one can see close-up the canals that distribute water to these lands.



Roman bridge in Talavera de la Reina



The course of the Tagus as it flows through Talavera de la Reina

The Stage begins near Talavera de la Reina's Roman bridge over the Tagus. From here, the route continues along the promenade that runs parallel to the river, with rest areas and abundant shade. The banks of the Tagus in Talavera burst with life and activity. The river is used and enjoyed by different groups: people taking a stroll along its banks, bikers, anglers, kayakers and, occasionally, swimmers.

CALERA Y CHOZAS

As the name indicates, this town has been closely associated with mining. It was founded in the fifteenth century as a settlement for workers employed at various limestone mines, whose stones were used to build, for examples, the Talavera de la Reina Collegiate Church.

Next to the landscaped square is the Romanesque parish church of San Pedro Apóstol, with a Renaissance façade (16th century) and a triangular pediment topped with balls.

The church was built partly in stone and the rest with bricks and earthen walls. It consists of three naves with several side chapels, one of which is devoted to Nuestra Señora de la Vega, and the other two to the Santísimo Cristo de Chozas and Nuestra Señora de los Dolores.

Calera y Chozas has a long-standing tradition of celebrating different festivities, including Carnival, the pilgrimage of Our Lady of Vega and the local festival in honour of the Cristo de Chozas in September.

The Trail gradually drifts away from the urban environment to escort the river. At the edge of Talavera's riverside walk, there is a sign showing all the towns that lie along this Stage. The route will travel along a wide track with some motorised traffic; therefore, caution should be exercised. Talavera's power plant is located soon after setting out on this track.

Livestock farms and large-scale croplands, as well as the canals that water these fields, begin to appear on both sides of the Trail. There are many perfectly signposted crossroads, leaving no room for doubt as to the direction to be followed.

Large, green fields stretch as far as the eye can see, with the view limited only by the Gredos mountain range on the horizon. The route crosses several water distribution systems: small irrigation ditches as well as large canals that channel large amounts of water to the edges of these meadows. The Trail is also intersected by creeks, including the Bárrago.

The route passes next to interesting places like the huge nursery with many hardwood and conifer species. The water is supplied to the farm via a canal from the river.

About nine kilometres from Talavera de la Reina, there is a wide and easy side road leading directly to the town of Alberche. To take this road, one must veer right to the northwest. The route enters the town from the south, where an information panel and a rest area are located.



Nature Trail alongside a nursery and an irrigation channel

Back on the Trail, which continues southwest, the route heads down long, straight roads that run parallel to the river, surrounded by vast fields where corn dominates. Canals and ditches full of water abound throughout this Stage. The water can be used on hot days to refresh oneself. You'll soon come to the junction leading to the village where this stage ends, just two kilometres away. On the horizon, atop a small hill, the first houses of the village of Caleras y Chozas come into view. You enter the village via an old bridge, beneath which runs the La Jara Greenway Nature Trail, which could be the perfect complement to this stage. If you decide to take a break, the village of Caleras y Chozas offers everything you need for a rest.



Start of the La Jara Greenway Nature Trail

LLANURAS DE OROPESA, LAGARTERA AND CALERA Y CHOZAS SCI AND SPA

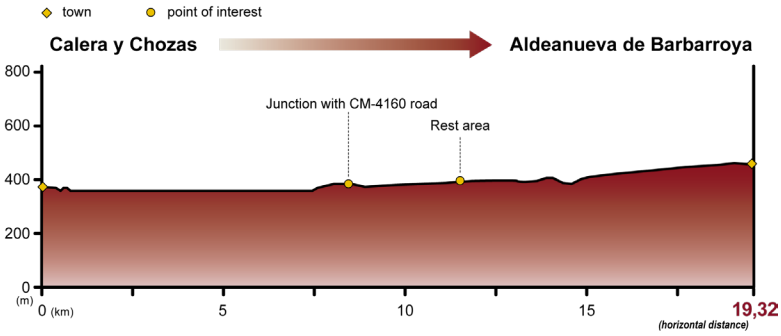
These sites are located on the flood plains along the right bank of the River Tagus, formed by sandy sedimentary basins and fluvial deposits. The area is covered by large annual xerophyte grasslands with a rich diversity of steppe birds, including Montague's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*), Bustard (*Otis tarda*), Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*), Black-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles orientalis*) and Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*).

The creeks are home to a variety of riparian formations (ash trees, willows, etc.). Furthermore, amphibian plant species of major interest thrive in the many ponds. There are also a few well-preserved "dehesas" scattered on the rolling hills.

STAGE 27 CALERA Y CHOZAS → ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	125 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	50 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	19,36 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h



SHARING THE ROUTE WITH LA JARA GREENWAY NATURE TRAIL

In this stage, the Tagus Nature Trail shares the route with La Jara Greenway Nature Trail, venturing through the spectacular landscapes of Azután Reservoir, along a former rail track with multiple tunnels and a breathtakingly high bridge over the reservoir.

The route sets off at the southern edge of Calera y Chozas, next to a playground with an information panel on this Stage. Further on, it crosses a bridge over La Jara Greenway Nature Trail, with which it will merge a few kilometres later.


A view of La Alameda stream



Former Calera and Chozas station

The wide track, without many bends, leads to the river. Stages 26 and 27 share this part of the route.

From the outset, grain and cornfields, as well as irrigation ditches, flank the Trail. At the interStage of the two Stages, the route continues straight ahead, leaving to the left, a path leading upstream to Talavera. The Trail continues straight ahead towards the river, although it does not quite reach it, as a paved road in good conditions with the lanes properly marked, interrupts the route before it reaches the riverbank. The path turns right at the interStage with this road, and continues 3.5 km along its shoulder. The road veers gradually to the northwest, away from the river, and further on, crosses Alameda Creek, with an abundant flow, just a few metres before it meets the Tagus.

RÍOS DE LA MARGEN IZQUIERDA DEL TAJO Y BERROCALES DEL TAJO SCI AND SPA

These tributaries, whose headwaters lie in Montes de Toledo, flow through the Jara district, along the left bank of the Tagus River. Deep furrows and small granite canyons provide an ideal habitat for cliff-nesting bird species, including Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*).

The trees and shrubs in the area are riparian in nature, with ash forests dominating the upper reaches, whilst willows and Ibero-African shrubby spurge inhabit the middle and lower Stages.

Notable is the large African boxthorn shrubs at Aldeanueva de Barbarroya, a chasmophytic vegetation of great value. These plants have extensive, deep taproots that enter cracks in the substrate.

The Trail turns left at an interStage onto a farm track flanked by canals and irrigated fields. After several well-marked twists and turns, and past a bridge over Valserrano Canal, the route begins a slow ascent from the fertile river plains towards the interStage with the CM-4160. From here, it turns left to continue for 1.5 km along the shoulder of this paved road. The path then takes the right branch at the fork, arriving soon after at the Jara Green Track that it had already intersected outside Calera y Chozas. The access to the Trail could not be more spectacular. It is almost as if one were trying to catch the train at Silos stop, where information points and a well-equipped rest area can be found.

From here, the route dives into the history of one of the more emblematic railroads in the area. One can feel from the first few metres that this place is special: many stone bridges with perfect arches, the Trail wedged between high embankments, and the unexpected sight of the quick-flowing river to the left. This area is dominated by the Azután Reservoir. There are rest areas, fountains (drinking quality is unknown) and numerous viewpoints scattered along the way. Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and granite boulders give the area a somewhat hostile and inaccessible appearance.

One can catch continuous glimpses of the reservoir and the tunnels. It should be noted that the tunnels lack lighting; therefore, caution should be exercised as many bikers use this Trail.

One of the more spectacular parts of this Stage, and even of the whole area, can be seen when one exits the third tunnel from Silos: the railway bridge over Azután Reservoir. Huge in size and several hundred metres long, it provides a wonderful viewpoint over the reservoir and the steep slopes that confine the river.



Azután Bridge over the River Tagus



View of the River Tagus from a viewpoint near Aldeanueva de Barbarroya

THE *ALCAZABA* OF CITY OF THE BASQUES

The *Alcazaba*, a term that designates fortresses of Arab origin, is commonly known as the City of the Basques (Ciudad de Vascos in Spanish), this is a 10th-century archaeological site of Muslim origin. Although the remains uncovered account for less than 10 per cent of the ancient city, visitors can see the citadel in the northern part and a mosque, the remains of two graveyards outside the city walls, as well as numerous remains of the suburbs.

The town is situated within a private estate and is only open to visitors on Saturday mornings from 16 May to 31 January; it is closed to the public for the rest of the year. The term "Vascos" here does not mean Basques but derives from the Arabic word *Basak*, which was the name given to the district of Talavera de la Reina.

In addition to its heritage value, it is set in an area of great natural beauty and scenic value. There are plans for a jetty to serve visitors to this site.

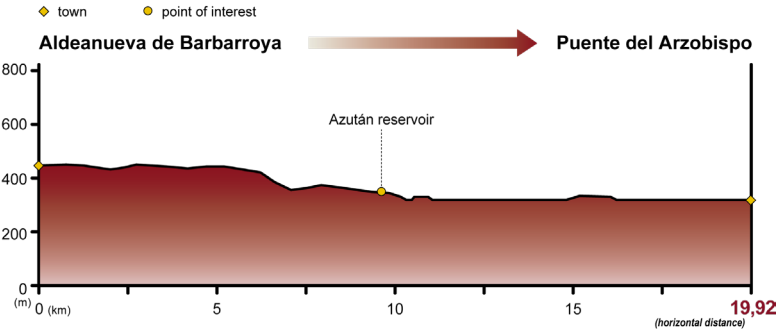
Back on "land", many rest areas provide a welcome break. The end of the Stage is less than 2 km away. Indeed, the first houses in Aldeanueva de Barbarroya are already within sight. The final stretch of the route traverses through an agrarian landscape of fields of grain and olive trees. The access to the town, and the end of the Stage, is at railway stop, where benches and a fountain can be found. It is almost as if the traveller had taken a train ride. An interStage to the left of the "tracks" is the endpoint of this Stage.

The final part of the Stage traversed through the "Ríos de la Margen Izquierda del Tajo y Berrocales del Tajo" Site of Community Interest (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

STAGE 28 ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA → EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	25 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	125 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	19,93 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h



ROMAN REMAINS ALONG THE TAGUS

The Nature Trail leaves Aldeanueva de Barbarroya in a steady descent towards the flood plains of the Tagus, through holm oaks and granite blocks, passing by the Roman road of the River Use and the Azután Reservoir.


View of Aldeanueva de Barbarroya

EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO

Franciscan Convent

According to the town's inhabitants, in bygone days, the convent was located one hundred paces from the town. Currently, it has been incorporated into the urban fabric. The image of Nuestra Señora de Majano, so-called because she appeared standing on a heap of stones to a sacristan from the nearby town of Alia, is venerated in the convent of the Discalced Franciscans. The church had five altars and an altarpiece. The residence of the Franciscan friars consisted of seventeen cells, two offices, two cloisters, a cave and a magnificent garden.

Stone bridge

It was commissioned in 1380 by the then Archbishop of Toledo, and Duke of Estrada, Pedro Tenorio. It is made of granite and semi-circular arches that are smaller on the sides. The central arch, under which the river flows, is approximately 14.5 m from the water surface. Two sturdy, granite ashlar defensive towers stood on both sides of the central arches, but were torn down in the late nineteenth century.

Legend has it that one day the archbishop arrived in the town and, wishing to cross the river, found the waters rushing wildly and had difficulty getting across. As the prelate was travelling in a boat, a sudden surge caused him to lose his ring in the river. His Eminence was so upset that he offered a generous reward to anyone who managed to retrieve it.

When the Archbishop returned a few months later and asked about his ring, he was told that it had been impossible to find. The Archbishop then made a promise: "If the ring were to be returned to me, I shall build a bridge across which cattle, pilgrims and travellers may cross the river without the difficulties they currently face".

A few years later, as the Archbishop was about to have his meal, he was served fish from the Tagus, which he was so fond of. When the fish was cut open, the ring was found inside. Deeply moved by the discovery and regarding it as a miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he ordered work to begin that very night.

Pillory

This Gothic, granite monument (15th century) is divided into five parts: stereobase, base, shaft, capital and pinnacle. The stereobase is divided into two torus, of which the second is ornamented with spherules. The square capital has two pearl-shaped ornaments and a protruding lion's head, reminiscent of the gargoyles of Gothic buildings. The pinnacle forms a pyramid with four pearl-shaped ornaments attached to the base, another four in the centre and one on each side, and finally, a larger pearl at the top. The pillory has a slender figure, and is one of the most valuable monuments of its kind in the province of Toledo.



Stone Bridge

The route heads northwest from the lower part of Aldeanueva de Barbarroya, along the final stretch of Stage 27. Where both Stages intersect, the Trail turns left to continue along Stage 27. During the first part, the route overlaps with the Jara Green Track, which also passes through this town. Soon after, the routes go their separate ways, with the Tagus Nature Trail veering north, to the right, at the interseccion.

From here, one can see in the distance the breath-taking view of the Tagus lowlands. This route passes next to the municipal swimming pool and football pitch, where it once again reaches an intersection with the CM-4140 leading to the town of Aldeanueva. At this fork, the route turns right, towards the town, during 150 m, then turns 180° to run parallel to the road. This stretch is narrow, overgrown with shrubs, and quite complicated to pass; however, it only covers 700 m.

The route then ventures onto a track that turns right into fields of grain and a few scattered vineyards. Soon after, the landscape changes drastically with beautiful holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and granite boulders. The route is slightly bumpier, wedged between granite walls that mark the boundaries of the holm oak estates. The few intersection in this area are clearly marked.



View of the Azután reservoir

AZUTÁN DOLMEN

It was subsequently declared a Site of Cultural Interest in 2007. It is a megalithic burial site located on the outskirts of El Puente del Arzobispo.

