Nature Trails

La Mancha Wetlands 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

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Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain

Nature Trails

La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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INTRODUCTION

La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail runs through the main lakes of La Mancha Húmeda, which are part of the Natura 2000 network and designated, amongst other protection statuses, as a Biosphere Reserve, with some of them included on the Ramsar Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance.

The trail consists of 5 stages and 6 detours with an approximate length of 150 km. This itinerary runs along broad, smooth relief paths between the provinces of Toledo, Ciudad Real and Cuenca. This feature makes it the perfect trail for bike rides, especially in seasons with a mild climate such as spring and autumn.

Finally, improving the network structure within the Nature Trails Programme, the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail is connected with the Guadiana Nature Trail and the Vía Verde del Trenillo Nature Trail in its Villacañas-Quintanar de la Orden section.

La Mancha Wetlands form a Protected Natural Area covering more than 14,000 hectares (ha), which is part of the Natura 2000 network as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA). This area, which is fragmented, stretches across the provinces of Toledo, Ciudad Real and Cuenca; it is also designated as a Biosphere Reserve known as La Mancha Húmeda, and many of its lakes are designated as Nature Reserves. It is characterised by a gentle relief and a climate with a distinctly continental character, featuring numerous shallow salt lakes that are highly seasonal, many of which dry up completely during the summer months. These unique characteristics contribute to the botanical and faunal value of this area. From a botanical perspective, a multitude of species adapted to hypersaline conditions thrive in the vicinity of these lagoon basins, notably including a wide range of protected and endangered species listed in national and regional catalogues. The area's importance in terms of wildlife lies mainly in the bird populations that find refuge here, both during their migratory passage and on a year-round basis. For all these reasons, preserving and conserving these areas and their flora and fauna communities is a commitment we all share.

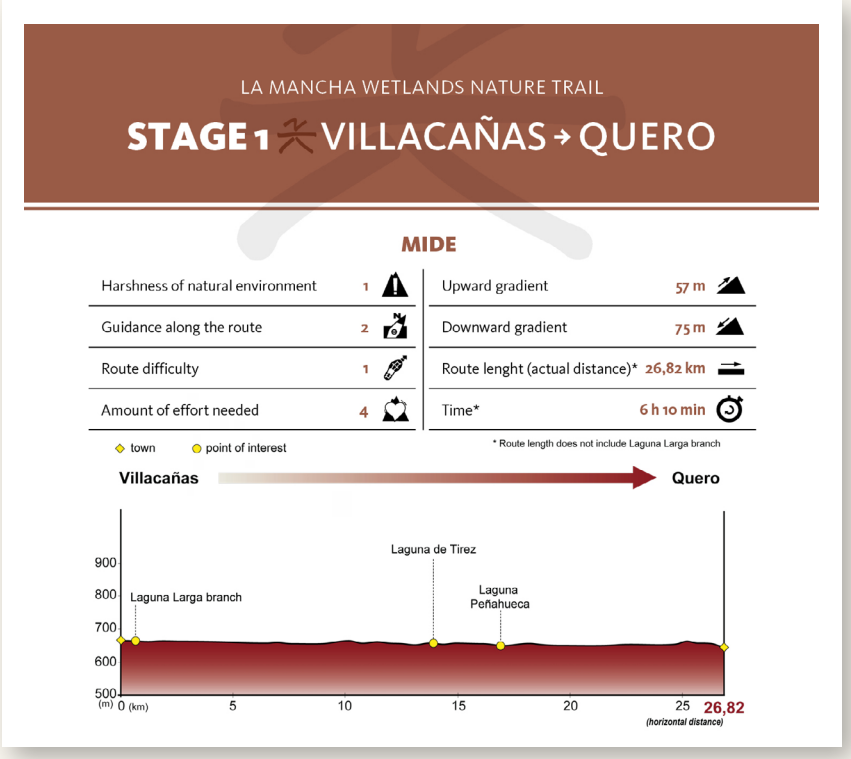
MIDE
EXCURSION INFORMATION METHOD

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

LA MANCHA WETLANDS NATURE TRAIL

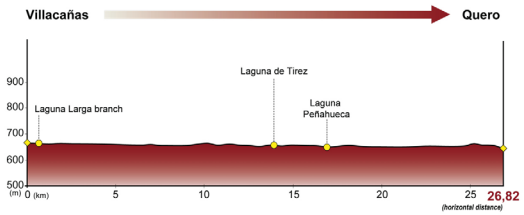
STAGE 1 VILLACAÑAS → QUERO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	57 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	75 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)*	26,82 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time*	6 h 10 min

town · point of interest

* Route length does not include Laguna Larga branch



LA MANCHA WETLANDS WELCOME THE TRAVELLER WITH ITS NORTHERNMOST LAGOONS

The first stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail runs across Toledo's lands throughout almost 27 km. After exploring Villacañas and its typical silos, the traveller will visit the town's lagoon complex, starting with the Laguna Larga and moving forward to the Laguna de Tirez and the Laguna de Peñahueca. Between these last two lagoons, the River Riánsares flows into the River Gigüela forming the Laguna del Taray in the municipality of Quero. Leaving behind the Lagunas y Albardinales del Gigüela Nature Reserve, the trail reaches the town of Quero, escorted by its restored windmill.



A close-up of the salt crust in Peñahueca Lagoon

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.

VILLACAÑAS

Town in the province of Toledo, located in the region of La Mancha. Various remains and ruins from different settlements have been found; up to four settlements existed within the town, which have now disappeared: Borregas, Ormeña, Ormeñuela and Tirez. The Carta Puebla de Villacañas population chart was granted in 1230 by the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem. Another important chapter in the town's history was the disentailment carried out in the 18th century, which resulted in the restructuring of land ownership and the emergence of labourers or unskilled farm labourers. They were poor families who worked the land, compelled to reside in poor underground houses, known as "silos", due to their economic situation. The architectural, ethnographic and cultural value of these buildings has resulted in its declaration as an historic-artistic site, specifically a Heritage of Cultural Interest. The Nuestra Señora de la Asunción Church is also worth visiting.

The economic sector, linked to agriculture for years, is currently based on vines, wheat and olive trees. Moreover, a large industry mainly linked to the wood sector and the production of doors promotes employment both in the town and in the region.

Among the local festivities, the most important celebration is the Cristo de la Viga day (1 May), which has been awarded Regional Tourist Interest status.

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



Laguna Larga de Villacañas

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

NATURE TRAILS

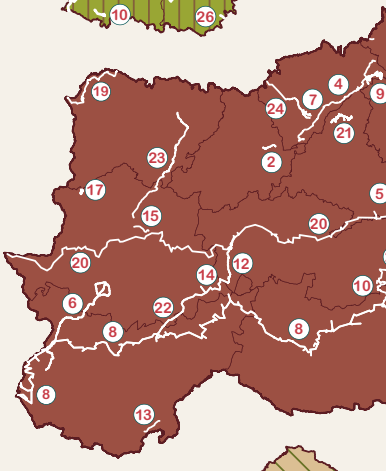
I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

- 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)



