Nature Trails

La Hoya de Huesca and Somontano de Barbastro Nature Trails









Unión Europea
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GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain

La Hoya de Huesca and Somontano de Barbastro Nature Trails

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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INTRODUCTION

The two Nature Trails featured in this guide run almost exclusively through the central part of the province of Huesca (with the exception of a stretch of around 4 km that passes through the Zaragoza municipality of Murillo de Gállego), crossing the regions from which they take their names: the Hoya de Huesca and the Somontano de Barbastro.

Aside from being in the same province, the Hoya de Huesca and Somontano de Barbastro Nature Trails also share one of Huesca's most distinctive landscapes: the Sierra y los Cañones de Guara Natural Park. A landscape of gorges and rocky outcrops carved out by watercourses through the limestone of the Sierra de Guara, within the largest protected natural area in the Community of Aragon.

The Hoya de Huesca Nature Trail, covering 133 km divided into 8 stages, runs through the region of the same name from west to east. Starting in Agüero, it passes through the towns of Murillo de Gállego, Las Peñas de Riglos, Loarre, La Sotonera, Arguis, Nueno, Loporzano, Siétamo, Ibica and Casbas de Huesca, before heading into the Somontano de Barbastro region via the towns of Abiego and Bierge.

For its part, the Somontano de Barbastro Nature Trail, comprising three stages and covering a total distance of 58 km, passes through the municipalities of Colungo, Alquézar, Adahuesca and Bierge, traversing the region that gives the trail its name from east to west.

The two routes meet at a unique spot: the Salto de Bierge, a weir that was once used for milling and hydroelectric power and is now a very popular recreational area.

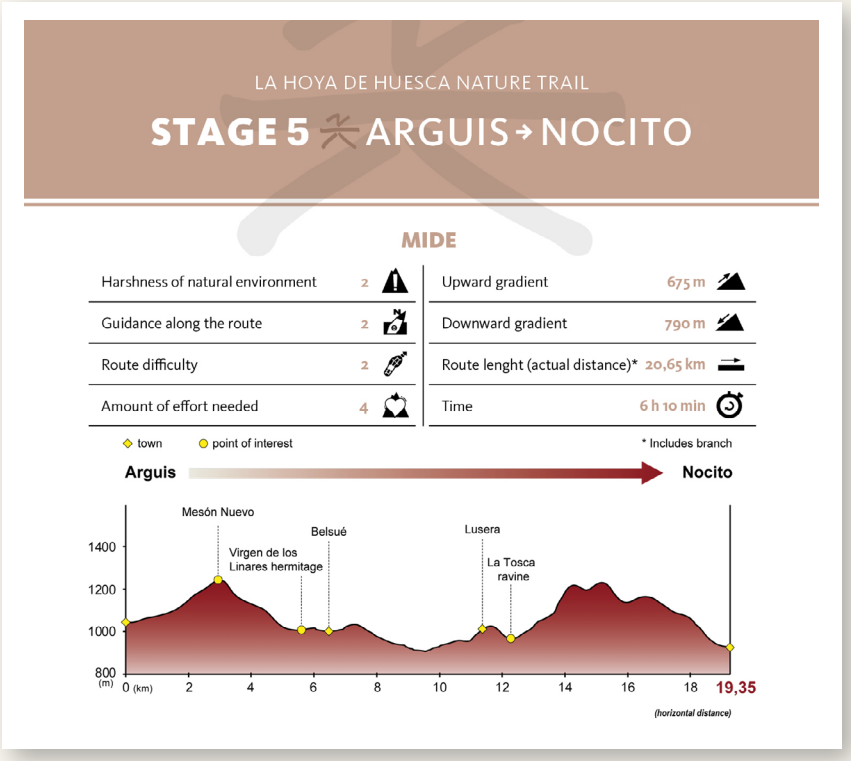
The geographical continuity of the two Nature Trails provides an ideal framework for exploring this part of the province of Huesca, through a landscape of contrasts featuring pastures and farmland, slopes covered in Mediterranean scrub, rivers and ravines nestled between limestone cliffs and intriguing rock formations of conglomerate. It also offers the chance to discover the region's rich historical heritage, ranging from the remains of the earliest settlers – with numerous rock-shelter sites featuring cave paintings – to historic towns such as Alquézar, Agüero and Loarre, and their spectacular castle.