It is a sizeable complex, as the tallest orthostates (the vertical stones) easily exceed two metres in height, and twelve metres in diameter.

It is a chamber-type dolmen, with an entrance passageway in which the remains of one of its side chambers can also be seen. Inside, in addition to human skeletal remains, pottery, bone tools and carved and polished stone tools were also found, as well as beads from necklaces.

In addition to the adjoining chambers, the dolmen featured a burial mound or artificial hill, which today has a diameter of over 18 metres, marked by the two rows of stones surrounding the main chamber. On some of the stones, you can see a number of ancient inscriptions.

The route is very pleasant and quite easy to walk, although it goes up-and-down frequently. The flood plains of the River Tagus can be seen throughout the route. About five kilometres from the last intersection with CM-4104, the route crosses to the opposite side of another road where the Roman road of River Uso begins.

The Roman road, whose original layout is visible, initially descends slowly, and then becomes steeper and narrower. If cycling, you may have to walk this part of the Trail owing to the large stones and narrowness at some points, which make it technically challenging. Regardless of whether you are walking or cycling, you will enjoy breath-taking views of the Azután Reservoir and the River Uso.

The Trail leaves this path at the intersection with the CM-4104, along which it continues for about 1.5 km. The route crosses a bridge over the River Uso, which appears restricted by a dam owing to the proximity of the waterfall.

The route moves away from the CM-4140 when it reaches a path to the right with a sign indicating the way to the Azután Reservoir spillway. The Trail passes across the reservoir dam with spectacular views of the surroundings.

It then winds along the right bank of the Tagus towards the TO-1194, then heads along its shoulder during 500 m. From here, the route changes directions several times, all clearly marked, skirting around irrigated land and livestock farms close to the town of El Bercial.

The road and the track merge again for 1.5 km, then the Trail continues to the left towards the river along a path that is increasingly narrow. Close to El Puente del Arzobispo, the path runs along a riverside walk that runs parallel to Frailes Creek, until it reaches the Bienvenida Bridge, which as its name suggests, is the entrance to the town. The endpoint of the Stage is near. From the streets closest to the Tagus, one can contemplate the monumental stone bridge that is the pride of the inhabitants of El Puente del Arzobispo.

THE ROMAN PAST OF AZUTAN

This small village, with a population under 350, is an ancient town in the province of Toledo, founded in 1260, shortly after the Reconquista, following the transfer of an estate to the nuns of San Clemente. However, it has an evident but lesser known Roman past. Proof of this can be found in a text from the early 19th century in which the renowned historian Ceán Bermúdez had this to say about Azután:

"Akutan, a town in the province of Toledo, in the district of Talavera. Between this village and the neighbouring settlements of La Estrella and Aldeanueva de Valbarro (probably the present-day Aldeanueva de Balbarroya), near the Huso River, there is an abandoned settlement with the ruins of Roman buildings. A few years ago (around 1820), it still had most of its ashlar walls, one or two gates, and a small gate leading down to the river. You can still see the foundations of the houses and make out the streets. On a nearby hill, at the foot of which the River Huso flows, large sections of a castle or fortress stand out, and the locals believe that this must have been the site of the City of the Basques, as stated by Father Román de la Higuera (a Spanish Jesuit historian). If that was true, it would belong to the region inhabited by the Carpetani".

There is no doubt that the history of the region has yet to be fully unravelled and that an increasing number of discoveries are opening up new avenues of interpretation. What is clear, however, is that it was an area of great importance in the Roman administration of Iberia.



Detail of a traditional ceramic piece

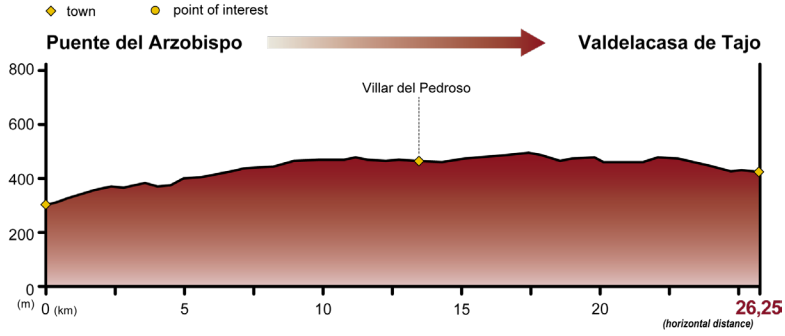
CERAMICS MADE IN EL PUENTE

The ceramics manufactured in El Puente is characterised by landscapes and hunting scenes in green. Green goes hand in hand with yellow, orange-blue and, occasionally, light brown.

STAGE 29 EL PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO → VALDELACASA DE TAJO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	250 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	100 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	26,28 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 15 min



FIRST STEPS THROUGH THE PROVINCE OF CÁCERES

The Nature Trail leaves El Puente del Arzobispo in Toledo, traversing through endless fields dotted with olive, almond and holm oak trees to finally arrive at Valdelacasa de Tajo.



Amidst fields of cereal crops and holm oaks, on the way to Villar del Pedroso

PARISH CHURCH OF LA ASUNCIÓN

A 15th and 16th century Gothic building with a vaulted polygonal chancel. A Renaissance portico with timber beam arches covers the south façade.

The route begins in the centre of El Puente del Arzobispo, on the left bank of the River Tagus, next to the namesake stone bridge built more than 600 years ago (please refer to the information provided in Stage 28). Leaving the bridge behind, the path runs along the river during the first 300 m, with panoramic views of the picturesque village.

The first part of the Nature Trail proceeds along a comfortable track with views of the extensive cereal fields and olive groves that are the basis of the local agrarian economy.

The route drifts away from the river and gradually narrows sandwiched between trees and rocky outcrops. This part of the Trail ends with a short climb up to the highest point in the route, from where one can see the lands covered by olive trees that stretch as far as the eye can see.

It begins a slow descent to cross over a small bridge on a river that runs dry in summer. Further on, the route passes next to cattle farms, a regular presence until the end of the Stage. There are several cattle grids scattered along the route to control cattle movement.



Signposting along the path at the foot of the slope



Wild cattle, roaming freely along the roadside

THE CAMINO REAL DE GUADALUPE

First used by the Romans, and later by the Arabs, it played a prominent role after the construction of the Monastery of Guadalupe in the thirteenth century. It was one of the pilgrimage routes that connected Castile with the Hieronymite Monastery.

This Route run from Villar del Pedroso to Guadalupe, leaving Carrascalejo to one side, and then up the south slope of Sierra de Altamira towards the mountain pass of Arrebatacapas. From here, it headed down the north slope towards Los Gallegos, to continue through the mountain pass of Venta del Puerto. It then continued towards Salto de la Cabra, crossing through the so-called "Gate of Camino Real", and from there, it headed down to the Venta Valley via the Caserones, where the roadside inn that gave its name to the valley stood. From here, it continued upstream, parallel to the River Gualija, towards Cabezuelas.

In certain areas, one can see the facilities and pipes that channel water to the crop fields. After crossing several sluice gates, the route merges with the road to Valdelacasa that links the start and endpoint of this Stage. The traveller has covered 10 kilometres at this point.



First glimpse of the village of Villar del Pedroso

The route continues through vast plains planted where day labourers are busy in the fields, and sheep and goats graze. Sierra de Valdecasa can be seen in the distance, on the horizon, with Pico Cabras standing out at 1,010 m of altitude. This landscape enhances the route to Villar del Pedroso, a charming town with cobbled streets, located on the opposite side of the road leading to El Puente del Arzobispo.

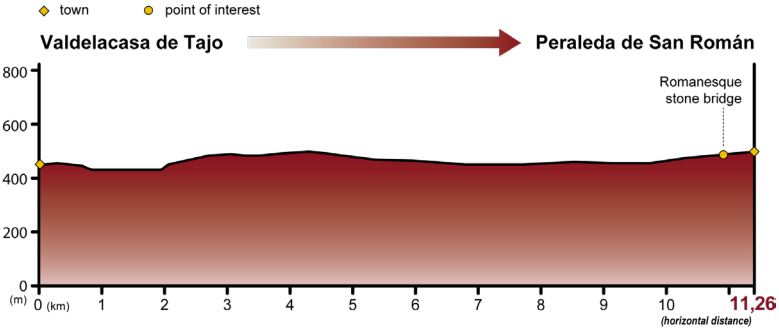
After leaving Villar behind, the Trail continues amidst olive groves and farmland until it reaches an emblematic route: the Camino Real de Guadalupe. Although it initially heads southwest, 5 kilometres after leaving Villar, the route turns 90º, and continues northwest during the last 8 km. During the final stretch of the Stage, the Pizarroso Reservoir hugs the right side of the Trail, although it is not visible.

The route reaches Valdelacasa de Tajo, with the zoomorphic sculpture of El Verraco and the church of La Asunción and its notable bell tower looking out over the roofs of the other buildings.

STAGE 30 VALDELACASA DEL TAJO → PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	125 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	75 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	11,27 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h



TOWARDS THE TOWN OF HOSPITALITY

This Stage leaves Valdelacasa de Tajo crossing through hunting preserves and crop fields towards the village of Peraleda de San Roman.



View of the stone bridge over which the path runs

PREHISTORIC ENGRAVINGS OF PEÑA CASTILLO

About 4.4 km to the north of Peraleda de San Román, halfway between the Tagus and the town of Navaluenga, is a huge rock. Five sets of prehistoric engravings with a variety of symbols: horseshoes, stelas, crosses, etc.

The route kicks off at Valdelacasa del Tajo, where signs indicate the Nature Trail. It crosses the road that runs between Valdelacasa del Tajo and Peraleda de San Roman, the start and endpoint of this Stage, and continues along an easy track.

Most of the time, the track is flanked by old stone boundary walls until it reaches an old stone bridge over the Zarzalejo Creek.

The Trail runs flat until it reaches a fork where it continues left, becoming somewhat narrower as it climbs up a moderately steep slope, with outcrops and loose stones that make the going more difficult.

When the route becomes flat again, it runs between private hunting grounds, where one can see typical game species, including deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and partridges (*Alectoris rufa*).

Leaving the Valdemujeres farm and the hunting grounds behind to the right, the route heads towards open fields of cereals and olive groves. It continues along



The surroundings through which the path runs

CANCHERA DE LA ATALAYA

On the right bank of the River Gualija are the foundations and several archaeological remains of a small, square irrigation beacon used to transmit warning signals and control the access to Ibores-Villuercas.

farm roads towards an intersection with the road leading to the town of Peraleda de San Roman.

After this short stretch on a paved road, the route veers right, then left, and after about 500 m, back onto a fork on the same road. After crossing the first branch of the road with care, the route proceeds to the right towards Peraleda. Close to this town is a stone cross on the side of the road, a funerary symbol that reminds us of the advent of the Roman occupation of this territory.

Once in Peraleda de San Román, known popularly as "the town of hospitality", you can stroll through its manicured streets and squares on the way to the Church of San Juan Bautista: the most prominent building in town. Notable also are the Romanesque remains of the church of San Román and the Church of Poveda, both from the fifteenth century.

The Route of La Jara, which runs from Peraleda de San Román to Garvín, and overlaps with this Stage until the endpoint, is notable.



The path narrows

CHURCH OF SAN JUAN BAUTISTA

It is the parish church of Peraleda de San Román. The single nave divided by three arches is built with granite ashlars. The choir is situated at the nave's narthex. The church consists of a two-staged tower and various chapels on both sides of the nave with Baroque altarpieces of the Cristo de la Vera Cruz, the Virgen del Rosario (1776) and paintings on wood of Saint Roch, Saint James and Saint Blaise. The altarpiece dates back to the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The construction is thought to have begun in the late sixteenth century, but was not completed until the seventeenth century.

ALIJA CASTLE

Alija Castle, which dates back to the 7th-12th centuries, stands atop the hills overlooking the point where the River Gualija empties into the Tagus. It was initially used by the Berbers to control the ancient road that led to Toledo. It was subsequently repopulated by Christians as evidenced by the necropolis with anthropomorphic tombs carved into the rock. The nearby church, flanked by several towers, is also believed to be from the Christian period.

Few remains of this castle can now be seen. It is located at a strategic position on an old road that led to the Toledo plain after crossing several bridges.

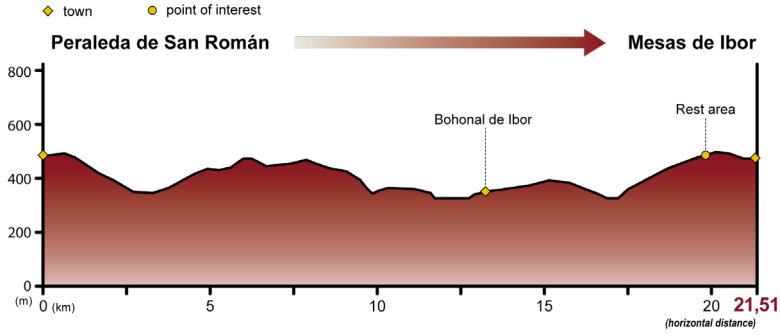


Markings indicating the continuation of the footpath along a country lane

STAGE 31 PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN → MESAS DE IBOR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	400 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	375 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,56 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	6 h



WALKING THROUGH OLIVE GROVES

This Stage is accompanied, from the beginning to Bohonal de Ibor, by olive groves, one of the most common landscapes in the area. From here until the end of this Stage, the Nature Trail runs parallel to the road to Mesas de Ibor.

Leaving Peraleda de San Román behind, the route traverses through wide farm roads that cut across vast extensions of olive groves. The olive trees provide plenty of shade under which the traveller can relax and enjoy the typical landscape.