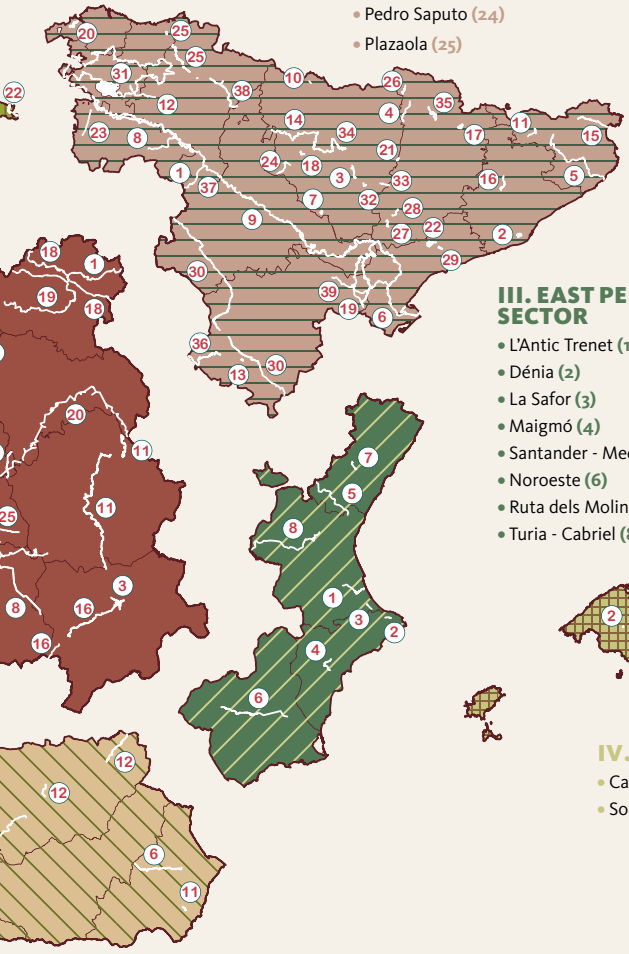


VII. CANARY SECTOR

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

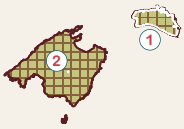
II. NORTHEAST PENINSULAR SECTOR

- 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)



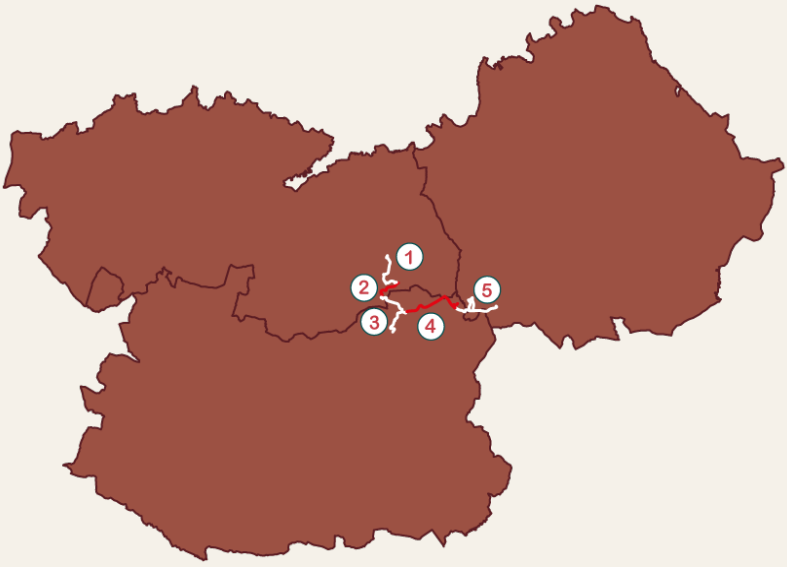
IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

- 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)

LA MANCHA WETLANDS NATURE TRAIL



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Close-up of a bunch of grapes

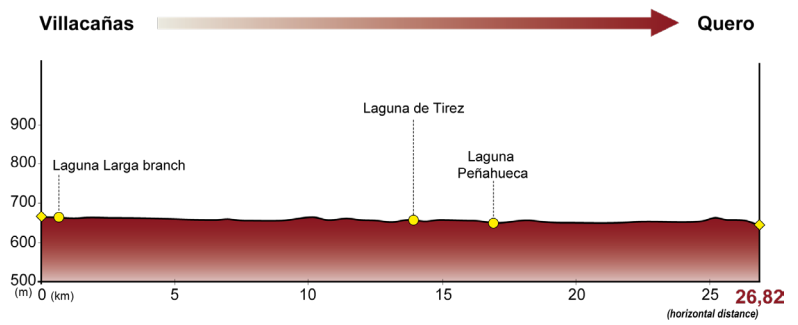
STAGE 1 VILLACAÑAS → QUERO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	57 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	75 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)*	26,82 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time*	6 h 10 min

◇ town ○ point of interest

* Route length does not include Laguna Larga branch



LA MANCHA WETLANDS WELCOME THE TRAVELLER WITH ITS NORTHERNMOST LAGOONS

The first stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail runs across Toledo's lands throughout almost 27 km. After exploring Villacañas and its typical silos, the traveller will visit the town's lagoon complex, starting with the Laguna Larga and moving forward to the Laguna de Tirez and the Laguna de Peñahueca. Between these last two lagoons, the River Riánsares flows into the River Gigüela forming the Laguna del Taray in the municipality of Quero. Leaving behind the Lagunas y Albardinales del Gigüela Nature Reserve, the trail reaches the town of Quero, escorted by its restored windmill.



A close-up of the salt crust in Peñahueca Lagoon



Molino en Medio

LThe first stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail starts at the connection to the Trenillo Natural Trail. Right after, you will cross the CM-410 road, taking extreme precautions, and leave the town of Villacañas on the right. Then, also on the right side, you will see the beginning of the 900 m detour that leads to the Laguna Larga de Villacañas (*endorheic, anthropomorphised lagoon with a surface of 84 ha that receives treated wastewater from the wastewater treatment plant (EDAR) of Villacañas. It contains different species of aquatic flora and numerous species of microcrustaceans and algae that favour the right habitat for a large number of aquatic birds*), and in particular to the Flamingo Observatory, where you will enjoy the beautiful landscape and its biodiversity, especially the flamingo community (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) that resides in this environment.

Back on the main trail, you will be delighted with the landscape that surrounds the right side of the lagoon as you move away, little by little, from this natural environment. A few metres after passing by kilometre point 3, the itinerary reaches the ruins of the Molino en Medio. From this mill, the trail moves forward in parallel to the River Riánsares, always on the left side. This Arab mill used water from the River Riánsares to grind wheat thanks to a cogwheel, a mobile circular stone with a central hole to insert the grain and that was mounted on a fixed stone, and thus making flour.

You will continue your journey throughout the Cañada Real Soriana Oriental that witnessed the cattle's seasonal mobility for centuries. After leaving the Molino de Abajo behind, you will cross the Madrid-Cádiz railway line by an overpass and reach kilometre point 7 of this stage.

DTwo kilometres afterwards, the trail continues to the west, leaving the River Riánsares in the proximity of its mouth in the River Gigüeña, forming the Laguna del Taray (*lagoon with a surface of 120 ha, formed by the alluvial deposits of the rivers Gigüela and Riánsares. Its sheet of water is permanent throughout the year and its fluvial nature causes its hypo-saline character; it can have a maximum depth of 2.5 m. The vegetation of its banks is mainly composed of reed beds and bulrush that attract numerous water bird species*). The ruins known as Las Casas Romanas are located just a few metres before reaching kilometre 10 of this stage. After walking for a kilometre, you will see the Hito de la Costera on the left side, with the cross from the Order of St. John carved in stone, which has served as a territorial limitation since the period of the Reconquista.

Continuing along the Cañada Real Soriana Oriental, you will cross the TO-3077 road, with the utmost care, to immediately reach the Laguna de Tirez (*endorheic,*



Tirez Lagoon

hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 89 ha that receives its water intake from the runoff, being completely linked to rainfall as a result. Saltpetre, which was exploited in the past, gives it a characteristic smell. The high concentration of salt causes the formation of saline efflorescences in summer, when it remains completely dry). You will enjoy its spectacular panoramic view for almost 2 km.