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

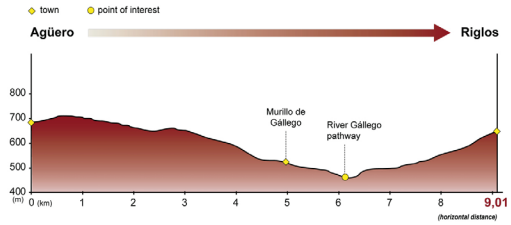
Introductory text

LA HOYA DE HUESCA NATURE TRAIL

STAGE 1 AGÜERO → RIGLOS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	220 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	260 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	9,07 km
Amount of effort needed	2	Time	2 h 25 min



THE KINGDOM OF LOS MALLOS

Some parts of the first Stage of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca, one of the two towns in Aragón most well known for its sheer rock formations or mallos on touring the municipalities of Agüero, Murillo de Gállego (Zaragoza) and Las Peñas de Riglos, coincide with the GR-1. It begins in the town of Agüero, which is located in the extreme northwest of the region of La Hoya de Huesca, at the foot of its impressive mallos. These geological formations, which are characteristic on account of their cylindrical shapes and vertical walls of Miocene conglomerates, bear this name in the whole of the Pre-Pyrenees of Aragón. The mallos of the neighbouring town of Riglos, the end of the first Stage of the Nature Trail, stand out because of their size and importance.



Vista de la localidad de Agüero a los pies de sus mallos

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.



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

rock. You need to make a reservation beforehand if you want to do this route (for more information, contact the tourist office at Alquézar or go to http://pasarelas-dealquezar.com/es_ES/).

Main descriptive text about the Nature Trail

If you want to complete the 17 km of the first stage, you just have to continue upwards for another half a kilometre to come the starting point next to the parish church.

ALQUÉZAR

The small town of Alquézar (from the Arabic al-Qasr, fortress), took shape around the skirts of the mountain where the fortress that gave it its name was built. The fortress itself dates back to the 9th century and was one of the main defensive bulwarks of the Andalusi region of the Barbitania.

Taken by Christians in the 11th c., the town's population began to increase and with that the town began to spread out beyond its walls, to form what is now the current town structure (*Burgo Nuovo Alquezarensis*). The only remaining inhabitants of the castle were clerics, which led to its transformation into the collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor, one of the most recognisable sights of Alquézar.

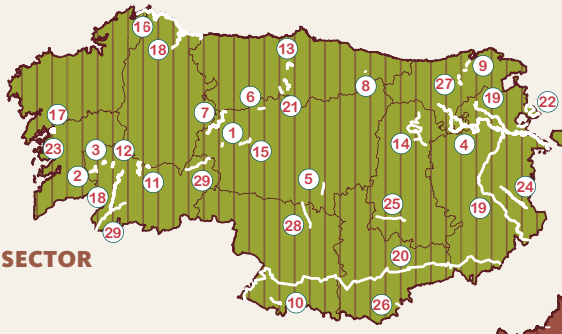
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Table with historical or anecdotal information on some aspect of the Nature Trail

NATURE TRAILS

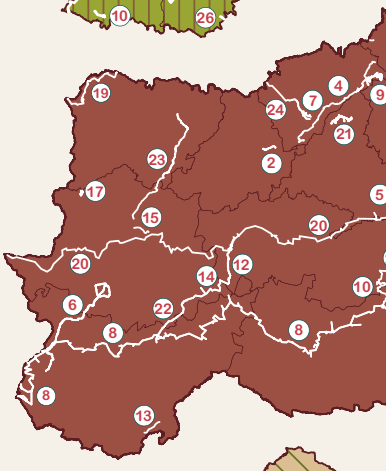
I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

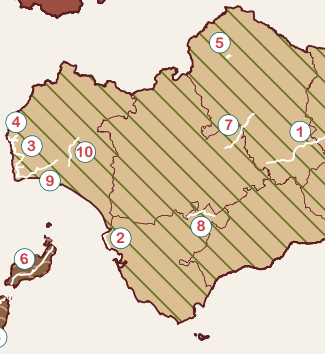
- Cacabelos - Quilós (1)
- Carballeda de Avia (2)
- Dos Arrieiros (3)
- Ebro (4)
- Esla (5)
- Laciana. Villablino to Villaseca section (6)
- Mirada Circular: Ancares Leoneses from Guímara to Balboa (7)
- Muñigo - Covadonga (8)
- Pas (9)
- Sayagués Agricultural Landscape (10)
- La Ribeira Sacra (11)
- 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)