The path winds its way between stone walls and olive trees



The path narrows beneath an oak tree

Further on, the route is confined by old stone walls until it reaches the River Gualija, which runs dry in summer, when the vegetation is used for grazing goats. The Nature Trail continues along an old stone bridge that crosses the river, leading the traveller back to the olive tree landscape typical of this Stage.

The path gradually climbs up narrow roads that meander through trees to the top of a hill from where one can enjoy the breath-taking view of Valdecañas Reservoir, near Bohonal de Ibor. The Trail now traverses through the "Sierra de las Villuercas y Valle del Guadarranque" Site of Community Importance (SCI) and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

MESAS DE IBOR

The town boasts the Church of San Benito Abad (16th and 17th century), with its simple, rural architecture. It has a slender steeple and interesting stone ornaments. It consists of a single nave, with two side chapels built at a later date.

Also noteworthy is the pillory in the main square. A rustic, one-piece, granite monolith crowned with four arms that stands on a quadrangular, stepped base. The monument, popularly known as the "Picota de la Justicia", is notable for its simplicity, grandeur and irregular style. The name refers to its original use, which dates back to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.



Talaverilla marbles in Augustóbriga

AUGUSTOBRIGA

It was a Roman city built on the banks of the Tagus River, between what are now Mérida and Talavera de la Reina. It was subsequently renamed Talavera la Vieja, before finally disappearing beneath the waters of the Valdecañas reservoir in 1963.

To prevent it from being swallowed up by the waters, parts of the archaeological site were moved, stone by stone, to another location. Today they are situated beside the road linking Navalmoral de la Mata and Guadalupe, in the municipality of Bohonal de Ibor. These ruins are commonly known as 'the marbles', although they are actually made of granite.

About nine kilometres after crossing the bridge, the traveller arrives at the intersection between EX-118, also known as the Road to Guadalupe, and a local road leading to Bohonal de Ibor. The route continues along the local road that leads to this town, the endpoint of Stage 31. Bohonal de Ibor welcomes the traveller with the ruins of the ancient Roman temple of Augustóbriga. Also noteworthy are the Church of San Bartolomé and Las Veredas Bridge, located at the Cañada Real, used as a drover's trail on the old Camino de la Mesta.

Following the signposts on the Nature Trail, which traverses the southern part of Bohonal, the route continues along a path that runs almost parallel to the local road linking the towns of Bohonal de Ibor and Mesas de Ibor. This road intersects the Stage, whose clearly marked path occasionally meanders along the road.

One of these crossings takes place at a different height when the route coincides with the River Ibor, a direct tributary of the Tagus. At this point, the Nature Trail crosses the river via a stone bridge called Las Veredas, which, in turn, runs under another newly built bridge that carries the local road.

About 600 m from the last intersection, and close to Mesas de Ibor, is a rest area equipped with tables, wooden benches and a fountain used as a watering hole for livestock, and whose water may be untreated. The traveller may rest at this point, with barely 1.5 km to the endpoint of the Stage.

Finally, the road reaches the village of Mesas de Ibor, a small town located in "Los Ibores" county, from where one can contemplate the beautiful Sierra de la Hache in the western part of the town.

LAS VEREDAS BRIDGE

This stone bridge, built over the River Ibor, is a natural boundary between Mesas de Ibor and Bohonal. The bridge was used at the time of the Mesta to drive livestock and link several towns. The bridge with a single arch looks over the stunning scenery of the river.

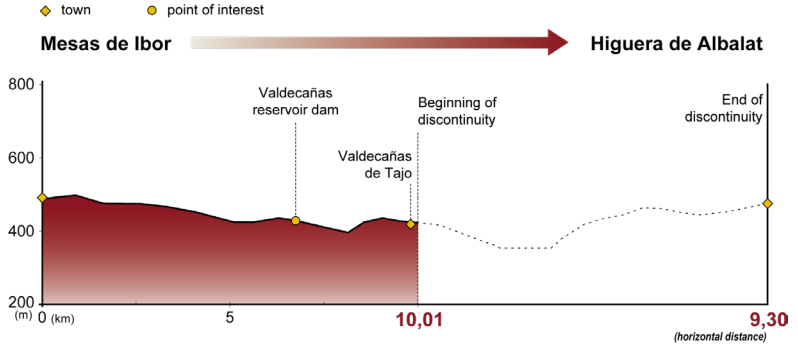


An old stone bridge

STAGE 32 MESAS DE IBOR → HIGUERA DE ALBALAT

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	100 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	175 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	10,03 km
Amount of effort needed	2	Time	2h 10 min



TOWARDS VALDECAÑAS RESERVOIR AND THE EXTREMADURAN "DEHESA"

Leaving Mesas de Ibor behind, the Trail heads towards the hills and small valleys leading to Valdecañas Reservoir. Following the meanders of the River Tagus, the route traverses through the Extremaduran "dehesas" towards Higuera de Albalat.



Start of the stage along a path between low stone walls

CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

The church was built between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but underwent renovations in the eighteenth century. It is built with masonry and bricks, with granite ashlars in the window and door openings, and the bell tower moulding.

The single nave is divided into four Stages separated by semi-circular arches supported by back-to-back columns with a polygonal apse. The gabled roof was recently restored, and the domed apse speaks to its sixteenth century origin.

The main altar, located in the apse, holds a classical 17th century altarpiece. Another classical altarpiece can be found on the side of the Epistle. A remarkable two-stage bell tower rises outside the church.

This Stage leaves Mesas de Ibor behind via farm roads leading to several private farm estates confined by ancient stone walls. Further on, the path drifts away from the dirt roads onto a local road leading to Valdecañas Reservoir. The route runs parallel to the paved road during 6.5 km until it arrives near the reservoir and other hydraulic infrastructures, including the spillway. The Nature Trail offers an excellent view of Reservoir from here.

Leaving the reservoir behind, another paved road from the dam merges onto the local road. The Stage begins a gradual descent until it reaches a stone bridge known as Gorrilla. The "Embalse de Valdecañas" Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) through which the route has traversed until now ends here.



Valdecañas Reservoir

LAS HERRERÍAS AQUEDUCT

About 9 km south of Valdecañas del Tajo, taking first the CC-19.4 road and then the turn-off onto the CC-19.5, the route comes to the village of Campillo de Deleitosa.

Here we find an aqueduct stretching over five kilometres along the banks of the Descuernacabras River, the construction of which was spearheaded by Mr Eusebio González Martín, a businessman who has received many honours and awards for the consistent focus on economic and social development in his projects.

It is an old water channel that used to supply a forge and three small power stations, which provided energy to the area in the last century, bringing it to life – a liveliness that is now lacking.

What makes the aqueduct so exceptional – apart from its spectacular hydraulic engineering – is that it is possible to walk almost the entire length of it inside the channel itself, and that at some points it spans a height of almost 10 metres. It is built from local quartzite and slate, and has been waterproofed with strong mortar.

At the end of the route there is a small dam with a well-preserved Portuguese plum tree (*Prunus lusitanica*). From this point, you can reach a cave used by the Spanish Maquis who sought refuge in this area; it is called Juan Caldilla's Cave.

Further on, the path takes a sharp turn towards a steep concrete track leading to the village of Valdecañas, which is about 1.5 km away. The Trail is interrupted from here to the town of Higuera de Albalat, where this Stage ends.

The town of Higuera offers the traveller numerous hiking trails, including a visit to La Norteña mine.



A small footbridge over the stream

ALBALAT BRIDGE

Located about ten kilometres from Higuera, the bridge, which is 127 m long and 38 m high, was built under King Charles I (16th century). It is formed by one semi-circular arch and one pointed arch.

It still bears the Habsburg coat of arms featuring the double-headed imperial eagle. The bridge served as a crossing for the cattle of La Mesta for centuries and suffered its worst damage during the War of Independence (it was destroyed in 1809), and was not restored until 1845.

CASTIL OREJA

The ruins of this castle stand on Castil Oreja Hill, in one of the larger meanders of Garganta Grande, near La Norteña mine and very close to Higuera. The only remains standing today are the foundation of a square tower or fort, built with irregular slate slabs, and the small settlement built amongst the cliffs, which appears to be Muslim in origin according to the pottery fragments found.

The artistic and cultural heritage of the town and its surroundings is also interesting, in particular, the church of San Sebastián, whose impressive bell tower looms high in the centre of the town, and can be seen almost from the start of the Stage.

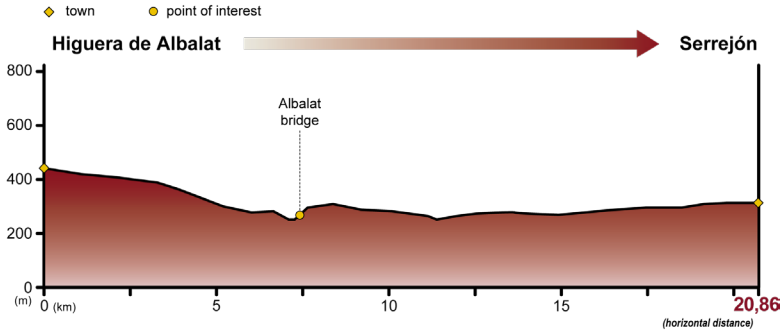


View of the River Tagus from the path

STAGE 33 HIGUERA DE ALBALAT → SERREJÓN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	100 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	250 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	20,89 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 40 min



HOLM AND CORK OAK "DEHESAS"

Leaving behind the hospitable village of Higuera, the Trail continues through the most typical landscape of this territory: the Extremaduran "dehesa". After crossing Arrocampo Dam and Anguila Reservoir, the route arrives at Serrejón, the first town within Monfragüe National Park.


The path winds through a landscape of pastureland



Stone bridge over the River Tagus

The Trail heads down a local road, which it immediately abandons to take a path on the right leading to "El Gato" farmstead. Between old stone walls, the track ventures into a private hunting ground, where caution must be exercised as fighting bulls can be found roaming freely.

One can enjoy the beauty of the holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and cork oaks (*Quercus suber*), that make up the dehesa. Some of the trees of the latter species may appear orange due to the removal of the bark for cork.

Further on, the path crosses over the River Tagus, via a masonry bridge with two arches. The Nature Trail and the N-V road overlap at this bridge, although they part ways again, only to overlap further ahead.

From here, the route continues towards a viaduct over the E-90/NV road, then continues parallel to this road until it changes its direction to skirt around Torrejón-Tajo Reservoir. Leaving the scenic views of the reservoir and the Almaraz nuclear power plant behind, the path drifts away from the road to the right, and ventures into another private hunting ground typical in Extremadura.

MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK

Monfragüe was declared a Nature Park in 1979, a Biosphere Reserve in July 2003, and a National Park in 2007. It is also part of the Natura 2000 network.

It is one of the finest existing Mediterranean forests, with traces of Atlantic and continental vegetation. The rivers Tagus and Tiétar are the pivotal elements of the Park, wedged in a narrow gorge, between two quartzite and slate mountain ranges.

The rich biodiversity of the Park and its surroundings, its most outstanding feature, draws on these biotic and abiotic characteristics and its good state of conservation.

In addition to the typical species of the area, holm oak, cork oak, strawberry tree, rockrose and heath, the southern slopes are also populated with other deciduous species such as Portuguese oaks (*Quercus faginea*), and maples (*Acer* sp.) and the rivers and creeks are home to ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*).

The biogeographical features of this territory, along with the diverse structures and compositions of plant communities and low human activity, make possible the existence of numerous, critically endangered wildlife species. These species are critical for the conservation of the genetic diversity of the Mediterranean. Notable amongst these species for their scientific interest, uniqueness and vulnerability are the Spanish Imperial Eagle (*Aquila adalberti*), the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*).

The dehesa, an example of a balanced ecosystem modified by human activity, surrounds the Park. Numerous wild species forage and coexist with the livestock grazing in the shade of holm and cork oaks. Flying over the dehesa are large raptors, whilst small birds feed off this land.

The presence of birds endemic to the Anguilla Reservoir is increasingly frequent as the route ventures deeper into these lands. It is even possible to watch the fishing techniques of several bird species. The route skirts around the eastern side of the reservoir, and continues to the endpoint of this Stage.

Once at Serrejón, a town located between the flood plains of Campo Arañuelo (Toril and Saucedilla) and the mountains of Monfragüe National Park, the traveller can enjoy the first glimpse of the wonderful landscapes and biodiversity of this protected area.

SERREJÓN

The most notable building in the town is the parish church of San Ildefonso, whose construction began in the 15th century and completed in the 18th. It is a rectangular, slate masonry building, with stonework on the doorways and arches. The most remarkable elements are the façade, altarpiece and lateral altars, and the statues found therein.

The shrine of San Antonio dates back to the eighteenth century. The rectangular building is made of masonry. The statues of San Antonio and the Virgen de la Oliva, patroness of Serrejón, can be found inside.

The area near Serrejón is also home to several shrines, many of which are barely ruins. This is the case of the shrines of Santiago (16th c.); Santa Lucia, of which only the foundations and walls still stand; and Nuestra Señora la Virgen de la Oliva, located five kilometres from the town.

The viewpoint of Canchos is also located close-by, where the traveller can enjoy nature and views of the rugged natural landscape.

Close to Serrejón is the Bermeja Cave, with rock paintings of great historical value.

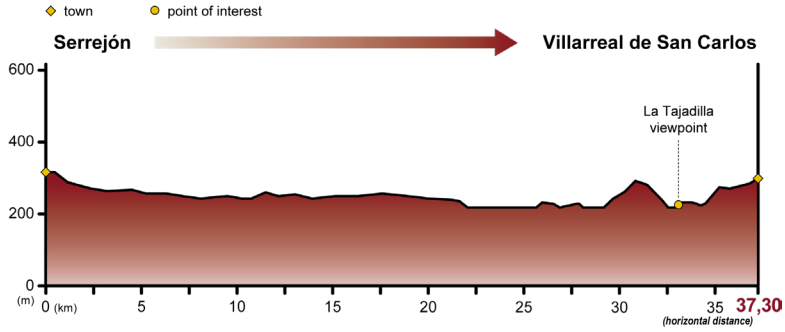


Views of the La Anguila reservoir

STAGE 34 SERREJÓN → VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	200 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	200 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	37,35 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	9 h 45 min



VENTURING INTO MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK

This Stage of the Nature Trail starts at Monfragüe National Park, the first ever protected nature area in Extremadura, and one of the largest and most representative enclaves of Mediterranean forest and scrubland.