A few metres before reaching kilometre point 15, the trail turns left, leaves the Cañada Real Soriana Oriental behind and crosses the TO-3077 road again, reaching shortly after the Laguna de Peñahueca (*endorheic, hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 120 ha that receives its water intake from the runoff, being completely linked to rainfall as a result. The effect of the salt extraction activities, significant in the past, are visible in its basin. It shelters important populations of insect species, whose biological cycle is linked to saline plan species*). In this lagoon, you will appreciate the great value of its environment thanks to a small botanical itinerary and the Pagaza observatory. After passing by kilometre point 17, the lagoon will begin disappearing in the distance.

Two kilometres afterwards, you will cross the River Gigüela through a bridge and enter into the Lagunas y Albardinales del Gigüela Nature Reserve. Along the path that surrounds this flood-plain area, you will continue leaving the tamarisks on the right side and rain-fed crops and some vineyards on the left.



Quero Windmill



Flamingos at Laguna Larga in Villacañas

At kilometre point 23, the itinerary turns right and crosses the albardines until it reaches a livestock holding that precedes the overpass on the Madrid-Cádiz railway line.

A rest area belonging to the Don Quijote Route and the municipal cemetery indicate the proximity to the town of Quero and the end of this first stage. You will take the wooded Las Viñas street, turn right on Cristóbal Colón street and reach the roundabout to continue through the Ronda Pueblo until its junction with the CM-3130 road that crosses the city or the Castilla-La Mancha avenue, as it is known in the town. At this point, the interpretation panel marks the end of this first stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail between the towns of Villacañas and Quero (Toledo).

LAGUNA LARGA BRANCH

A less than 1 km branch that draws from the Main Route and continues to reach the Laguna Larga de Villacañas, specifically the Flamingo Observatory, where you can enjoy this natural environment.

VILLACAÑAS

Town in the province of Toledo, located in the region of La Mancha. Various remains and ruins from different settlements have been found; up to four settlements existed within the town, which have now disappeared: Borregas, Ormeña, Ormeñuela and Tirez. The Carta Puebla de Villacañas population chart was granted in 1230 by the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem. Another important chapter in the town's history was the disentailment carried out in the 18th century, which resulted in the restructuring of land ownership and the emergence of labourers or unskilled farm labourers. They were poor families who worked the land, compelled to reside in poor underground houses, known as "silos", due to their economic situation. The architectural, ethnographic and cultural value of these buildings has resulted in its declaration as an historic-artistic site, specifically a Heritage of Cultural Interest. The Nuestra Señora de la Asunción Church is also worth visiting.

The economic sector, linked to agriculture for years, is currently based on vines, wheat and olive trees. Moreover, a large industry mainly linked to the wood sector and the production of doors promotes employment both in the town and in the region.

Among the local festivities, the most important celebration is the Cristo de la Viga day (1 May), which has been awarded Regional Tourist Interest status.

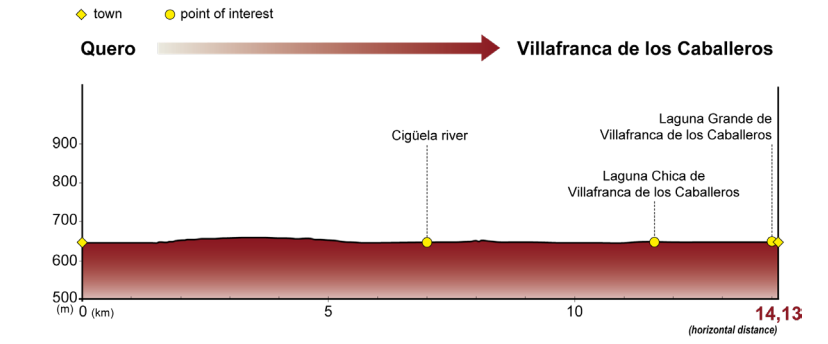


Laguna Larga de Villacañas

STAGE 2 QUERO → VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	24 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	24 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	14,13 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 20 min



FROM SALT EXTRACTION ACTIVITIES TO MEDICINAL BATHS: FROM THE LAGUNA GRANDE DE QUERO TO THE LAGUNA GRANDE DE VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS

This short stage of approximately 14 km winds through Quero (Toledo), exploring its Laguna Grande and the River Gigüela, and diving into the Lagunas y Albardinales del Gigüela. Afterwards it circles the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros to finally reach the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros.



Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros



Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) at Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros

The second stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail starts in the town of Quero. It continues along Avenida de Castilla-La Mancha (CM-3130 road) towards the south-west until it gets to kilometre point 27 of the Main Route. When you find a roundabout at the entrance to the town, you must take the dirt path on the left, surrounding the roundabout.

The trail continues in parallel to the CM-3130 road and to the Cañada Real Soriana Oriental, which witnessed the transhumance movements of the livestock for centuries. At the same time, and always on the left side of the trial, you will enjoy the landscape of the Laguna Grande de Quero (*endorheic, hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 72 ha, located south-west of the town of Quero. It was historically exploited for the extraction of salt and brine; currently, the lagoon basin partially preserves the slope of the old pools*). At certain times, the salt accumulated in the surface reflects the sunlight, offering a stunning visual spectacle.

A few metres after kilometre point 28 and after crossing a flood-plain pass, the trail is paved. At this point you will also find an interpretation panel.

After leaving the Laguna Grande de Quero behind, you will cross the Madrid-Cádiz railway line by an underpass and reach the Quero wastewater treatment plant (EDAR). Once these facilities have been crossed, the trail becomes a dirt path again and it continues parallel to the CM-3130 road.

The smooth climb which starts after crossing the railway line comes to an end at kilometre point 30. Walking along the trail, flanked by a road on the right and rain-fed crops on the left, you will cross several flood-plain passes and reach, right after point kilometre 32, the Lagunas y Albardinales del Gigüela Nature Reserve.

You must cross the CM-3130 road with the utmost care and go along it for about 200 m, always on the correct side depending on whether you are going on foot or by bicycle.

At kilometre point 34, the dirt path continues and goes parallel to the CM-3130 road on the right side. A few metres afterwards, you must go along the road again for about 125 m towards Quero. Once this section is completed, you must turn left to start an ascending dirt path that leads to the flood-plain area of the Laguna Grande and the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros, as indicated on a panel located in an intersection.



Accessible birdwatching point at the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros

After kilometre point 36, the trail turns left and continues flanked by large-sized tamarisks on both sides, as the species of this genus are well adapted to this saline environment. A new kilometre point marks a turn to the left and, in a southerly direction, a repopulated area of stone pines (*Pinus pinea*) will accompany you on the left side of the trail. The track turns left continuing the stone pines area and starts a smooth descent towards the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros (*lagoon with a surface of 37 ha that receives water intake from the River Gigüela via the Caz de las Lagunas canal. It contains water almost all year, although its volume is drastically reduced during the summer period. It is connected to the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros. It contains a broad sample of charophytes with reed and cattail formations in its banks, and serves as a shelter for different species of passerine birds*).

The trail continues on the right side, but the signposting invites you to turn left and walk the approximately 300 m between the intersection and the bird observatory of the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros, where you can enjoy the richness of the fauna and the beautiful scenery.

Back on the trail, you will continue the route flanked by the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros on the left and cereal crops and vineyards on the right. After kilometre point 39, a repopulated area of Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*) separates the two lagoons. The San Cristóbal Shrine, founded in 1980, marks the beginning of the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros (*lagoon with a surface of*



Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros



Fishermen's post at Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros

72 ha that receives its water intake from the River Gigüela via the Caz de las Lagunas canal, connected to the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros. Since the 18th century it has been a bathing area due to the claimed curative properties of its water. Many second homes, accommodations and different restaurants have been built along its banks, resulting in the creation of an area known as Urbanización de las Lagunas).

A few metres afterwards, you will find two floating fishing posts and, right after kilometre point 40, the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros resting area, where the trail is paved.