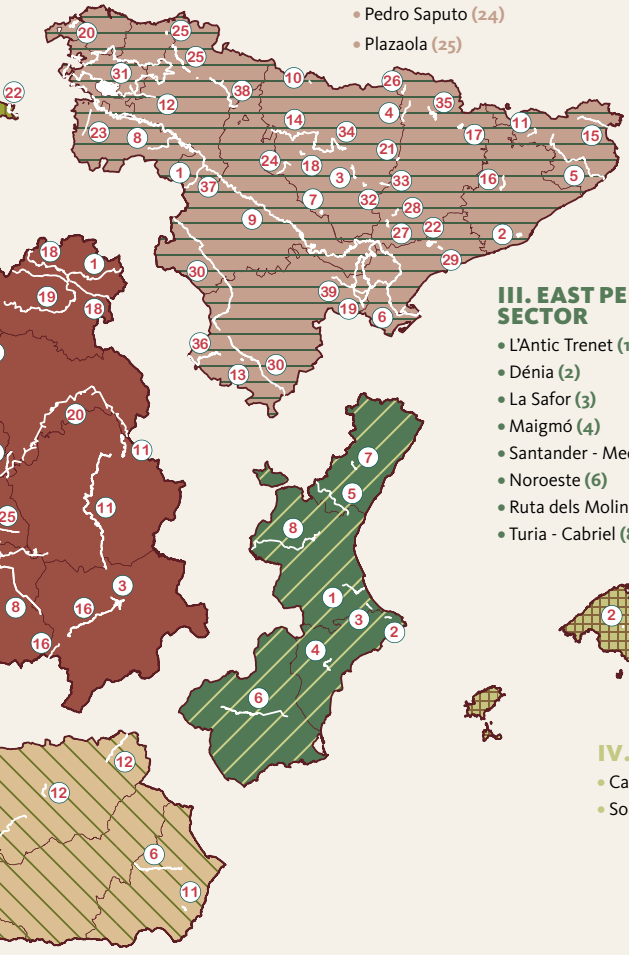


VII. CANARY SECTOR

- 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)



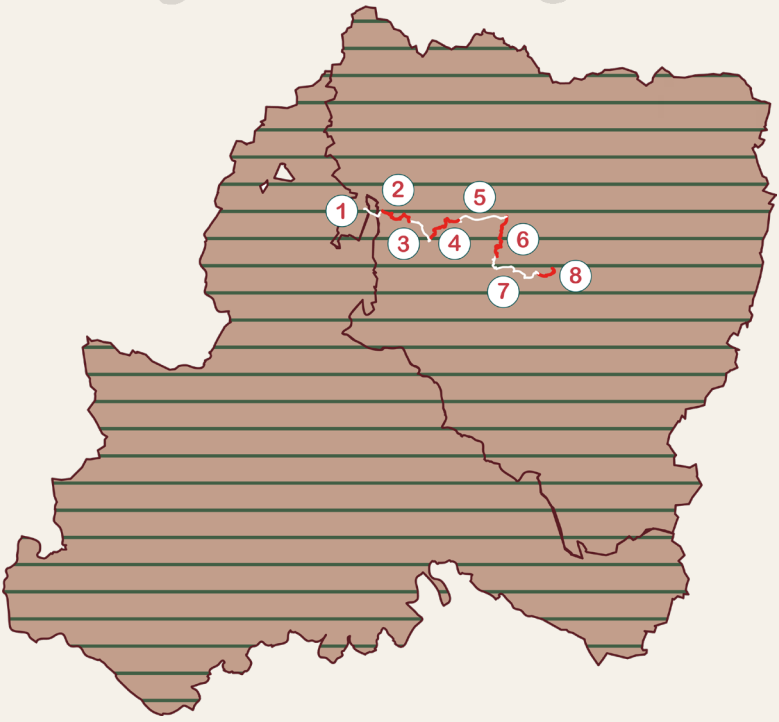
IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

- 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)
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- Los Molinos del Agua (10)
- Lucainena de las Torres to Agua Amarga (11)
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LA HOYA DE HUESCA NATURE TRAIL



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INTRODUCTION
LA HOYA DE HUESCA NATURE TRAIL

The Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca, with a length of almost 133 km between the towns of Agüero and Bierge, runs in a westerly-easterly direction through this region of Huesca to join up, at its end, with the Nature Trail of El Somontano de Barbastro.