Water basin



Salto del Gitano Viewpoint

The route begins in the centre of Serrejón, and continues along the "Ruta Rosa" to Toril, through Finca de los Calles. The route is dotted with many ponds in which diverse lake-dwelling species can be found, including newts (*Salamandridae*), and several frog species (*Ranidae*). These wetlands alternate with holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and cork oak (*Quercus suber*), dehesas, where fighting bulls roam freely, therefore caution should be exercised.

The route crosses two small bridges over creeks, and further on, a properly marked level crossing, after which it arrives at Toril. The town is home to the shrine of Saint Blaise and the "Portico de Monfragüe" Dehesa Interpretation Centre, which provides information on the characteristics, factors and environment that have defined the Park. A recreational area is located on the outskirts, where one can rest.

The route then crosses a level crossing and a bridge, similar to those described above. Immediately after, the Trail ventures through several pig and sheep farms. The Stage reaches a road and continues along this route for several kilometres through the National Park. La Fresnera Reservoir and La Herguijuela farmstead appear before one reaches the River Tiétar.



Mirador "Portilla del Tiétar"

The route meanders along the River Tiétar until it merges with the River Tagus near Villarreal de San Carlos. The two rivers create the local environment that is rich in wildlife and biodiversity, and which can be easily seen from the viewpoints that dot this stretch of river. The route to crosses over the river via the Torrejón-Tiétar Dam and, further on, reaches "Tajadilla" Viewpoint, with a rest area where one can enjoy the flight of Egyptian Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) in the shade.

At the next fork, the route turns left, drifting away from the road, onto a narrow path that leads to Villarreal de San Carlos. This stretch coincides with the "Ruta Amarilla", which is one of the routes available within Monfragüe National Park, where one can visit the fountains of Tres Caños and Alisar. This route lasts just over an hour, with breath-taking views of the river and its surroundings.

The Stage ends at Villarreal de San Carlos, a town located on the Cañada Real, the old drover's trail used to cross through province of Extremadura, which retains its spirit of hospitality, providing the traveller many services and well-equipped facilities.

VILLAREAL DE SAN CARLOS

This small village is the only urban centre within the National Park. The Park's management and administration facilities, well as the visitor's centre are located here.

The town was established in 1767 by King Charles III to accommodate travellers using the Cañada Real Trujillana. This drover's trail, used by farmers and traders, is located in a rugged area that was frequently ravaged by bandits. The provision of shelter and protection to travellers was one of the reasons Villarreal was founded. The shrine of Virgen del Socorro was built in the 18th century at the time the town was founded.

MONFRAGÜE CASTLE

This castle of Arab origin (2nd c.) is located to the west of Las Corchuelas Mountain Range at an altitude of 465 m. The castle was conquered by the Christians in the late twelfth century, and was handed over to the Order of Calatrava in 1221. It was later transferred to the aristocrats that helped King Alphonse VIII during the Reconquest.

The castle was abandoned after the War of Independence. It is now used as a vantage point for visitors to the Park. Next to the castle is the chapel of Nuestra Señora de Monfragüe, a Byzantine statue carved from black wood.

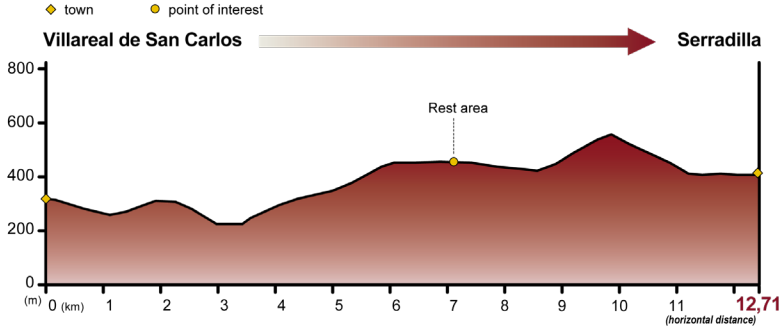


View of the River Tiétar from the 'La Tajadilla' viewpoint

STAGE 35 VILLARREAL DE SAN CARLOS → SERRADILLA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	425 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	325 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	12,78 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h



WILDLIFE IN MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK

The Stage is divided into two parts: one outside and the other inside Monfragüe National Park. The part inside the Park runs along narrow paths, where one can admire the wildlife that has contributed to its designation as National Park, including its riparian vegetation.



The trail follows the GR14



The River Barbaón runs alongside this section of the stage

The route begins in the small village of Villarreal de San Carlos, up a path with a slight slope, paved with natural stone slabs, located near the Interpretation Centre, that leads to small brook. A recreational area with tables and benches can be found here. From here, the route continues along a dirt road that ventures into the Park, where the traveller can enjoy its wildlife.

During the rut, one can often hear the buck (*Cervus elaphus*) grunt, and sometimes even see them fighting over does and territory. The Park is also home to a variety of bird species. The colonies of Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) are easily identifiable when they fly just a few metres above the ground.

The Stage of the Trail that traverses through the Park is also included in the "Monfragüe y las Dehesas del Entorno" SCI, whereas the route itself belongs to the namesake SPA.

FOUNTAINS AT SERRADILLA

Serradilla is also home to a number of interesting fountains. Notable is the Capillo Fountain, the first of its kind in Serradilla, currently in disuse. This fountain is located in Hoyo de Santa Ana. It has a cap-shaped roof with a square base.

Another notable fountain, located at Paraje de las Huertas, is square with a hemispherical dome, currently also in disuse.



The Mediterranean landscape accompanies the walker

The path turns right at the intersection near the hill, and continues along a narrow path. The Nature Trail and the "Itinerario Marrón" of the Monfragüe National Park Trail Network overlap from here onwards.

To walk this section, you need a special permit, which must be carried with you at all times, as the route passes through a nature reserve. This permit can be obtained free of charge by contacting the Monfragüe National Park Information Centre, or via the website of the Autonomous National Parks Authority.

It continues through the Mediterranean forest along the left bank of the River Barbaón. This protected area is home to the largest recorded colony of Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*). This diurnal bred of prey, a scavenger that nests in treetops, has a wingspan of up to three metres. It can be easily spotted in areas with abundant vegetation, near rocky cliffs and crags, such as the mouth of the River Barbaón, where it nests every year. Although less abundant, the Park is also the habitat of the Spanish Imperial Eagle (*Aquila adalberti*) endemic to the Iberian Peninsula, which feeds mainly on rabbits. It is also possible to catch a glimpse of this bird in the dehesas located outside the Park.

The riverbanks are populated with typical riparian species, including willows (*Salix* spp.). The river flows under a bridge supported by three pillars, from where it is possible to see how the tributaries empty their waters into the Tagus.

EL CARDENAL BRIDGE

From Villareal de San Carlos, taking the EX-208 road southwards, we come to this bridge, which was commissioned by Cardinal Juan de Carvajal, Bishop of Plasencia, in 1446, to facilitate travel between Plasencia, Jaraicejo and Trujillo.

Built entirely from granite ashlars sourced from Malpartida de Plasencia, it features large semicircular arches and porthole windows in the spandrels of the arches. Although it has undergone numerous alterations, it is thought to date from around 1450.

The Trail continues to an intersection with a forest track. A wooden hut, equipped with a table and benches, stands at the intersection to allow the traveller to rest. From here, the forest track divides into two, and this Stage continues along the right path which crosses a small brook.

Further on, it merges again with the forest track that leads uphill to a promontory from where one can see the town of Serradilla. The final stretch of this Stage begins at the next intersection, where it heads down a narrow path towards the town.

The whole itinerary runs through pine forests and typical Mediterranean vegetation, except at the end of the Stage, outside the Park, when the route is flanked by holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and olive trees until it reaches the town.

Worthy of note is "Pinar de Serradilla", a 4,170 ha public forest property of the town, of which 3,000 are inside the Monfragüe National Park.

As the Trail approaches Serradilla, the endpoint of this Stage, one can enjoy a beautiful panoramic view of the typical "dehesa" landscape. It is possible to enjoy the beautiful image of a typical Extremaduran town, with its small whitewashed houses and labyrinth of tiny streets.

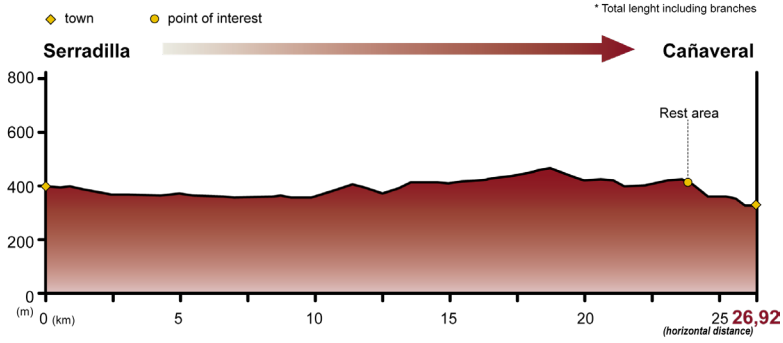


A small ford for crossing a stream

STAGE 36 SERRADILLA → CAÑAVERAL

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	175 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	250 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	27,21 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 10 min



THROUGH "TIERRAS DEL MARQUESADO"

This Stage runs almost entirely on the local road from Serradilla to Cañaveral. It traverses through holm oak, cork oak and olive groves, until it passes under the Ruta de la Plata motorway to arrive at Cañaveral along a small track.



A walk along the local road

CASAS DE MILLÁN

Casas de Millán is home to a variety of religious buildings, including the Church of San Nicolás, the church of San Sebastián, the shrine of San Ramón, the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Tebas, and civil buildings such as the home of the Marquis of Siete Iglesias, situated in the Palace square, near the parish church, with the coat-of-arms of Condado de Oliva on the façade.

The church of San Nicolás de Bari is built with masonry and ashlars according to the style in vogue for religious buildings in the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, it also has Gothic decorative elements on the façade and the tower. The square apse and dome were added in the seventeenth century. The nave is covered with a wooden gabled roof supported by two semi-circular arches.

The altarpiece, made of painted carved wood, is an interesting work of art. The Plateresque altarpiece was created by the wood carver Francisco Garcia, circa 1545, from Plasencia. The church also houses paintings (1549-1557) by Diego Perez de Cervera, from the nearby town of Jerte.

There are also other religious buildings of interest, including the shrine of San Sebastián with a notable belfry and the image of Saint Lucia; the shrine of San Ramón, an example of Baroque architecture, and the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Tebas, located seven kilometres away, a 17th century masonry work.

The route begins on the local road from Serradilla to Casas de Millán. The Trail ventures through dehesas populated with holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and cork oaks (*Quercus suber*), as well as olive groves and fields of cereals. Many animal species along the path find forage and shelter on these lands.

The landscape changes slightly as the route approaches Casas de Millán, a town located in Tierras del Marquesado County, with a geomorphology characterised by mountains with heights ranging between 500 and 700 m that contrast with the surrounding Extremaduran plains. The cliffs typical of this terrain are home to a variety of birds that build permanent nests or rest on migrations.

The route is dotted with farms where livestock graze, including sheep, Iberian pig and fighting bulls.

The road crosses a bridge over a railroad before entering Casas de Millán, where one can visit various religious buildings from different historical periods.



Road to Casas de Millán

Leaving the village behind, the route drifts away from the road to the left onto a dirt track. Close to a livestock farm is a pond used by animals as a watering hole, which brings a little excitement to the experience.

The Autovía de la Plata (motorway), under which the route passes, appears further on. During this stretch, the route crosses two small brooks, which are never wider than one metre, and therefore easy to wade with a long stride. From here, one can enjoy a panoramic view of Cañaveral Reservoir.

The route continues until it merges with a local road that runs under the Autovía de la Plata. It then turns right at an opening flanked by walls, and continues until it reaches an intersection with another road, from where it takes a path leading to the town of Cañaveral. A small recreational area equipped with tables, benches, a fountain and a shelter-hut can be found before reaching the town.

SHRINES AND CHURCHES OF SERRADILLA

There are many shrines and churches within the municipal borders of Serradilla. Santa Catalina is a well-preserved, single nave building built in 1716. Santa Ana, a square building with a small arch on its façade, is the oldest, dating back to the 16th century. The dome is a hemispherical structure covered with a hipped roof and Arabic tiles.

The shrine of Santa Barbara (17th c.) consists of a single nave divided into several Stages, and an apse with a hemispherical dome. Finally, the Shrine of San Antonio (17th c.), the largest in the municipality, can be found in the namesake square.

One can also visit the Church of Asunción. This building and its bell tower date back to the sixteenth century. It consists of three naves separated by pillars and pilasters along the side walls. The apse is square and covered by a hemispherical dome.

The town is also home to the Convent of Santo Cristo, built between 1672 and 1675. The faÃ§ade has a semi-circular arch. The cornice on the second storey has three niches crowned with the coat-or-arms of the Augustinian Order. The Latin cross nave has a dome over the transept.

SHRINE OF THE HOLY CHRIST OF VICTORY

It is possibly the second most popular place of religious worship in Extremadura in terms of the number of pilgrims, after the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe.