The Lagunas Grande y Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros Interpretation and Education Centre indicates that the trail is entering the residential area surrounding the Laguna Grande. It continues along Avenida de la Laguna Grande until reaching the Abuela roundabout, where an interpretation panel indicates the end of this second stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail between Quero and Villafranca de los Caballeros.



Laguna Grande de Quero

QUERO

Town of the province of Toledo that belongs to the region of La Mancha, whose origins date back to Palaeolithic period, although some remains from subsequent ages have been found, since the natural deposits of water have attracted inhabitants over the years. Salt extraction activities in the Laguna Grande date back to the Roman period and were continued until the end of the 20th century, when the economy was based on agricultural and salt activities depending on the time of the year.

The architectural heritage is particularly reflected on religious buildings, such as the Ntra. Sra. de la Asunción Church, the Ntra. Sra. de las Nieves Shrine and the Soledad Shrine. The restored windmill and another partially preserved mill are also worth noting.

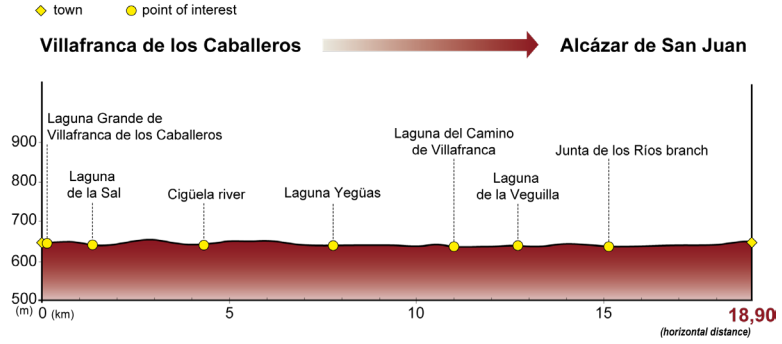


Detalle de alacranera (*Salicornia ramosissima*)

STAGE 3 VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS → ALCÁZAR DE SAN JUAN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	60 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	57 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	18,90 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 30 min



FROM VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS (TOLEDO) TO ALCÁZAR DE SAN JUAN (CIUDAD REAL), THE TRAVELLER WILL FIND NUMEROUS WETLANDS

The third stage, with almost 19 km, harbours a large number of wetlands. The trail begins at the Laguna Grande de Villafranca, explores the Laguna de la Sal and leaves the province of Toledo crossing the River Gigüela, whose basin indicates the limit between provinces. In Ciudad Real the traveller will reach the Laguna de las Yeguas, soon afterwards the Laguna del Camino de Villafranca and finally the Laguna de la Veguilla. The town of Alcázar de San Juan is the starting point of the Junta de los Ríos detour. The third stage ends after crossing the town, which is also worth a visit.



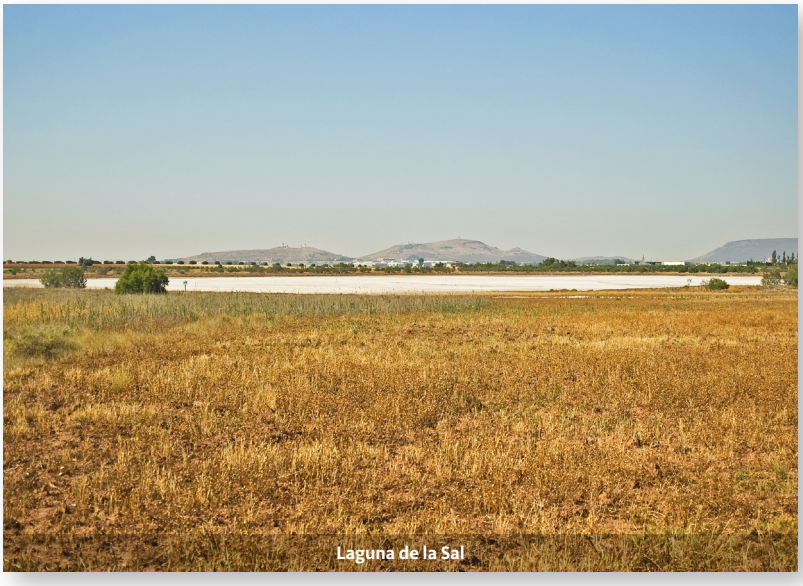
Flamingos (Phoenicopterus roseus) at the Veguilla lagoon

The third stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail connects the towns of Villafranca de los Caballeros and Alcázar de San Juan. This stage begins at the Abuela roundabout, in the residential area of Laguna Grande in Villafranca de los Caballeros.

You will pass by kilometre point 41 of the Main Route along Avenida de la Laguna Grande, reach the Puerta de las Lagunas roundabout and continue circling and enjoying the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros along Avenida de la Laguna Chica.

At the interpretation panel, the trail turns right and continues along Calle Polvorín, leaving behind the Laguna Grande de Villafranca de los Caballeros. At the end of this street, you must carefully cross the CM-3130 road and continue straight along the dirt path. At the next intersection, the trail turns right and continues along a path that leads to the Laguna de la Sal (*endorheic, shallow lagoon with a surface of 30 ha and a strong seasonality that allows the existence of partridges and rabbits. The vegetation is clearly influenced by this seasonality, and therefore species as albardine, tamarisks and some specimens of the Limonium sp. genus are highly common in this area*). The trail descends, approaching the lagoon basin and turns left, always keeping the lagoon on the right side and moving away from it, little by little, surrounded by rain-fed crops, olive groves and vineyards.

After crossing the Cerro Miguel, you will head to the River Gigüela basin. Upon reaching the river, the trail turns right, narrows and continues parallel to the river. The itinerary leaves the province of Toledo after kilometre point 45 and ventures into Ciudad Real after crossing the River Gigüela through a bridge and turning to the left. From this point the trail becomes wider and begins a small ascent where the crops draw all the attention.



Laguna de la Sal



Close-up of sea lavender (Limonium sp.)

The trails continues its descent and reaches a solar farm used to produce photovoltaic power, located on the right side of the path, where you will see the Laguna de las Yeguas (*lagoon with a surface of 66 ha and an endorheic and hyper-saline nature that results in the absence of aquatic vegetation. A wide variety of plant species adapted to high concentrations of salt are distributed over its banks, serving as a nesting place for diverse bird species, such as the Kentish plover*). From this spot, after kilometre point 49, the panoramic view of the Laguna de Las Yeguas on the right side is breathtaking.

After several low hills, whose slope and length do not require much effort, the trail turns right and reveals the Laguna del Camino de Villafranca (*endorheic, hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 185 ha, connected to the Laguna de la Veguilla, which receives treated wastewater from the wastewater treatment plant (EDAR) of Alcázar de San Juan. It contains different waders populations*). The trail continues with the lagoon on its right side, so you will be able to bear witness to the vast length of this wetland.

At kilometre point 53, the trail passes the basin of the Creek Albardial by means of an overpass and in less one kilometre it reaches the Laguna de la Veguilla (*lagoon with a surface of 85 ha and endorheic nature which receives treated wastewater from the wastewater treatment plant (EDAR) of Alcázar de San Juan and has water throughout the year. It shelters diverse species: white-headed ducks, flamingos, avocets, black-winged stilts, etc. It is the biggest biodiversity nucleus in La Mancha Wetlands*).

The trail continues towards Alcázar de San Juan and enters this town through the Emilio Castro industrial park. There,you will turn right on Vía Polígono Residencial Alces which, after turning left, becomes Avenida de los Institutos.

This avenue leads to a roundabout in which the industrial park ends. The trail crosses the CM-3165 road (or Avenida Adolfo Suarez) through the crosswalk and takes the bicycle lane located on the right side, leaving the beautiful Alces park on the left side. Without leaving the bicycle lane, it turns left on Avenida Herencia.