La Hoya de Huesca is located in the transition area between the Pre-Pyrenean Sierras and the plain of the River Ebro valley. The Nature Trail initially crosses the Kingdom of Los Mallos, continues across the Sierra del Gratal and Arguis, reaching the Sierra of Guara via the valleys of Belsué and Nocito, to then return through Vadiello to the agricultural plain and the Somontano of the western part of La Hoya.

Due to this mountain-to-plain transition situation, the path offers a wide variety in terms of both natural wealth and cultural heritage.

The route crosses some protected spaces, such as the Natural Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons, two Special Protection Areas for Birds (S.P.A.s of the Sierras of Santo Domingo and Caballera and the River Onsella, and of the Sierra and the Guara Canyons) and four Sites of Community Interest (SCIs of the Sierras of Santo Domingo and Caballera, of Monte Peiró-Arguis, of the Sierra and Guara Canyons and northern Guara). It also runs through other impressive natural spots such as the Mallos de Riglos, de Agüero and de Vadiello; the valleys of Belsué and Nocito; and rivers such as the Gállego, Isuela, Flumen, Guatizalema, Formiga and Alcanadre in conjunction with their ravines.

As regards cultural heritage, along the trail's route you can visit numerous monuments that have been important throughout history, such as the churches of Santiago de Agüero, San Martín and Santa María de Belsué and San Miguel de Foces; the castles of Loarre, Marcuello and the Atalaya de Santa Eulalia; the Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor in Bolea; and the Cistercian Monastery of La Gloria de Casbas in Huesca, all of which have some kind of listing as Sites of Cultural Interest, National Monuments or Historic Artistic Monuments.

This itinerary partly coincides with historic path GR-1 and, as you walk along it, you can link up with two other long paths such as the GR-16 in Nocito and the GR-95 in Riglos and Loarre. Some of the sections are easy to cover, even by bike, and are suitable for horse riding.

All of these attractions make the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca an ideal itinerary for actively enjoying this combination of a unique cultural heritage with a spectacularly beautiful natural environment, within an unparalleled setting in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

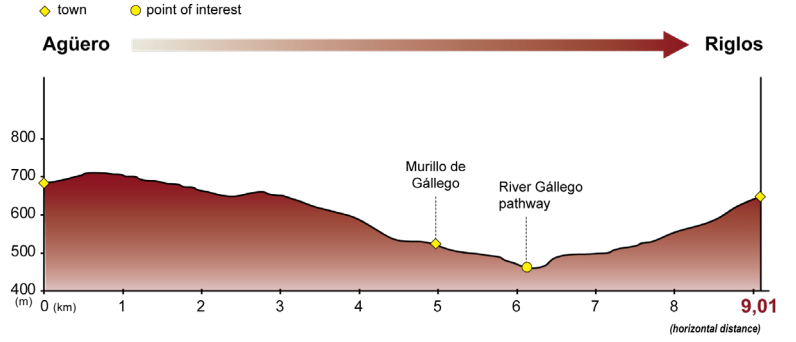


The Peña Sola rock formation in the Agüero Mallos, seen from one of the village's streets