The veneration inspired by the Cristo de la Victoria in Serradilla is famous not just amongst the people of Extremadura. In fact, until it arrived at the convent of the Augustinian Recollects in Serradilla in 1641, it had been venerated for years in the chapel of the Royal Palace in Madrid on the orders of Philip IV. Such was the public outcry that there are now several replicas of the polychrome wooden sculpture created by the Madrid-based sculptor Domingo de Rioja, which depicts Christ standing, embracing a large cross and standing on a skull.

The path continues and crosses two gates with cattle grids. Soon after, the route heads down a road leading directly to Cañaveral, where this Stage ends.

MIRABEL CASTLE

This castle is situated about three-quarters of an hour's journey from Serradilla, on high ground from which all the neighbouring villages can be overlooked. This was one of the fortresses held by King Alfonso VIII following the founding of Plasencia, but in 1196 it was destroyed by the Almohad armies.

The archaeological remains found in the area, dating from Roman, Arab and Germanic settlements, suggest that the castle was rebuilt several times, until, centuries later, it became part of the Marquisate of Mirabel, along with the village of Mirabel.

The remains of what was once an important fortress are open to visitors; most of them date from the alterations carried out during the time of the Marquis of Mirabel.



Rest area near the village of Cañaveral

ZEPA CANCHOS DE RAMIRO Y LADRONERA

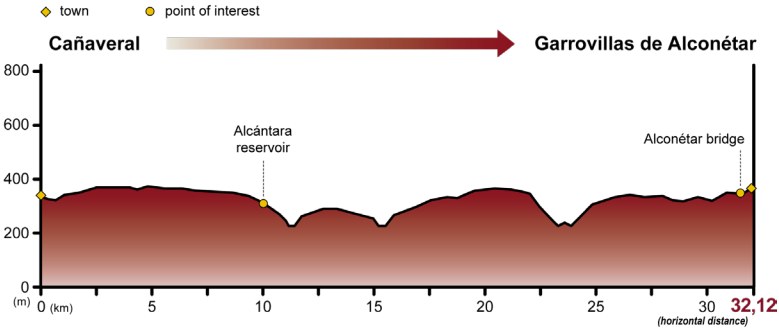
This rugged terrain is located between the mountain ranges of Canchos de Ramiro, Pico de Ladronera and Sierra de la Solana. Several waterways run through this SPA, including Castillo de las Moreras Brook, River Alagón and River Rivera de Fresnedosa. The Portaje Reservoir, home to bird species of international interest under Ramsar criteria, is also located within this protected space.

Typical of dehesas are the Quercus, as well as brooms and heather. There are also riparian forests and floating-leaf vegetation such as buttercups. Numerous raptor species populate this area, including Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). This area is also the habitat of some endangered species, such as the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and Common Black Tern (*Chlidonia niger*).

STAGE 37 CAÑAVERAL → GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	325 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	325 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	32,26 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	8 h 30 min



GETTING CLOSER TO ALCÁNTARA RESERVOIR

This Stage of the Nature Trail traverses through a variety of landscapes, from arid areas with Mediterranean vegetation to beautiful views of the Tagus, impounded by the Alcántara Reservoir.



Path towards the San Benito Bridge



Views of the Alcántara reservoir

The route leaves the town of Cañaveral through its southern edge, heading towards the railroad tracks that it crosses via a causeway. It continues along the opposite side of the N-630 until it reaches a narrow stone path leading to San Benito Bridge.

In the Middle Ages, the pilgrims who, on their way to Santiago de Compostela, wished to quench their thirst at the San Benito Fountain used this 14th century stone bridge over a small brook. From here, they would head to the Church of Santa Marina, in the heart of Cañaveral.

VIADUCT OVER THE TAJO RIVER

Besides the snippets of history encountered on this route, on this stage we'll be able to see a piece of infrastructure from our modern history which, thanks to its characteristics and scale, is a worldwide benchmark in engineering and was built for Spain's high-speed rail network (AVE).

This viaduct is situated on the Cañaveral–Embalse de Alcántara sub-section, right across the River Tagus, and is a high-speed concrete and steel arch bridge with the longest span in the world. It is 1,488 metres long, has a central span of 384 metres and a central arch of 324 metres, and its average height above the river is 90 metres, exceeding 100 metres at some points.



A close-up of the footpath fitted with log steps

The first part of this Stage heads along a clearly marked road that overlaps with the so-called Camino de la Plata. The traveller will see the railroad tracks of the AVE, under construction at the time this guide was written. In the distance, one can glimpse the impressive A-66 motorway, known as the "Ruta de la Plata", which links Gijón with Seville.

ROCAFRIDA OR FLORIPES CASTLE

At the junction of the N-630 and the EX-373, the remains of the reservoir can be seen. There is really very little to see apart from the keep, which can be glimpsed rising from the blue waters during periods of drought.

The fortress was built in Alconétar to protect the Silver Route, at a location of great strategic importance, as it is situated on the natural border formed by the Tagus River.

Originally, the castle had a double defensive enclosure with several towers, including three watchtowers. The pentagonal tower is built with Roman ashlars forming its foundations, and the Alconétar Bridge was originally connected to the fortress. The bridge was moved to a new location to protect it from floods; however, the same could not be said for the castle, due to the high cost of moving it.

The castle is protected under the general provisions of the Decree of 22 April 1949 and Act 16/1985 on Spanish Historical Heritage.

RUINS OF ALCONÉTAR BRIDGE

The bridge, built in Trajan's times, was moved upstream in 1970 when the reservoir was built. It was originally 250 m long with thirteen arches, of which only four remain.

It was built by the architect Lucio Vivo in the 1st century A.D. It is located very close to where the River Almonte empties into the Tagus. The bridge was used to cross over the river, and was part of one of the most important roads in the Iberian Peninsula, the "Vía de la Plata" that linked Mérida with Gijón.

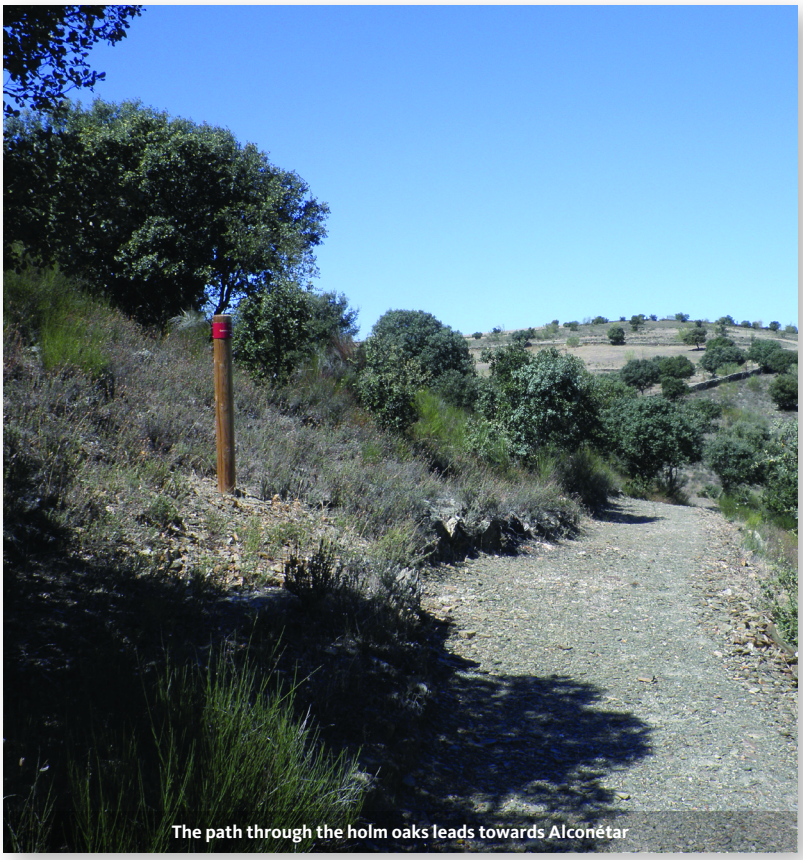
GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR

Notable is the Plaza de la Constitución, one of the twelve "plazas mayores" in Spain. This amazing architectural ensemble consists of two-storey attached houses supported by granite columns and brick arches. The oldest houses were built in the fifteenth century in Gothic style, albeit with clear Mudéjar influences. The square has 65 arches and 103 windows. The rectangular square, spread over more than 4,000 m2 with five gates, has been declared a Historic Artistic Monument of National Interest. It is used as a bullfighting ring during Saint Roque's feast.

Also noteworthy are the Church of San Pedro Apóstol (15th c.), of Romanesque and Gothic style, built in ashlar; the Church of Santa María de la Consolación, home to the organ that is believed to be the oldest in the Iberian Peninsula, and the third oldest in Europe; the Convent of the Monjas Jerónimas; the palace of the Condes de Alba de Liste; and the Jewish quarter with its labyrinth of narrow, winding streets and Gothic and Arab architecture.

The Trail ventures through several small hills with an interesting landscape of fields and broom thickets where wildlife finds shelter. Hares (*Lepus granatensis*), partridges (*Alectoris rufa*), flocks of hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) and even a small fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) can be seen scurrying through the bushes. The Stage slowly approaches Alcántara Reservoir, one of many reservoirs along the Nature Trail. It is included in the Natura 2000 network as part of the "Embalse de Alcántara" Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

As the route draws closer to the reservoir, the landscape changes from scrubland to olive trees, holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and cork oaks (*Quercus suber*). Near a small house, where one can rest, the Trail turns left onto a slightly sloping narrow path leading to the N-630, which can be reached by climbing down a flight of wooden steps embedded into the ground. Here, the route crosses one of several bridges along this Stage, with spectacular views of the reservoir and the River Tagus. At this point, walkers can see the viaduct that has been built to serve the AVE high-speed rail service, a fine example of modern engineering.



The path through the holm oaks leads towards Alconétar

The bridge has a pedestrian lane that leads to the path. This part of the Nature Trail runs almost parallel to the railway and the N-630. Indeed, in some parts it overlaps with the road.

Further on, the Trail crosses the EX-373 leading to Hinojal, and continues along the narrow path that runs parallel to the N-630 towards Cáceres.

The route crosses two more bridges, one over the River Almonte, and the other over the railway, which runs parallel to Villoluengo Creek. The Nature Trail coincides again with two areas under construction.

Further on, the route crosses the road several times, leaving the path behind. It again crosses the N-630, then turns abruptly onto the EX-302 leading to Garrovillas de Alconétar. From here until the end of the Stage, the road will accompany the traveller, sometimes in parallel, and at other times crossing back and forth over it. The route crosses Araya Creek, near Alcántara Reservoir, venturing along the EX-302. It only drifts briefly away from the road during the last stretch, when the narrow path traverses through amazing rock formations and woodlands, where the traveller can relax in the rest area before reaching the famous Plaza de la Constitución at Garrovillas, the endpoint.

THE CONVENT IN PALANCAR

Saint Peter of Alcántara, a Catholic saint born in Extremadura, founded a place between the rocky outcrops near Pedroso de Acim and the Palancar spring, where "all poverty, harshness and wretchedness" shine forth. And so the Convent of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción del Palancar was founded, a name that is rather long compared with the one by which it is known today: "*el conventico*" or "the little convent".

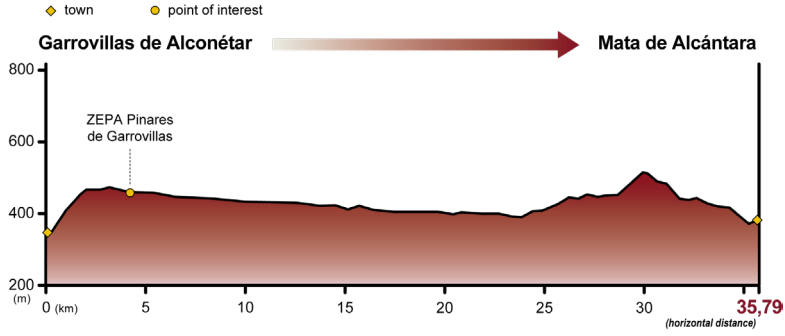
Despite its austere aspect, it includes all the rooms typical of a convent: a cloister, a kitchen and a few cells, all of which are tiny; so much so that it is said that Saint Peter of Alcántara used to sleep sitting on a stone, resting his head on a piece of wood leaning against the wall.

The beauty of the setting in which the little convent stands undoubtedly invites one to rest and find spiritual tranquillity.

STAGE 38 GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR → MATA DE ALCÁNTARA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	450 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	475 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	35,87 km
Amount of effort needed	5	Time	10 h



THROUGH PINAR DE GARROVILLAS

This long Stage provides an opportunity to enjoy a variety of landscapes, including amazing pine forests at Garrovillas, with large rock formations; steppe areas throughout the route; and tree-thinned, holm oak forests with large trees.



Convent of St Anthony of Padua on the outskirts of Garrovillas de Alconétar

CHURCH OF SANTA MARÍA DE GRACIA

Located at Mata de Alcántara, the church dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Gracia was built in the sixteenth century, although the square tower was added in the seventeenth century.

The single nave has a magnificent star-ribbed vault from the late Gothic period. Pedro de Ibarra was the architect.

The route turns left at the Shrine of Cristo del Humilladero, located on the outskirts of Garrovillas. Well worth a visit is the Convent of San Antonio de Padua, a monument typical of the times of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Monarchs, located to the left of the path.

This first part of the Trail, through pastures, olive trees and holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), leads the traveller along a comfortable, wide track to Garrovillas' pine forest. The Nature Trail overlaps the "Ruta de los Almendros", one of the routes included in the TRANSLANA project, a community initiative between Spain and Portugal to develop and promote ancient cultural trails.

The Trail passes near a farmhouse after which it crosses a gate. From here, the route, which is narrower and more winding, leads to Rehana Brook. After crossing the brook, the path becomes easier to walk. One can enjoy the views of the large granite rocks that dot the path, creating a striking landscape.