This is the starting point of the Junta de los Ríos detour that connects, after over 15 km, the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail and the Guadiana Nature Trail.

A few metres after taking the avenue, you must cross through the crosswalk and continue along Avenida Pablo Iglesias. The bicycle lane in this wide avenue allows touring cyclists to move comfortably, and its broad pavement does likewise for hikers or pedestrians. You will pass by sports facilities, houses and a cooperative wine-growers association, and at the end of the avenue the trail turns left and takes Avenida de Cervera. Two rows of trees will offer you a pleasing shade, and you must turn right on Calle Recreo after walking approximately 400 m. The trail continues along until reaching Calle Federico Álvarez and Paseo de San Isidro until leaving the town.

Once the railway lines have been crossed through an underpass, the trail turns left and, after an unprotected level-crossing of the railway branch that services the precast concrete industry, the third stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail ends.



Church of Ntra. Sra. de la Asunción in Villafranca de los Caballeros



Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Alcázar de San Juan

VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS

A town in the province of Toledo that belongs to the region of La Mancha. The surroundings of the River Amarguillo have been inhabited for centuries, as its waters secured the fertility of the nearby lands. Remains of Iberian, Roman and Muslim settlements have been found and dated, and the population was strengthened after the Reconquista.

Apart from the different settlements, the River Amarguillo has been a great modelling element of the town with its frequent floods, as it has caused floodings that devastated numerous houses and destroyed crops; for this reason, it has undergone some channelling works. The Ntra. Sra. de la Asunción Church, the Cristo the Sta. Ana Shrine and the San Isidro Shrine are just an example of the local architecture, as well as the Miguel de Cervantes monument located next to the city council The economy is based on agriculture and on a rising tourism linked to the Laguna Grande and the Laguna Chica de Villafranca de los Caballeros.

ALCÁZAR DE SAN JUAN

A town in the province of Ciudad Real where different remains from the Stone Age have been found. Some mosaics of the Roman period have been discovered in this area. After the Visigoth settlements, the Arab conquest transforms this town into an important defensive complex known as Al-ka-sar, which was the origin of its current name. During the Reconquista, the Order of St. John repopulated the town. In the 16th century an important gunpowder factory was built and it remained in operation until 1868. The economy, previously based on the railway due to its geographic location, is currently linked to a solid, diverse industrial and commercial network supplemented by the touristic and agricultural activity.

The rich architectural heritage is vast: the Turret of the Grand Prior, different churches built in honour of San Francisco, Santa María, Santa Quiteria and the Santísima Trinidad, and the city council, which served as a casino in the past, are the most representative sites. The local festivities take place between September 2 and 8, just before the harvest.

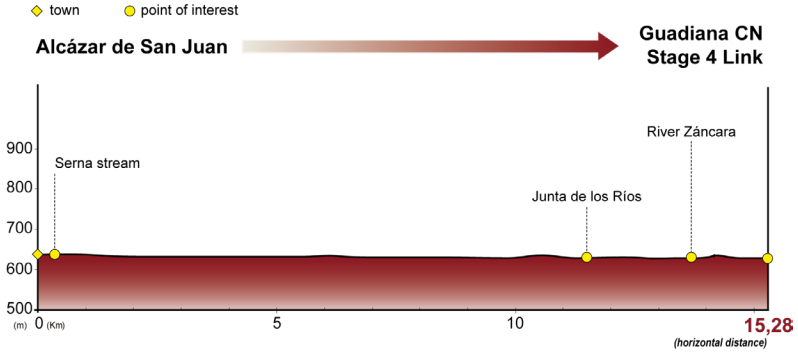


The Grand Prior's Tower in Alcázar de San Juan

BRANCH JUNTA DE LOS RÍOS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	28 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	36 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	15,28 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 40 min



JOINING TWO MAJOR ROADS

A section of just over 15 km linking the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail with stage four of the Guadiana Nature Trail, near the River Záncara.



Junta de los Ríos Branch

The Junta de los Ríos detour begins at the south-west limit of the Alces park. After crossing Avenida Herencia through the crosswalk, the trail turns right on Avenida de la Cruz Roja and right after it reaches the small basin of the Creek Serna.

Continuing along this avenue and after passing by a residential area located on the left side, the paved trail becomes a dirt path and leaves the town of Alcázar de San Juan.

The landscape, predominantly consisting of rain-fed crops, turns yellow and ochre in the summer. The trail gets closer to the CM-42 motorway, known as Autovía de los Viñedos, and runs underneath it. After passing by it, it turns right and then turns left, and continues running in parallel to the drainage canal of the EDAR of Alcázar de San Juan.

Olive trees and tamarisks invade the landscape, characterized by rain-fed crops. After several kilometres and passing by kilometre point 6, the trail turns left, then right and then left again to finally cross the canal before it flows into the River Gigüela, taking the traveller into the renowned Junta de los Ríos.



Ruins on the Junta de los Ríos branch



Drainage channel

The trail turns right, running parallel to the cattle road known as Cordel de Cádiz, leaving a vast repopulation of tamarisks on the right side and the rain-fed crops on the left side.



Bridge over the River Záncara

The trail turns right, running parallel to the cattle road known as Cordel de Cádiz, leaving a vast repopulation of tamarisks on the right side and the rain-fed crops on the left side.

In the east direction, the trail continues in parallel to the River Záncara and turns right to cross it through a 9-arch stone bridge after passing by kilometre point 13.

A low hill between rain-fed crops leads you to kilometre point 15, which precedes the interpretation panel which indicates the end of the Junta de los Ríos detour in Stage 4 of the Guadiana Nature Trail.



Signage on the Junta de los Ríos branch

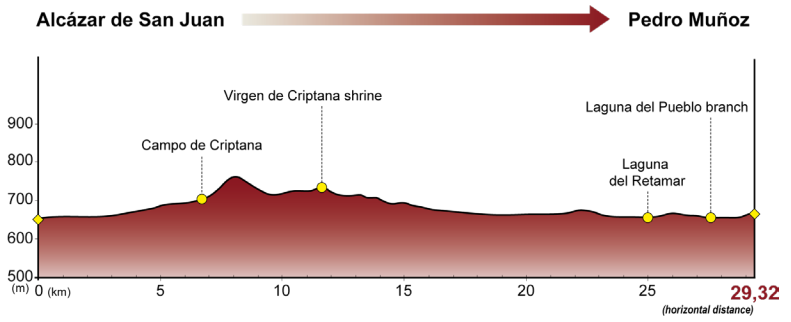
STAGE 4 ALCÁZAR DE SAN JUAN → PEDRO MUÑOZ

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	179 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	167 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)*	29,32 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time*	6 h 55 min

◇ town ○ point of interest

* Route lenght does not include Laguna del Pueblo or San Isidro´s shrine branches



"DO YOU SEE OVER YONDER, FRIEND SANCHO, THIRTY OR FORTY HULKING GIANTS? I INTEND TO DO BATTLE WITH THEM AND SLAY THEM"

The longest stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail, with more than 29 km, begins its itinerary to the south-west of Alcázar de San Juan and reaches Campo de Criptana, the town where Don Quijote confused the windmills with giants. A vast extension of vineyards covers the land until reaching the Laguna del Retamar that precedes the town of Pedro Muñoz, where the Laguna del Pueblo and the San Isidro Shrine are visited through detours.



The Pedro Muñoz Village Lagoon

The fourth stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail connects the towns of Alcázar de San Juan and Pedro Muñoz. This stage begins to the south-east area of this town, next to a precast concrete industry, where the paved path becomes a dirt path. After a smooth ascent, you will reach kilometre point 61 of the Main Route and enjoy the spectacular panoramic view over the windmills of the town.

Vineyards draw all the attention in these vast plains. After passing by kilometre point 63 and continuing a descent, you will reach a large-sized white poplar (*Populus alba*) known as *El Viejo Sabio*, where the trail is paved again.