STAGE 1 AGÜERO → RIGLOS

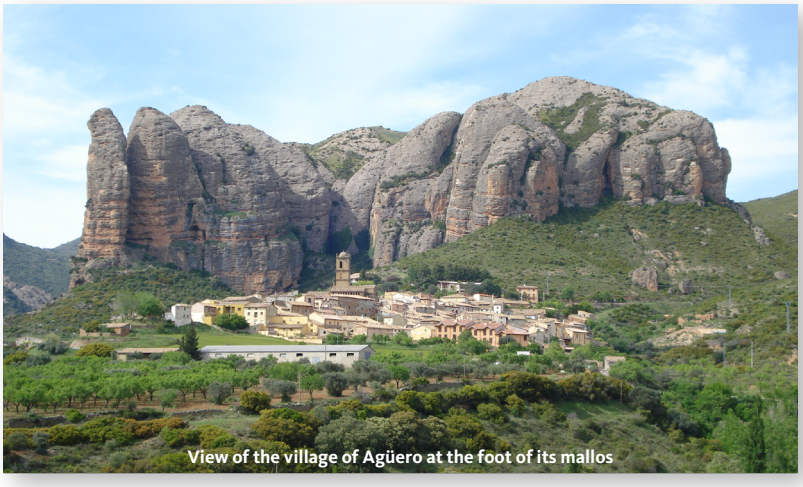
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	220 m
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Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	9,07 km
Amount of effort needed	2	Time	2 h 25 min

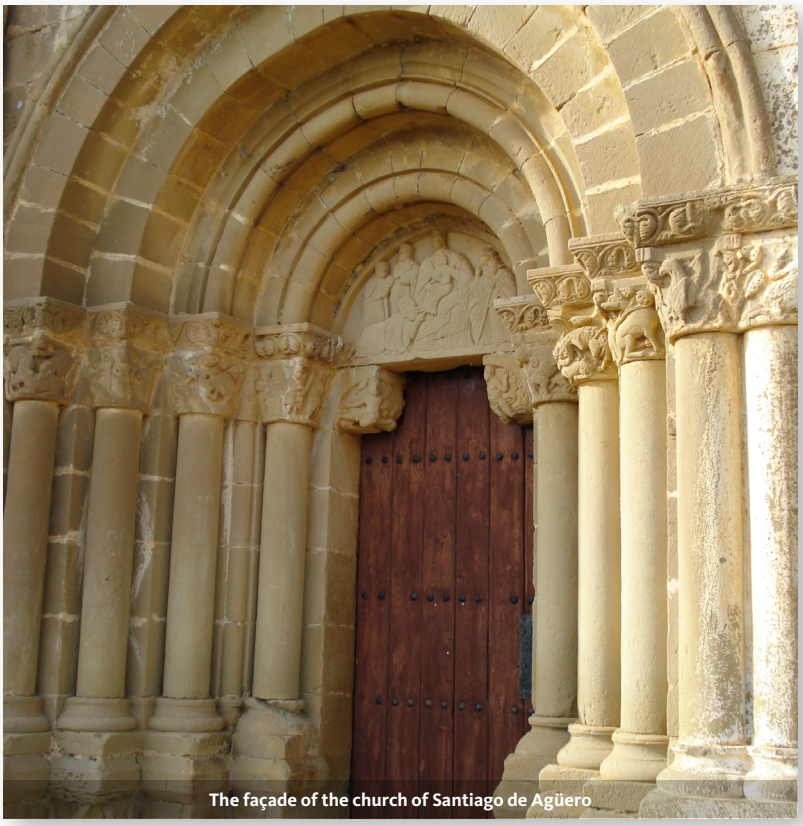


THE KINGDOM OF LOS MALLOS

Some parts of the first Stage of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca, one of the two towns in Aragón most well known for its sheer rock formations or mallos on touring the municipalities of Agüero, Murillo de Gállego (Zaragoza) and Las Peñas de Riglos, coincide with the GR-1. It begins in the town of Agüero, which is located in the extreme northwest of the region of La Hoya de Huesca, at the foot of its impressive mallos. These geological formations, which are characteristic on account of their cylindrical shapes and vertical walls of Miocene conglomerates, bear this name in the whole of the Pre-Pyrenees of Aragón. The mallos of the neighbouring town of Riglos, the end of the first Stage of the Nature Trail, stand out because of their size and importance.



View of the village of Agüero at the foot of its mallos



The façade of the church of Santiago de Agüero

The starting point is in the village of Agüero, situated at the north-western edge of the Hoya de Huesca region, at the foot of its imposing mallos.

The path leaves from the town's main square, where you will find the parish church of San Salvador, declared a Site of Cultural Interest, whose Romanesque façade featuring Christ Pantocrator stands out. Continuing in an easterly direction towards the bakery, the path goes along the steep streets of the rural centre towards the ravine of the fountain of El Piojo. A short while before you leave the village, the path turns to the right towards a small rest area in the bottom of the ravine, located next to an old stone fountain. Other attractions that you can find in the narrow streets of Agüero are its Ethnological Museum of d´o Sagallo and the olive tree of Chiménez (*Olea europaea*), a specimen from the catalogue of unique trees of Aragón, which is several hundred years old and was divided in two by a flash of lightning.