The path leads into the Garrovilla Pine Forest



Stone structures for protecting beehives

In places, the rolling landscape of granite rocks is broken by stone pine stands (*Pinus pinea*) that compete with holm oaks. The pine forest produces pine nuts, a natural resource exploited not only by humans, but also by birds that feed on forest fruits. The path becomes increasingly steeper. Some areas even have wooden steps directly embedded in the ground to help in the steeper areas. Atop the hill, next to the path, is a beekeeping operation, similar to the Asturian "cortín". There are breath-taking views of the pine forest from the site called Peón, next to a quarry.

The Trail continues atop this hill, along a comfortable track that crosses through vast areas of reforestation and scrubland. The Alcántara Reservoir can be seen from the livestock farm located here. The landscape remains unchanged for a long way. Roaming livestock appear constantly, especially where ponds or lagoons are used by the animals as a watering hole. The Trail traverses through several hunting grounds, which are sometimes closed with gates, or equipped with cattle grids.

The landscape changes slightly as the route approaches a summer pasture, near a brook, where the cattle graze. On several occasions, the Stage crosses over small waterways, including the River Alcalfe, where there is a bridge, and the Rivera de la Mata Creek, with a stone ford. The green pastures contrast with the rest of the landscape. The bush landscape that has been the norm throughout the route gives way to holm oaks and olive trees.



The road crosses a bridge near Mata de Alcántara

PINARES DE GARROVILLAS SPA

This nature area located just west of Garrovillas, in the central-western province of Cáceres, has several waterways, including Rehana Brook and Garciacaballero Creek.

Pine trees and vast extensions of pseudo-steppe with grass surrounded by broom thickets (*Retama* ssp.). populate the landscape. Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*), an endangered species, and Bustards (*Otis tarda*).

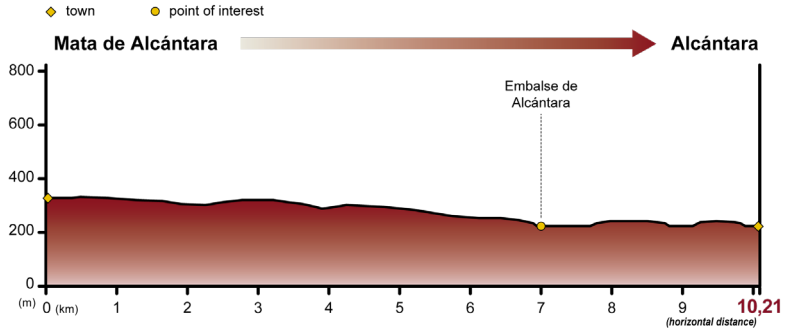
Very close to the endpoint, the Stage ventures into a holm oak forest with ancient trees that provide the traveller a beautiful image. It is possible to see large groups of vultures, easily more than 20, flying quietly over the area. There is a rest area with tables and benches, and a few rustic wooden steps, where the traveller can rest. The path leaves behind the oak forest, skirting around a small dam, to continue along the road that directly leads to the town of Alcántara.

After travelling more than 35 km through a variety of landscapes, including the rough terrain near Pinar de Garrovillas or the rugged areas populated with scrub and holm oaks, typical of Extremadura, the route ends in this town.

STAGE 39 MATA DE ALCÁNTARA → ALCÁNTARA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	100 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	25 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	10,23 km
Amount of effort needed	2	Time	2 h 40 min



ALCÁNTARA, MONUMENTAL CITY

This Stage begins at Mata de Alcántara, from where the route heads to Alcántara, a charming city with a long history that is only a few kilometres away. Its strategic position has deeply influenced its history, with archaeological finds from the Palaeolithic era. Notable amongst its important collection of monuments is its spectacular Roman bridge.



A rest area in the shade of an oak tree.

ROMAN BRIDGE OF ALCÁNTARA

Built by different Lusitanian peoples, it is believed that its construction begun around 75 A.D. under Caius Iulius Lacerit, and was completed between 103 and 104 A.D. in the times of the Emperor Trajan.

It consists of three elements: bridge, arch and temple. The bridge is 194 m long, 8 m wide and 71 m high.

It has been restored over the centuries and still preserves its old defence system: a slate and brick tower called Torre del Oro. It was declared a National Monument on August 13, 1924.

The Stage begins on the road out of Mata de Alcántara, along which the Trail continues for just over 2.2 km, including the turn to the right at the first intersection.

Further on, to the right, is an entrance to a private hunting ground with a gate and cattle grid along which runs a comfortable track. Large holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) dot the landscape, alternating with an abundance of rockrose (*Cistus* sp.) and broom (*Retama* ssp.) thickets.

The route takes a sharp turn to the left, then continues towards a livestock farm where a stone table and a few benches in the shade of a tree provide an opportunity to rest. From here, one can already glimpse the town of Alcántara on the horizon. The Alcántara Reservoir appears, yet again, and will remain visible throughout the route.



View of the Alcántara reservoir dam from the road

The landscape changes near the reservoir. Whereas the shores are covered with more trees, the areas farther away from the reservoir are dominated by scrub.

Alcántara Reservoir is an ideal site for bird watching. Different raptor species including the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*) inhabit this land.

The Trail continues along a wide, comfortable track, without significant slopes, until it reaches Alcántara. The reservoir can be seen, unmistakable in the distance, as one approaches the city. From here, the route ventures into the "Embalse de Alcántara" Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

In this last stretch, and near the endpoint, the Trail runs along the reservoir's edge until it crosses a bridge closed with a gate. From here, the route heads upwards along a road leading to Alcántara, which is just a few metres away. The path turns into a road shortly before it passes through another gate. To the right is a "bohío", a typical hut formerly used by shepherds, which is currently being restored due to its ethnographic value.

Very close to the city, to the right, is a power station. Next appears the convent-inn of Alcántara, the former convent of San Bartolomé, built in the fifteenth century and recently restored. The route now ventures into Llanos de Brozas Site of Community Interest (SCI).



A bridge providing access across the Alcántara reservoir



Huts formerly used by shepherds

CHAPELS AND HOUSES

Alcántara is home to numerous chapels, including the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios; the Chapel of Soledad, in the heart of the Jewish quarter; and the Chapel of San Antonio, built in 1213 to commemorate the definitive conquest of Alcántara.

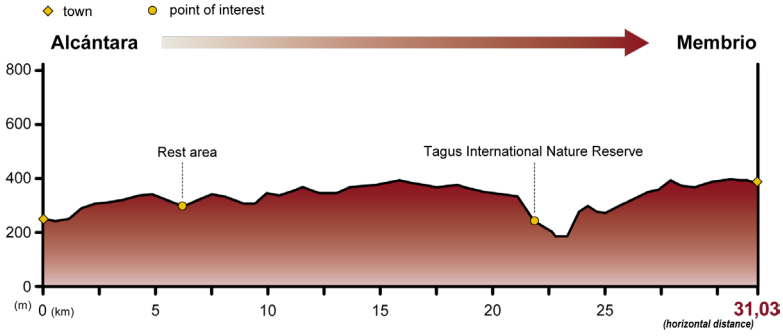
There are also several interesting houses, including the house of Claveria, where the "gatekeeper" of the convent and archive lived; the house of Perero, an aristocratic family that has lived in Alcántara since the creation of the Military Order; Pacheco's House, with a large granite ashlar façade and the coat-of-arms of the family; the Barrantes Maldonado House, a manor with the remarkable coat-of-arms of the Barrantes and Maldonado families; the house of Oviedo, an aristocratic family from Asturias that settled in Alcántara in the 15th century; the palatial mansion of the Barco family who settled here in the 16th century; the palatial mansion of the Marquis of Torreorgaz; the palatial mansion of Topetes Escobar, who settled here in the 13th century; the house of Arias de Quintanadueñas; the house of Bootello and the house of Vélez Suárez.

From here, one can see the Convent of San Benito, whose construction begun in the early sixteenth century, and combines various architectural styles. After crossing a stone bridge, the Trail heads straight into Alcántara; a small town with a notable history and important cultural offerings: dolmens and menhirs bear witness to early human settlements and remains of Muslim, Jewish and Roman culture speak of the influence they had on Alcántara and the city it is today.

STAGE 40 ALCÁNTARA → MEMBRÍO

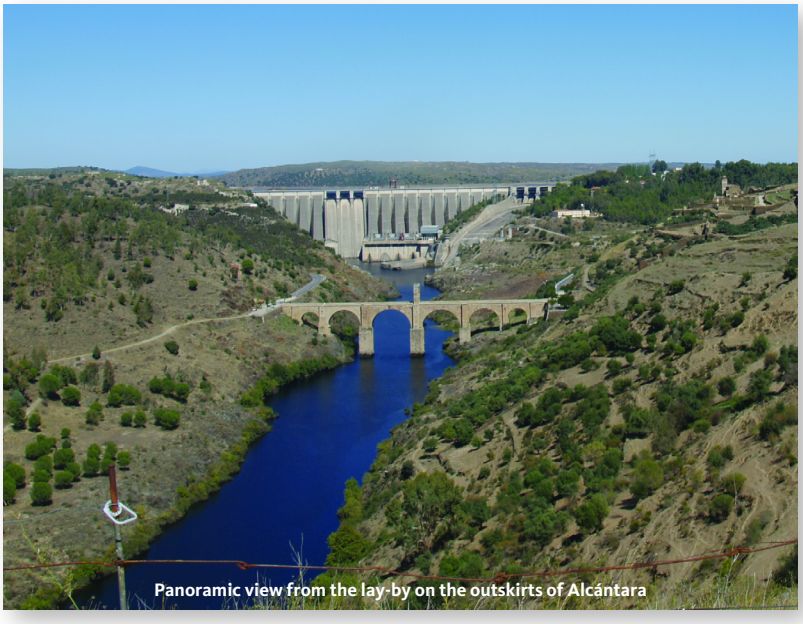
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	425 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	275 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	31,11 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	8 h 30 min



THROUGH LOS LLANOS DE BROZAS Y ALCÁNTARA

Los Llanos de Brozas y Alcántara is a vast area of high ecological value that is part of the Natura 2000 network. Traditionally, it has been used for grazing and grain production, hence a biologically rich floodplain ecosystem with a high concentration of birds has been created.



Panoramic view from the lay-by on the outskirts of Alcántara



A typical stone building known as a 'bohío'

This Stage begins on the outskirts of the town of Alcántara, amidst paved streets confined by slate walls. Further on, a slate ford makes the crossing of the river easier when it carries much water.

The Trail quickly gains height. Indeed, some areas have stone steps to make the climb easier. Leaving behind the Alcántara Bridge and the River Tagus confined in the bottom of the ravine, this is the moment to enjoy the landscape. A wonderful view of the town of Alcántara can be seen from the top of the hill, with the reservoir in the background, and its famous Roman bridge in the foreground. The remains of the walls that protected the town can also be seen. The path continues up an alley to the outskirts, where the walls disappear and the track widens.

The Trail ventures along Cañada Real de Gata as it moves forward to Los Llanos de Brozas y Alcántara. A few trees still line the path during the first part of the Stage, as well as an occasional traditional "bohío", small huts used in the past by shepherds, which are currently being restored.

The Stage ventures now into Los Llanos, an area wedged between the rivers Tagus and Salor, with a gentle slope and an altitude ranging between 200 and 400 m. The land is crisscrossed by myriad brooks and streams that empty into the two rivers that form its boundary. The Trail is dotted with numerous fords that allow the traveller to cross streams and brooks. There are also small ponds and shallow lagoons were waterfowl can find shelter and bring diversity.

TAGUS INTERNATIONAL NATURE PARK

The Tagus International Nature Park (25,088 ha) spans eleven municipalities along the River Tagus, from the Roman bridge of Alcántara to Cedillo Reservoir, as well as many tributaries that empty into the river.

The diversity of wildlife is remarkable, with large shady areas, rich riparian habitats, typical floodplain forests and sub-humid Mediterranean forests.

Many wildlife species found here are considered priority species under the Birds and Habitats Directive, including the Sites of Community Importance (SCI) of Cedillo y Río Tajo, Rivera de Membrío, Rivera de Aurela, Riveras de Carbajo y Calatrucha, Rivera de los Molinos and the local tower and brook; and the Special Protection Areas for Birds (SPA) of Río Tajo Internacional y Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas, included in the Natura 2000 Network.

The landscape consists mainly of vast grasslands, dry pastures and broom thickets, with very few trees. The seasons have a strong impact on this enclave. There is widespread shortage of water in the summer, except in very specific points that attract wildlife. These high-value, natural and semi-natural steppes are populated by bird species for whom this is one of few remaining havens, including the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*).

The path crosses several gates during the next 15 km along this floodplain. Leaving Los Llanos behind, the Trail reaches the road linking Alcántara and Membrío (EX-117), running parallel to it for about two kilometres. Several signs indicate that the Trail continues on the opposite side of the road, briefly drifting away from the road.

After passing through a gate, the route continues along a track that soon becomes a path down to the River Salor. Here, the brooms (Cytisus ssp.) and cereal fields give way to typical riparian species. The River Salor flows through the Tagus International Nature Park, and forms the western boundary of the "Llanos de Brozas" Site of Community Importance (SCI). It is also part of the "Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas y Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos" SPA. The traveller will venture through all these sites included in this Stage.

Rustic, wooden steps have been placed in some areas, making the path even narrower in the narrowest parts of this small gorge. The traveller must cross the EX-117 to the opposite side to cross the bridge over the River Salor where the road used to pass. There is a small rest area near the bridge, which may seem familiar, as it is a replica of the Roman bridge of Alcántara. After skirting around the slope, the path merges again with the EX-117, which it must cross again to the opposite side.

After passing through another gate, the Trail climbs down a narrow path, and then climbs up towards a private hunting ground, where the landscape is dominated by holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*).