The trail continues with a smooth descent until reaching an unprotected level-crossing that crosses the railway line. You must cross the lines with the utmost care and then enter the town of Campo de Criptana through the Pozo Hondo industrial park. Always towards the north and after crossing two roundabouts through the crosswalks, you will take the cycle lane or the pavement on the right, depending on how you are travelling, that runs parallel to the CM-3166 road.

Before entering the next roundabout, you will cross the mentioned road and turn left on Avenida de los Siete Molinos. At the end of the avenue, you will turn right on Calle Quero and then right on Calle Cencibel, which a few metres afterwards becomes Travesía Alcázar. You will keep ascending Calle San Isidro and cross the CM-3105 road at the end of the street.



The Windmills of Alcázar de San Juan

The trail follows the first exit on the right, which later becomes a dirt path. Continuing the ascent, you will reach kilometre point 67 and leave behind the ruins of several windmills. Right after, the ascent ends and you will discover, on the right side of the trail and standing as giants, the windmills of Campo de Criptana, preserved in perfect condition, which were declared a Site of Cultural Interest in 1978.

After recovering from the impression caused by this architectural spectacle, the trail begins descending and, a few metres afterwards, is paved. The traveller gets closer to the municipality of Campo de Criptana a few metres after passing by kilometre point 68 through the Huertos street.

Afterwards you will turn left on Travesía Eras, then right on Calle Moro and left again on Calle Santa Águeda. The zigzag continues with a right turn on Calle Delicias, a left turn on Calle Mira, a right turn on Calle García Lorca and then a left turn on Travesía García Lorca. Finally, you must turn right on Calle Cantera and then left on Calle Virgen de Criptana, which will lead you outside this town that is also worth visiting.

You will walk along a paved path that initiates the ascent to the Virgen de la Criptana Shrine. A few metres afterwards, you will pass by kilometre point 69 of the Main Route. The rows of trees that flank the paved path, mainly consisting of pines, will offer you a pleasant shadow.





Virgen de Criptana hermitage

After surpassing kilometre point 70, you will discover the Pozo de la Virgen well and a fountain you can use to cool off. Right after you will reach the ascent to the Virgen de la Criptana Shrine, which offers, apart from its architectural and religious value, a stunning panoramic view of the vast plains.

You will initiate the descent along a dirt path, leaving behind kilometre point 71 and a rest area of the Quijote Route, and crossing a few metres afterwards the CR-1101 road with the utmost care. The trail becomes a paved track again, as on both sides there are several open-cast quarries. After a small climb and leaving the access to the last quarry on the left, the trail becomes a dirt path and approaches a new area of agricultural crops predominated by vineyards.



Pedro Muñoz Town Hall and Church

Along the kilometres, some smooth ascents and descents will delight all the cyclo tourism lovers. At kilometre point 80 the landscape is dotted by large-sized oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and, at the second junction, the trail turns right and initiates a smooth ascent. After several ascents and descents, the change from crops to rain-fed cereal becomes visible in the landscape, and the trail reaches kilometre point 84 of the Laguna del Retamar (*endorheic, hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 90 ha and a strong seasonality, as it depends on the annual rainfall. For this reason, a wide sample of steppe-land bird species populates its surroundings, as well as different species typical of the wetlands*).

After surpassing this lagoon, the trail reaches the town of Pedro Muñoz in less than 3 kilometres. Turning into the left on the first paved street you will reach kilometre point 87 next to an interpretation panel; then you must turn right and carefully cross the CM-3103 road through the crosswalk. This is the starting point of the Laguna del Pueblo detour.

Back in the Main Route trail and within the town of Pedro Muñoz, you must head south-west until you reach the roundabout that connects the CM-3103 road and the N-420 road, known as Avenida de la Constitución by the locals. Then you must turn left and take that avenue, and then turn right on Calle Doctor Fernando Mayordomo.

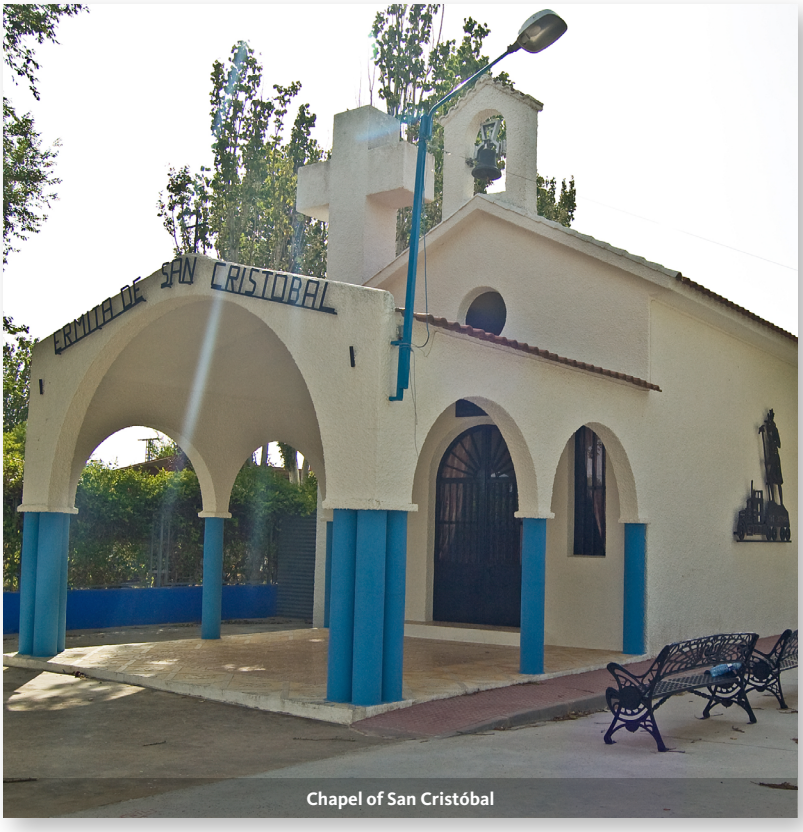


Birdwatching at the Pedro Muñoz Village Lagoon

After several crossings, you must turn left on Calle Carlos Gazaran and then right on Calle Maestro Juan de Ávila, which becomes Calle de Velázquez after a crossing. A new zigzag will make you turn left again on Calle del Saliente and finally turn right on Calle Sorolla to leave Pedro Muñoz, where the interpretation panel marks the end of the fourth stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail between the towns of Alcázar de San Juan and Pedro Muñoz.

LAGUNA DEL PUEBLO BRANCH

This detour starts just after the "el Humedal de Don Quijote" Nature Interpretation Centre in Pedro Muñoz. Once the path ends and after walking a small section along the side of the CM-3103 road, you will take a dirt trail on the right. Keeping the safety fence and the tamarisks of the Laguna del Pueblo on your right hand side, continue following the signs, briefly leaving the sides of the lagoon to then continue parallel to the safety fence once again. After kilometre point 1 of this detour the tamarisks will gradually start to disappear, which will allow you to see the lagoon basin of this wetland (*an endorheic, saline lagoon with a surface of 185 ha which currently receives waters from the fresh waters treated in Pedro Muñoz. It is located in the north, close to the town centre, and such non-natural factors have always had a large influence on its state of conservation. As it has water all year long, it is home to reed beds, bullrushes and saltmarsh bulrushes*).



Chapel of San Cristóbal



Chapel of San Isidro Labrador

Not long after reaching the most northerly point of this natural space, you will reach the Laguna del Pueblo bird Observatory, where you can enjoy the fantastic richness of fauna that is found here. The trail keeps close to the lagoon, heading south towards kilometre point 2. At the next crossroads, take the left San Isidro Shrine detour on the left.