A little further ahead, there is an informative panel for this first Stage of the Nature Trail, which continues by crossing the ravine and ascending via a path in poor condition between kermes oaks (*Quercus coccifera*) and almond trees (*Prunus dulcis*) as far as the road that leads to the top part of the village. After walking along an asphalted part for some 150 m, you reach a sharp bend where the path turns to the right along a track with directions to Murillo de Gállego and Riglos, coinciding with the GR-1.

From here, you will have a beautiful view of the mallos of Agüero, which are a little less known than their neighbours in Riglos, but equally impressive. Worthy of note is the Peña Sola, separated from the other mallos on the left of the massif, as it is the one that is most frequently used by climbers and because the remains of the old castle of Los Mallos, a Building of Cultural Interest currently in ruins, is located at its base.

Leaving the mallos behind you and Peña Rueba in front, carry on for some 400 m when the path turns to the right to cross an area in worse condition which, a little further on, turns into stone, the remains of a mediaeval road, which descends as far as the ravine of Espadiero. At the bottom of the ravine, a very large Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) gives shade to the rest area behind which the trail returns to the track turning to the right.

On the right of the route, hidden behind a Holm and kermes oak-covered hill, you will come to the church of Santiago, catalogued as a Building of Cultural Interest, which is accessed by leaving Agüero along the HU-534 highway, at a signposted turn-off on the left, following a track for around 1 km. It is an unfinished construction from the sculptural workshop of the maestro of Agüero, whose work can be found in other places in Aragón such as in San Juan de la Peña and San Pedro el Viejo in Huesca.

On making headway between fields of almond trees, approximately 1 km along the trail, coinciding with the route of the GR-1 trail, the path turns to the right along a stony path which descends among kermes oaks, crosses a small stream with stepping stones and once again climbs up to the track, among almond trees and herbaceous crops until the path turns towards the left on a sharp bend some 600 m further on.



The Peña Rueba cliff face



The road leading towards Murillo de Gállego, with the Mallos de Riglos in the background

The trail turns once again into a path and heads in the direction of Murillo from Gállego, which you can already see in the distance, together with Peña Rueba, which continues on your left. This geological formation, similar to the mallos, is outfitted on its southern face with sports climbing and ferrata routes, and is the nesting place of numerous birds, many of which are carrion-feeding, such as griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) and bearded vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*).

The path with a little wall on the right, which has collapsed in parts, gives way to another stony area of mediaeval road, which begins to descend, joining another larger downward path that is also stony, with the mallos of Riglos in the background and the village of Murillo de Gállego appearing before us in the foreground. The stony downward descent towards the bottom of the ravine of Bivera intensifies in the final Stage and trekkers are helped by two portions of wooden railing that lead the trail to some natural sandstone steps in the ravine bed.

The trail now runs along the left bank of the ravine and you can see on your left the entire thickness of the alluvial terrace materials. In a few metres, at the entrance to the town of Murillo de Gállego, you reach the old Roman construction, where a cosy rest area with tables, benches and a panel with information on the path has been outfitted around it. From here, you climb towards the town centre along a paved street following the path's signposts. Heading in the direction of the church between stone constructions with a marked mediaeval nature and after climbing some steps, you enter the square of the church of El Salvador, which has been declared a National Monument. In the high part of the town, you also come to the Romanesque chapel of the Virgin of La Liena that stands on a mediaeval necropolis containing tombs excavated in the rock. In Murillo, you can also visit the Electricity Museum located in the old Flour Mill.

The path descends from the square to cross the road in the direction of the campsite and the River Gállego along an asphalted road surrounded by olive trees (*Olea europaea*). After leaving the campsite on your left and walking down to the river, you turn to the left along a dirt path that makes its way in the shade of Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*), junipers (*Juniperus communis*) and kermes oaks (*Quercus coccifera*). Here, you enter the walkway over the River Gállego, where you'll find an informative panel on the fauna, vegetation and geology of the area and the water activities that take place on the river. The River Gállego is one of those with the greatest biodiversity in the province of Huesca. With respect to the fauna you can find in this Stage, worthy of note is the otter (*Lutra lutra*), which is gradually recovering its population thanks to the amount of fish there, such as the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), the common trout (*Salmo trutta*) and the common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), in addition to water birds such as the Royal heron (*Ardea cinerea*) and the cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).