Deer emerge from amongst the trees. They do not appear to fear human presence. It is possible to observe them at close range. Leaving the hunting ground behind, the Stage crosses again the EX-117 to the opposite side and continues parallel to the road until it reaches Membrío.



A bridge over the River Salor, across which the road runs

ANTHROPOMORPHIC TOMBS

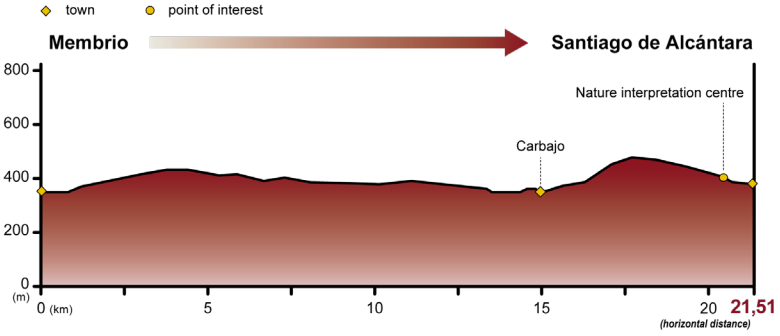
The rock-cut tombs, of which the exact date is unknown, can be found throughout the district. It is believed that they may be from the late Roman and Visigoth period (7th c.).

Although they are usually isolated, in some cases they form groups in which the tombs are placed near each other. Most of the tombs face west, and measure 2 m long and 60 cm deep.

STAGE 41 MEMBRÍO → SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	200 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	150 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,55 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 45 min



SIERRA DE SAN PEDRO

Sierra de San Pedro is one of Extremadura's great unknowns. With more than 80,000 ha, it is possibly one of the most representative Mediterranean forests. With altitudes ranging between 300 and 700 m, it is considered one of the areas with the richest biodiversity associated to Mediterranean forest and scrubland. It is home to 15% of the world population of Imperial Eagle.



A beech forest that runs through a hunting reserve



Reddish trunks of recently de-corked cork oaks

Leaving Membrío behind, the Trail crosses an iron and concrete bridge to continue along a wide, comfortable track. It traverses through the "Rivera de Membrío" Site of Community Importance (SCI), located just outside the town, which connects two areas included in the Natura 2000 network: Sierra de San Pedro and Los Llanos de Brozas. The riverside is dominated by oaks. There is also a large community of Mediterranean turtles (*Mauremys leprosa*), the most representative reptile of this area.

The Trail ventures through holm oak forests, often dotted by rockrose thickets (*Cistus* ssp.), which occasionally cover large areas. Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) give way to cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) while the path continues through private hunting grounds along wide tracks. Attention should be paid to the signs, as it is easy to get lost.

The well-paved path is very easy to walk throughout the whole Stage. As the Trail heads forward, Sierra de San Pedro appears on the horizon. The path runs parallel

DOLMENS AND PAINTINGS

Near Santiago de Alcántara is a cave called El Buraco with interesting schematic cave paintings. There are many other caves with paintings in this area, including El Borrico and El Agujero, which attest to the antiquity of Santiago de Alcántara.

There are also small dolmens dating back to around 3,000 to 4,000 B.C.



The path winds its way through a landscape dotted with olive trees and strawberry trees

to the northernmost foothills of this mountain range. The gentle hills and dense tree cover of this protected landscape are easily identifiable on the horizon owing to changes in terrain and vegetation.

Although holm oak is the dominant tree species, the climate and type of soil have enabled the development and distribution of cork oak. Indeed, cork is the main driver of the region's economy. In some places, one can see the beautiful image of recently debarked cork oaks.

One kilometre further on the so-called "Road to Membrío" leading to Carbajo, there is a small town on the foothills of Sierra de Santiago, dominated by olive groves and other fruit trees.

Leaving behind the town on the road to Santiago de Alcántara, the path turns left onto a dirt track that ventures into Sierra de San Pedro.

The vegetation changes significantly here. Although it is still dominated by holm oaks, there are also several other species, including the strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), pistachio (*Pistacia terebinthus*), Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*), tree heath (*Erica arborea*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Iberian pear (*Pyrus bourgaeana*) which form dense thickets.

The last part of this Stage runs halfway up the hill, with panoramic views of the lowlands to the right. After about four kilometres, the path arrives at Santiago de Alcántara, with its whitewashed houses and narrow streets, and the endpoint of this Stage.

SIERRA DE SAN PEDRO AREA OF REGIONAL INTEREST

This area is not only the largest Mediterranean forest and scrubland (115,000 ha) designated a Special Area of Conservation, but also the largest protected area in Extremadura.

It consists of a row of small mountain ranges populated by dense Mediterranean forest and scrubland, home to a rich variety of wildlife. The animal species found in this habitat include wolf (*Canis lupus*), Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), and Bonelli's Eagles (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*). The mountain range is almost completely covered with Mediterranean forest and scrubland. However, the emblematic species is undoubtedly the Iberian Imperial Eagle (*Aquila adalberti*). This is the most important breeding site worldwide of this endangered species (15% of the world population lives here).

At a regional level, Sierra de San Pedro has been designated an Area of Regional Interest, and therefore eligible for environmental protection. Moreover, many of its animal and plant species are listed under the Birds and Habitats directives, and the area is included in the Natura 2000 Network, under the "Sierra de San Pedro" SCI and Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA).

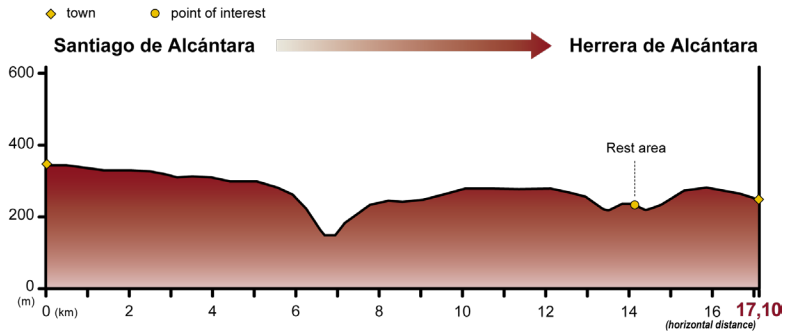


Santiago de Alcántara

STAGE 42 SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA → HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	175 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	250 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	17,15 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 45 min



RIVERA AURELA

Rivera Aurela is located in western Extremadura, to the south of the River Tagus. The area lies along its namesake river that rises in Sierra de San Pedro, flowing south to north, and empties into the Tagus. There are abundant cork and holm oak forests, with a few riparian galleries.

The Stage sets out from Santiago de Alcántara along the road leading to Herrera de Alcántara. After 1.5 km, it turns onto a wide track with good paving on the right hand side of the road. The unmistakable smell of the rockrose (*Cistus* sp.) a typical Mediterranean bush, accompanies the traveller throughout most of the route, as well as holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*).


Footbridge over the River Aurela


Tajo International Natural Park

One can see in the distance the rolling hills along which the winding road leads to Rivera Aurela. Santiago de Alcántara, originally a Roman colony at Eras de Ulloa, was founded gold diggers who searched for gold in the river. Rivera Aurela, declared a Site of Community Importance (SCI), is included in the Natura 2000 Network, and is a protected area within the Tagus International Nature Park.

This Stage's landscape is more rugged, the mountains are steeper and the route descends to the riverbanks via narrow paths that climb back into the hills. The vegetation is slightly different as well, with higher tree and thicket density. After a few kilometres, the track turns into a narrow path that descends steeply, zigzagging down to the bottom of the valley. There is a wooden railing near the river to help prevent slipping on wet stones. The route crosses a wooden bridge over the river. There is again a railing on the opposite side to help climb up the rocky slopes. It is worth stopping on the bridge to rest and enjoy the magnificent views of the river.

The path heads along the opposite side towards an information panel on Rivera Aurela. From here, the path widens into a track that ventures forth amongst eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* ssp.). A few abandoned beehives can be found halfway up the hill. If you look back over the route, one can enjoy a stunning view of the path leading down to the river, sandwiched between vegetation. Rolling hills covered with Mediterranean forest stretch as far as the eye can see. This part of the Stage traverses through eucalyptus forests that alternate with holm oaks until it reaches Herrera de Alcántara. Leaving behind the eucalyptus forest, the Trail ventures into private hunting grounds and sport hunting reserves.

RIVERA AURELA SCI

This SCI runs south to north and empties into the Tagus. It links several Natura 2000 Network areas, including the Sierra de San Pedro Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) and SCI, and the Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos SPA, through which the route traverses.



A typical herd of pigs from the pastures of Extremadura

The hunting grounds that dot the route are home to deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and other game species. There is also a large pig population in this area. Indeed, one may even see some of the Iberian pigs roaming freely.

In this Stage, the gates have a wooden ancillary door to make it easier for the travellers to pass through. The vegetation typical of a dehesa populates the hunting ground.

The track becomes again a path that gradually climbs down through reforestation eucalyptus. The path may be occasionally rocky. The route crosses over a small stream called Regato Negrales via a concrete bridge. Nearby stands a wooden hut with tables and benches where the traveller can rest and admire the beautiful riparian scenery.

After crossing the stream, the path widens again gradually until it becomes a forest track as it approaches the town of Herrera de Alcántara.

DOLMENS

There are several dolmens in the area, including those at Cerro Caldera or Bodegas. Unfortunately, only few remain standing, as dolmens are built with slate, a very fragile stone that is very difficult to preserve.

The Bodegas Dolmen is a megalithic structure consisting of a circular chamber just over two metres in diameter. The Cerro Caldera dolmen is large and in good condition; however, it barely juts out of the ground. The Sesmo Dolmen is located on a gentle slope near the Sesmo farming estate.

MEGALITHIC INTERPRETATION CENTRE

The Dolmen Culture Interpretation Centre – also known as the Megalithic Culture Centre – is a unique centre situated on the outskirts of Santiago de Alcántara.

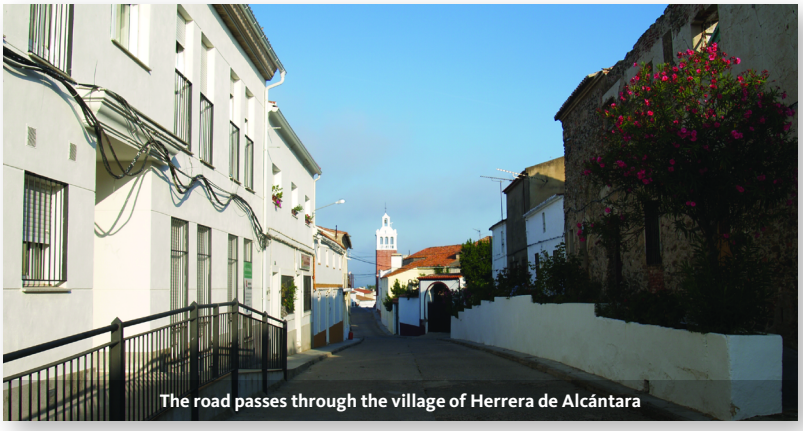
The entire Spanish International Tagus Natural Park and its Portuguese counterpart, together, form one of the most important and diverse megalithic sites in Europe. Many of the municipalities whose territory forms part of the Natural Park feature examples of this prehistoric architecture.

The building, constructed to showcase and interpret this prehistoric heritage, is notable for the fact that all its facilities are underground and its exterior resembles a large dolmen with an area of around 200 m². Visitors enter the centre via a long corridor that imitates an entrance to a burial mound. At the end of the corridor is a large polygonal hall where the site's significance in terms of megalithic culture is illustrated through reconstructions, models, display panels and videos.

The Santiago de Alcántara Centre includes a comprehensive collection of documentation and innovative resources to help visitors interpret the collection, enabling everyone to appreciate the great value of this heritage.

EL PÉNDERE NATURE INTERPRETATION CENTRE

Located in the 13th-century El Péndere Shrine, this centre features a room dedicated to the landscape and ecosystems, flora and fauna, dioramas, information panels, an interpretative model and an audiovisual presentation, as well as a planisphere projected onto the shrine's dome, all designed to highlight the significance of the International Tagus Natural Park and raise awareness of local resources. Guided tours are available provided advance notice is given, and there are nine signposted routes throughout the municipal area.

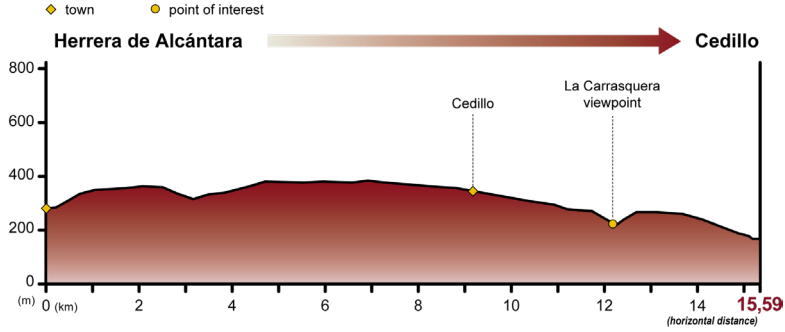


The road passes through the village of Herrera de Alcántara

STAGE 43 HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA → CEDILLO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	200 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	300 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	15,65 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 40 min



CEDILLO, ENDPOINT

The route finally reaches Cedillo, the endpoint of the Nature Trail, from Montes Universales, where it started, to this town on the border with Portugal, where the river crosses the international border into another country.


The stage begins with a walk through a forest of cork oaks



The path leads to a stone bridge to cross a stream

Leaving the town of Herrera de Alcántara to the left, wedged between two houses is a steep concrete track where the last Stage begins. This stretch, which runs from Santiago de Alcántara to Cedillo, coincides with the Green Track, a route included in the Tagus International Nature Park's network of routes.