The Laguna del Pueblo detour continues along the path on the right, bordering the lagoon and tamarisks take the spotlight once again, covering your view of the lagoon basin. Once you enter the town again, you turn left onto Calle de la Laguna, bringing this Laguna del Pueblo detour to an end on the Avenida de la Constitución (N-420), where it joins up with the Camino Natural de los Humedales de La Mancha Main Route once again.

SAN ISIDRO SHRINE BRANCH

The San Isidro Shrine Detour starts at the Laguna del Pueblo Detour. By means of a wide dirt track you will come close to the N-420 road, but before you reach it the trail turns left and runs alongside said road. After an overpass, you will start an uphill section which leads towards to San Cristóbal shrine which was opened in 1987.

The path continues straight, leaving the shrine behind and heading north towards the Laguna de Navalafuente (*an endorheic, saline lagoon with a surface of 40 which is dry most of the year. It was turned over and drained in the past, and many trails go through the lagoon basin. For these reasons, vegetation has been altered and it is now covered of salt meadows*), a few metres after the San Cristóbal shrine you will reach the San Isidro shrine which marks the end of this short detour.



Sardinero Mill in Campo de Criptana

CAMPO DE CRIPTANA

A town in the province of Ciudad Real which is situated within the region of La Mancha. It was first populated in the Neolithic period. A Moorish castle once stood where the Virgen de Criptana shrine is currently found. The town was re-populated in 1328 after the reconquest, by the Order of Santiago, and after the fusion of the towns of Criptana and Campo, it started to be known as Campo de Criptana, as it is nowadays.

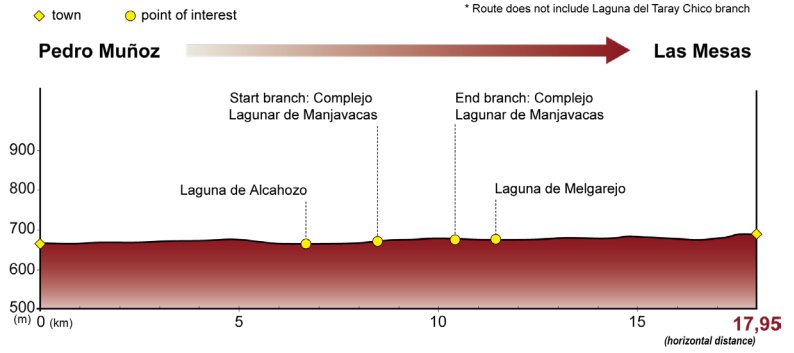
The town's glory days were in the 16th century. It was in this period when the majority of the monuments which are still preserved these days were built. The most stand-out of which is the group of windmills which was the inspiration for the famous battle of Don Quijote against the giants in Miguel de Cervantes' literary masterpiece. These days a total of ten windmills remain, three of which from the 16th century; although at the time there were 34. Its economy is based mainly on agriculture, the services sector, the building sector and the wine industry. The patron saint festivities honour the Santísimo Cristo de Villajos and the Santísima Virgen de Criptana.

STAGE 5 PEDRO MUÑOZ → LAS MESAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	51 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	29 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)*	17,95 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time*	4 h 15 min

* Route does not include Laguna del Taray Chico branch



PASS BY THE MANJAVACAS LAGOON COMPLEX BEFORE THE LAGUNA DEL TARAY CHICO PROVIDES THE PERFECT ENDING

After leaving the town of Pedro Muñoz behind, followed by a section of vineyards, you are welcomed by the Laguna de Alcahozo. Surrounded by vineyards, the town of Las Mesas is reached. Here, after visiting the town centre, another detour takes the traveller to the evergreen Laguna del Taray Chico.



Close-up of a bunch of grapes



Alcahozo Lagoon

The fifth and final stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail starts in the east of the town of Pedro Muñoz at the interpretation panel for this purpose.

This town is left via an asphalt track surrounded by trees on each side which provide some welcome shade. In this shared section, the vineyards line both sides of the trail, which, after going past kilometre point 90 of the Main Route, turns into a dirt path whilst staying equally as wide.

The three following kilometres are completed among vineyards and a gentle slope, advancing along a cattle road known as Vereda de los Serranos. The Laguna de Alcahozo can be seen before your eyes, and you should take the trail on the left at the next detour, leaving the previously mentioned cattle road. A new turn to the left leads to a short decline down to the edge of the Laguna de Alcahozo (*an endorheic, hyper-saline lagoon with a surface of 72 ha which solely depends on the water run-off, thus being particularly seasonal. The prolonged absence of water bodies influences the flora and fauna, with this being a habitat for wader reproduction*). Here, bird lovers can delight at the large observatory.

PEDRO MUÑOZ

A town in the province of Ciudad Real which belongs to the region of La Mancha. Remains found at the Cerro de la Nieve suggest that this was a Carpetani town. The fort was put to use in the Roman period and to this day the bridge over the River Záncara still remains. After the Alans, Visigoths and Moors, the area was left completely unpopulated, and its re-population did not begin again until the 13th century thanks to the Order of Santiago. In the year 1410, epidemics caused the town to be abandoned. A century later the re-population commenced, and this progressed both demographically and economically until the present day, apart from the period of hunger which occurred in the post-war period.

These days Pedro Muñoz has a wide business network made up of three key pillars, the agriculture sector (particularly vineyards) which is connected with part of its industry and finally the service sector. Many traditional solariega manor houses have been conserved, some of which are emblazoned, the architectural heritage is completed by the San Pedro Apóstol church and the Ntra. Sra. de los Ángeles and Ntra. Sra. del Buen Parto chapels. The festivities of the patron saint Virgen de los Ángeles take place between the 1st and 7th August.

The trail continues along the flood plain, with the lagoon always staying on the right hand side. Shortly after kilometre point 95, take a trail on the right which gets wider along the way. This continues bordering the lagoon, and after kilometre point 96 the trail distances itself little by little from this natural space. With no let up, and after another kilometre, a trail is reached on the left which marks the beginning of the Complejo Lagunar de Manjavacas detour.



La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail

The vineyards continue to be the star of the show within the landscape, and when you reach the crossing that marks the end of the Complejo Lagunar de Manajavacas detour to the left of the Main Route, a stand of stone pines also enriches the scenery. Not long after the stand, once again on the left, you pass just 200 m from the Laguna de Melgarejo. At the same time, you reach kilometre point 100 of the Main Route and then continue easterly towards the end of the stage.

Shortly after kilometre point 102, the trail crosses the River Saona (and then runs alongside it for nearly 2 km through the town of Socuéllamos), where you can enjoy a typical riverside woodland. The trail continues among vineyards and rainfed crops and, two kilometres later, the path becomes an asphalt one which soon crosses the Ánimas River.

Now, in the town of Las Mesas in the province of Cuenca, the trail advances along Calle Camino de la Hontanilla. After crossing the CM-3102 road, it continues along Calle Pedro Muñoz, immediately turning right on Calle Nueva. This zigzagging through the town continues on the left on Calle Molino, and then on the right on Calle Pérez Galdos, on the left once again along Calle del Pozo, on the right on Calle Medicina and finally on the left on Travesía Medicina.

Once in Plaza España, you will take the third exit along Calle Príncipe, going uphill to then turn right onto Calle de San Cristóbal. Continue along said road, on the left there is a replica of a windmill and not long afterwards, at the end of the town, there is an interpretation panel which shows the fifth and final stage of the La Mancha Wetlands Nature Trail and the beginning of the Laguna del Taray Chico detour.



Church of Ntra. Sra. de la Asunción in Las Mesas



Taray Chico Lagoon

LAGUNA DEL TARAY CHICO DETOUR

The Laguna del Taray Chico detour starts at the end of Calle San Cristóbal, in the town of Las Mesas, in Cuenca. It ends at the final point of the fifth stage of the Camino Natural de los Humedales de La Mancha, where the Main Route comes to an end.