A rest area with benches and an information panel on the Green Track is located just after the route reaches the bottom of the slope. The route begins to climb again and rises above Herrera de Alcántara, from where one can enjoy a beautiful view. The path continues along a forest track, gradually climbing through holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), olive trees, cork oaks (*Quercus suber*), rockrose (*Cistus* sp.) and brooms (*Retama sphaerocarpa*).

As the route approaches the banks of the Cabrioso Stream, rockrose thickets dominate the south slope. From here, it is possible to see the changes in vegetation on the opposite slope: the tree cover disappears, giving way to a pseudo-steppe created by human activity.

The path climbs down toward the stream. There are wooden steps in some places to make the climb easier. A stone bridge allows the traveller to cross to the opposite side. Leaving the stream behind, the route ventures into the "Cedillo and Río Tajo Internacional" Site of Community Importance (SCI) and the "Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos" Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA), sandwiched between the River

OLD BRIDGE OF CABRIOSO

This interesting slate bridge is located on the Cabrioso Brook, about three kilometres from the town, along the ancient path that formerly linked Cedillo with Santiago de Alcántara. Although the exact date is unknown, it is believed that its origins must be ancient. Although rarely used today, it used to link the neighbouring towns of Herrera de Alcántara and Cedillo.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL MUSEUM

It is located in the Tajo-Sever Interpretation Centre at Cedillo. The centre has a mural describing how the dolmens were built. It also houses plate idols, and other household items found in some dolmens. (The items exhibited here are copies. The originals are in the Museum of Cáceres). There is also a "standalone" anthropomorphic tomb and a replica of a prehistoric cave.

Tagus and its tributary the River Sever. It also briefly traverses through the foothills of the Tagus International Nature Park, along which it continues for more than six kilometres in the stretch closest to the River Tagus.

The path climbs gently through rockrose thickets and holm oaks. The route reaches the top of the hill and crosses a gate. Here, holm oaks, olive trees and cork oaks give way to herbaceous vegetation. Trees can be found only along brooks and streams. The route skirts around a livestock farm and a small lagoon, winding through a wooden gate at the edge of the EX-374, to the nearby town of Cedillo.

Several signs along the way indicate the existence of anthropomorphic tombs dating back to the Middle Ages, which suggest the constant presence of humans in this area. The route arrives soon at Cedillo, where the traveller can rest before the final hike to the endpoint: the hydroelectric power plant on the River Tagus.

From Cedillo, the route heads toward the Tagus, winding through rolling hills along a track wedged between beautiful slate walls. This stretch is dotted with interesting archaeological and ethnographic heritage, which can be seen taking several detours.

After crossing a gate, the track ventures through a farm owned by the town of Cedillo, where traditional goat farming and ancient olive groves on stone wall terraces are being recovered. The traveller may approach a viewpoint on the Carrasquera Hill with splendid views of the River Tagus.



A pool of water near the path

THE INTERNATIONAL TAGUS NATURE PARK

Designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in March 2016, this area is located along the stretch of the Tagus River, between the Roman bridge at Alcántara and the Cedillo dam, as well as the tributaries that flow into this river (Erjas, Salor, Rivera de Calatrucha, Aurela, Sever and Alburrel).

It covers an area of 25,088 hectares. In the Extremadura part, it covers the municipalities of Alcántara, Brozas, Carbajo, Cedillo, Herrera de Alcántara, Membrío, Salorino, Herreruela, Santiago de Alcántara, Valencia de Alcántara and Zarza la Mayor in the province of Cáceres, and, in Portugal, the Concelho of Castelo Branco and Idanha Nova.

The vegetation is a mixture of Mediterranean species (including cork oaks, Portugyese oaks and strawberry trees) and riverside species (with *Flueggea tinctoria* as the star species). The area is designated as a Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) known as "International Tagus and Riberos" Some of the protected species found in the park include the black stork and the Iberian endemic eagle, both of which are endangered; whilst the cinereous vulture and the Bonelli's eagle are sensitive to changes in their habitat, and the Egyptian vulture, golden eagle and griffon vulture are considered vulnerable species.

The track then descends to and crosses the river, then starts to climb up a path protected by a wooden railing, which makes the climb up the slope easier. The top of the hill is populated with holm oaks, olive trees, strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*), as well as a few scattered reforestation eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* sp.).

Further on, there is a rest area with tables, chairs and a playground. After a while, the route intersects the so-called "Carretera del Muelle", along which it winds for the last few metres before it reaches Cedillo Dam, the endpoint of the Tagus Nature Trail, on the border with Portugal.



Panoramic view of the River Tagus along the final stretches of the Nature Trail

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CACERES

- **ALCÁNTARA** *(http://www.alcantara.es)* 927 390 002
- **BOHONAL DE IBOR** *(http://www.bohonaldeibor.es)* 927 574 006
- **CAÑAVERAL** *(http://www.canaveral.es)* 927 300 006
- **CARBAJO** *(http://www.carbajo.es)* 927 592 037
- **CASAS DE MILLÁN** *(http://www.casasdemillan.es)* 927 306 002
- **CASTAÑAR DE IBOR** *(http://www.castañardeibor.org)* 927 554 002
- **CEDILLO** *(http://www.cedillo.es)* 927 590 029
- **GARROVILLAS DE ALCONÉTAR** *(http://www.garrovillasdealconetar.es)* 927 309 002
- **HERRERA DE ALCÁNTARA** *(http://www.herreradealcantara.es)* 927 591 006
- **HIGUERA** *(http://higueradealbalat.es/)* 927 576 577
- **MATA DE ALCÁNTARA** *(http://www.matadealcantara.es)* 927 371 032
- **MEMBRÍO** *(http://www.membrio.es)* 927 594 107
- **MESAS DE IBOR** *(http://www.mesasdeibor.es)* 927 574 809
- **PERALEDA DE SAN ROMÁN** *(http://www.peraledadesanroman.es)* 927 553 004
- **PORTEZUELO** *(http://www.portezuelo.es)* 927 302 037
- **SANTIAGO DE ALCÁNTARA** *(http://www.santiagodealcantara.com)* 927 592 029
- **SERRADILLA** *(http://www.serradilla.es)* 927 407 095
- **SERREJÓN** *(http://www.serrejon.es)* 927 547 652
- **TORIL** *(http://www.toril.es)* 927 577 191
- **TORREJÓN EL RUBIO** *(http://www.torrejonelrubio.com/)* 927 455 004
- **VALDECAÑAS DE TAJO** *(http://www.valdecanasdetajo.es)* 927 542 013
- **VALDELACASA DE TAJO** *(http://www.valdelacasadetajo.es)* 927 576 102
- **VILLAR DEL PEDROSO** *(http://www.villardelpedroso.es)* 927 555 002

CUENCA

- **BETETA** *(http://www.aytobeteta.es)* 969 318 001
- **CUENCA** *(http://ayuntamiento.cuenca.es)* 969 176 100

GUADALAJARA

- **ALBALATE DE ZORITA** *(http://www.albalatedezorita.es)* 949 376 001
- **ALMONACID DE ZORITA** *(http://www.almonaciddezorita.es)* 949 376 201
- **CIFUENTES** *(http://www.cifuentes.es)* 949 810 001
- **MANTIEL** *(http://www.aytomantiel.es/)* 949 357 476
- **PAREJA** *(http://www.pareja.es)* 949 354 003
- **PASTRANA** *(http://www.pastrana.org)* 949 370 014

- **SACEDÓN** *(http://www.sacedon.es)* 949 350 015
- **TRILLO** *(http://www.trillo.es)* 949 815 030
- **ZORITA DE LOS CANES** *(http://www.zoritadeloscanes.com)* 949 37 69 23

MADRID

- **ARANJUEZ** *(http://www.aranjuez.es)* 918 090 360
- **COLMENAR DE OREJA** *(http://www.colmenardeoreja.com)* 918 944 702
- **ESTREMERA** *(http://www.estremera.com)* 918 721 648
- **FUENTIDUEÑA DE TAJO** *(http://www.fuentiduenadetajo.org)* 918 728 002
- **VILLAMANRIQUE DE TAJO** *(http://www.villamanriquedetajo.com)* 918 727 186
- **VILLAREJO DE SALVANÉS** *(http://www.villarejodesalvanes.es)* 918 744 002

TERUEL

- **ALBARRACÍN** *(https://www.albarracin.es/en/)* 978 700 400
- **CALOMARDE** *(http://www.calomarde.es/ayuntamiento/)* 978 705 022
- **FRÍAS DE ALBARRACÍN** *(http://www.friasdealbarracin.es)* 978 705 030
- **TORRES DE ALBARRACÍN** *(http://www.torresdealbarracin.es)* 978 706 103

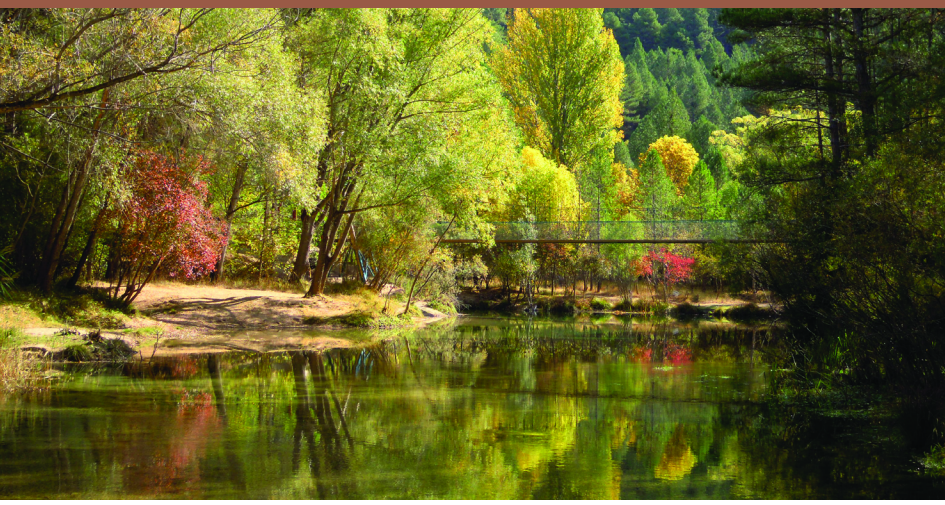
TOLEDO

- **ALBARREAL DEL TAJO** *(https://albarrealdetajo.es/)* 925 749 644
- **ALDEANUEVA DE BARBARROYA** *(http://www.aldeanuevadebarbarroya.org/)* 925 706 074
- **AÑOVER DE TAJO** *(http://www.anoverdetajo.es)* 925 506 003
- **BURUJÓN** *(http://www.burujon.es)* 925 756 081
- **CALERA Y CHOZAS** *(http://www.caleraychozas.es)* 925 846 004
- **CARPIO DE TAJO (EL)** *(http://www.elcarpiodetajo.es)* 925 757 171
- **CAZALEGAS** *(http://www.cazalegas.es)* 925 869 002
- **CEBOLLA** *(http://www.ayuntamientodecebolla.com)* 925 866 002
- **MALPICA DE TAJO** *(http://www.malpicadetajo.es/)* 925 877 214
- **PUEBLA DE MONTALBÁN (LA)** *(http://www.pueblademontalban.com)* 925 745 858
- **PUENTE DEL ARZOBISPO (EL)** *(http://www.puentedelarzobispo.es)* 925 436 162
- **TALAVERA DE LA REINA** *(http://www.talavera.org)* 925 720 100
- **TOLEDO** *(http://www.ayto-toledo.com)* 925 269 700
- **VILLARRUBIA DE SANTIAGO** *(http://www.villarrubiadesantiago.es)* 925 150 281

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **TAJO RIVER BASIN AUTHORITY**
  http://www.chtajo.es 915 350 500
- **SPANISH RAILWAYS FOUNDATION. GREENWAYS**
  https://viasverdes.com/en/
- **UNESCO GEOPARK: VILLUERCAS-IBORES-JARA**
  https://geoparquevilluercas.es/the-geopark/villuercas-ibores-jara/the-geopark-2/
- **ALTO TAJO NATURAL PARK**
  http://www.parquenaturalaltotajo.es/
- **DEHESA DE CORDUENTE INTERPRETATION CENTRE** 949 831 102
- **SEQUERO DE OREA INTERPRETATION CENTRE** 949 835 393
- **ALTO TAJO INTERPRETATION CENTRE. ZAOREJAS** 949 848 217
- **MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL LIVESTOCK FARMING IN THE ALTO TAJO** 949 848 217
- **MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK**
  http://www.parquedemonfrague.com/
- **MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK INFORMATION CENTRE** 927 199 134
- **RECÓPOLIS INTERPRETATION CENTRE** 949 376 898
- **ALTO TAJO INTERNATIONAL NATURE PARK**
  https://turismotajointernacional.es/ 927 592 029
- **GOVERNMENT OF ARAGON**
  http://www.aragon.es
- **REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF CASTILLA-LA MANCHA**
  https://www.jccm.es
- **COMMUNITY OF MADRID**
  http://www.madrid.org
- **REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF EXTREMADURA**
  http://www.juntaex.es/web/
- **TOLEDO MUNICIPAL TOURISM BOARD**
  http://www.toledo-turismo.com/
- **CUENCA TOURIST OFFICE**
  http://turismo.cuenca.es/
- **MADRID REGIONAL TOURIST BOARD**
  http://turismomadrid.es/es/
- **HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF CASTILLA-LA MANCHA**
  http://www.patrimoniohistoricoclm.es/
- **TRANSLANA PROJECT**
  http://www.translana.org
- **TAJO-SALOR ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES**
  http://www.tajosalor.es/

Nature Trails









Since 1993, the Nature Trails Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has the main objective of re-conditioning old unused infrastructure (railway lines, livestock trail or traditional paths), to give them new life as spaces for citizens to use and enjoy.

This guide offers detailed texts and accompanying maps for the nature trails completed to date, which are one of the best ways of getting close to nature and discovering the culture and traditions of our territory.