You will pass by the Carrasquilla creek along a tree-lined asphalt path. Not long after going past kilometre point 1, this becomes a dirt track and gently goes uphill for less than a kilometre.

The vineyards are, once again, the star of the show. Despite this, the closeness to the neighbouring town of Las Pedroñeras can be appreciated due to the garlic (*Allium sativum*) fields which can be seen, as you are now within a Protected Geographical Indication area of garlic called "Ajo Morado de Las Pedroñeras".

After kilometre point 4 you will always be able to see the Laguna del Taray Chico on your left. The trail turns to the left and reaches kilometre point 5, where it turns to the left once again and leads towards the Laguna del Taray Chico (*a lagoon with a surface area of 21 ha which receives waters from the Taray creek. It has water all year long with a maximum depth of 1.5 m. Under these conditions, a dense reed coverage proliferates, which completely surrounds the lagoon, providing it with a certain amount of protection and calmness. That is why many bird species, including the white-headed duck, have chosen it as a breeding place*), this is where the section which gives this detour its name comes to an end. The last 600 metres of this detour take you through the town of Las Pedroñeras, as this lagoon is spread across this town and Las Mesas.

LAS MESAS

A small town in the province of Cuenca, located in the region of La Mancha. In the past it was called Las Mesas Rubias (the Blonde Mesas) as its main crop was cereal and so during the summer the land glistened with this colour. Not much is known about its history, with the first written document being found from the 13th century, thus it can be assumed that it had a similar history to its neighbouring towns. Its economy is based on agriculture, and vineyards reign supreme among the other crops.

The architectural heritage is focused on religious buildings, such as the Ntra. Sra. de la Asunción church and three chapels: San Isidro, San Cristóbal and Santo Niño de la Bola. Festivities take place on the third Sunday in August, in honour the town's patron saint, Santo Niño de la Bola.

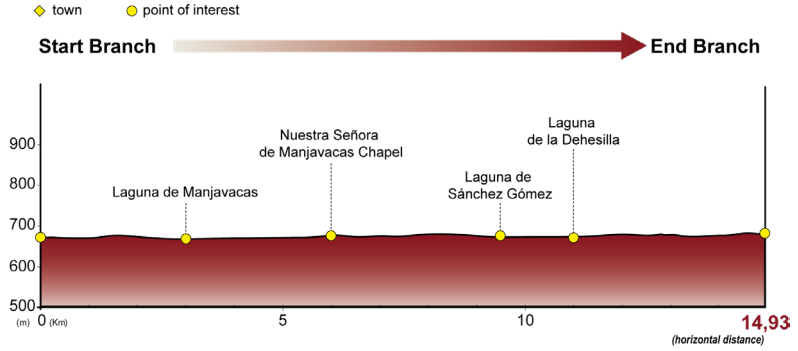


Traditional garlic harvest in Las Mesas

BRANCH MANJAVACAS LAGOON COMPLEX

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	44 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	35 m
Route difficulty	1	Route lenght (actual distance)	14,93 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 35 min



A STUNNING LAGOON COMPLEX, ALWAYS WATCHED OVER BY ITS CHAPEL

The almost 15 km detour, which is just a little less than this fifth and final stage, visits the entire Manjavacas lagoon complex in the province of Cuenca.


Manjavacas Lagoon



Close-up of saltwort (*Salicornia ramosissima*)

This is an almost 15 km long detour which starts at the pathway crossroads just after kilometre point 97 of the Main Route. It goes through vineyards and after a small incline the first kilometre of the detour is completed. Turn left on the CRP-1266 road just after the stand of holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*). After just over 200 m on this road, you turn left and this shared section comes to an end. Take the dirt track and you will reach kilometre point 2 and the great Laguna de Manjavacas (*a lagoon with a surface area of 236 ha which receives its waters from the EDAR de Mota del Cuervo, and therefore has a high amount of nutrients and an average amount of salinity. Due to the large distance that separates the lagoon basin from the town of Mota del Cuervo, this practically dries up in the summer, and during other seasons it is home to large colonies of flamencos*).

As you descend, the Laguna de Manjavacas will be on your right and at kilometre point 3 of the detour you will reach the bird observatory. Just before reaching the next kilometre point, you will leave the wide trail for a detour on the left which, just a few metres afterwards becomes a breath-taking wooden footbridge which immerses you in the surrounding of the Laguna de Manjavacas, specifically at the Mother Ditch.

At the end of this footbridge, the Manjavacas Ringing Station can be seen, and the trail continues in a northerly direction along a dirt track. For a few metres the trail runs parallel to the CUV-1001 road. When coming away from said road, it becomes an asphalt trail and goes through a large pine mass which marks the beginning of the Nuestra Señora de Manjavacas shrine recreational area. After passing by the resting area on the Don Quijote Route, a high observatory is reached whereby you can enjoy outstanding panoramic views of the area, with the Laguna de Manjavacas stealing the spotlight.

Kilometre point 6 is reached after turning to the right and the Nuestra Señora de Manjavacas shrine stands before your eyes after you turn right once again.

The trail continues and crosses the CUV-1001, it then runs alongside this road towards Las Mesas for just 50 m and it then leads onto an asphalt path on the left. Just after kilometre point 7, the path climbs over the Mother Ditch, whose waters run underneath. The path now becomes a dirt track and continues through vineyards and rain-fed crops, it then turns to the right and heads in a southerly direction after kilometre point 8.

The Laguna de Sánchez Gómez (*a lagoon with a surface area of 55, made up of run-off and aquiferous waters. It is a very special natural water feature within Europe, with its most important aspect being its chlorinated magnesium sulphate waters. It is home to both migratory and more stable populations of waders*), appears just a few metres after the change in direction and it stays on your left as you travel from north to south. The end of the Laguna de Sánchez Gómez is marked by a dip on the left of the trail, and here the Laguna de la Dehesilla begins (*this is a 19 ha large endorheic, saline lagoon, depending on the run-off. It is characterised by its defined seasonality. In the summer it is completely dry with various reddish tones due to Salicornia populations in the lagoon basin*) to the right of the trail.



Sánchez Gómez Lagoon



Dehesilla Lagoon

Head in the same direction, and after passing by the ruins known as the Casa de Castaño and the Casa de Chico, you will cross the CUV-1001 road. After the road, the trail heads slightly downhill and is lined by vineyards on both sides, it then enters a stand of stone pines (*Pinus pinea*) which offers some welcome shade. Whilst always continuing south, the trail passes through two sections of this tree-covered area. After the second area, vineyards once again cover the earth and this Manjavacas lagoon complex detour comes to an end and joins the Main Route just after kilometre point 99.





Footbridge over the Acequia Madre canal at Manjavacas Lagoon



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS IN CASTILLA-LA MANCHA**

  (https://areasprotegidas.castillalamancha.es/)

- **LIFE LA MANCHA WETLANDS**

  (http://www.humedalesdelamancha.es/)

- **VILLACAÑAS COUNCIL**

  (https://www.aytovillacanas.com/) 925 56 03 42

- **QUERO COUNCIL**

  (http://www.quero.es/) 926 57 70 04

- **VILLAFRANCA DE LOS CABALLEROS COUNCIL**

  (https://villafrancadeloscaballeros.es/) 926 55 86 40

- **ALCÁZAR DE SAN JUAN COUNCIL**

  (http://www.alcazardesanjuan.es/) 926 57 91 00

- **CAMPO DE CRIPTANA COUNCIL**

  (https://www.campodecriptana.es/) 926 56 12 42

- **PEDRO MUÑOZ COUNCIL**

  (http://www.pedro-munoz.es/) 926 58 60 01

- **LAS MESAS COUNCIL**

  (http://www.lasmesas.es) 967 15 59 01

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.