The vegetation on the riversides is also plentiful and comprises poplars (*Populus nigra*), white poplars (*Populus alba*), willows (*Salix alba*), ashes (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and elm trees (*Ulmus minor*) together with bushes such as tamarisks (*Tamarix gallica*). The geology of this Stage of the river is also characteristic, as from the reservoir of La Peña as far as Santa Eulalia de Gállego, crossing the canyon of the River Gállego, you can see the transition of the marls to sandstones and conglomerates of the Miocene, which conform the unusual mallos. In addition to these natural values, the River Gállego also stands out for its suitability for water sports such as canoeing and rafting, which are promoting the development of the region.



The Nature Trail footbridge over the River Gállego in Murillo

THE MALLOS OF RIGLOS

In Aragón, mallos (from the Latin malleus, which means "mallet") is the name for the cylindrical shape and vertical wall reliefs that appear in the Pyrenean front along the outer Sierras.

These reddish conglomerate formations were formed by the dragging of boulder-type materials, cemented by gravel and sand, towards the old depression of the River Ebro. There, the sediment settled, which was later raised by internal folding during the tertiary era. The distinct erosion of the different materials led to their current spectacular configuration, which is enhanced even more at dusk, owing to the intensity of the light on these walls.

The structure of these reliefs, some over 200 m high, does not go unnoticed by travellers and mountaineers, who, in the 19th century, wrote about these spots. These descriptions, together with the first photographs in the 20th century, contributed to the fact that the 1930s began to see not only great climbing feats on these cliffs but also accidents. Since then, almost 300 climbing routes have been opened on practically all the walls, while the mallos of Riglos are known on the national and international level as one of the best places for climbing.



The Mallos de Riglos, with the village houses at their feet

The mallos are divided into two groups: the large mallos and the small or little mallos, and although some of their summits can be accessed by foot, others are inaccessible and you have to climb to conquer their tops.

Each of the mallos has a name linked to its shape, a house in the village or a local character or climbers, so, if you look at their south face from left to right, you have the large mallos: Firé, Puro, Pisón, Macizo, Volaos, Cuchillo, Frechín and Visera. Separated from the main massif and further to the right, we find the small mallos of Colorao, Chichín, Herrera, Magdalena, Cored, Gómez Laguna, Aguja Roja, Capaz and Arcaz or the Vultures' Wall.

The most well known are those located over the village whose houses are positioned very close to their foothills, and which are also the highest: Firé, Puro, Visera, Cuchillo and Pisón, with the highest altitude and whose vertical wall has a difference in level of 275 m. On some occasions, these walls have collapsed, such as in La Visera, which makes climbing them even more spectacular.

The other great attraction of the mallos is the number of birds of prey that live on their walls, including Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), wallcreepers (*Tichodroma muraria*), bearded vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*), in danger of extinction, and above all, griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), which form one of the largest stable colonies on the Iberian Peninsula and in Europe, with the Arcaz mallo or the Vultures' Wall standing out as a protected nesting area where you can find between 70 and 100 nesting couples every year.



The long pedestrian walkway built for the Nature Trail links Murillo de Gállego directly with Riglos, ensuring trekkers do not have to cross the river via the road bridge and shortening the distance between the two towns by around 5 km.

Once you are on the left-hand-side bank of the River Gállego, the path zigzags up to then pass over the projection of sandstones and marls excavated by the river, with the help of steps and wooden railings. In the top part, in the area of La Sarda, the trail turns to the left along a path following the 2.5 km sign to Riglos. From here, you can enjoy the natural spectacle offered by the mallos of Riglos, which, with their vertical red walls, rise impressively over the small village. A few metres further on, the trail joins the track that leads directly to the village. After crossing the ravine of El Chopo and another small ravine, surrounded by a green plant carpet with a clear Mediterranean influence, with a prevalence of kermes and Holm oaks, you come to the Riglos railway halt. The path crosses the railway track of the "Canfranero" via a level crossing and the track changes into asphalt as it approaches the impressive conglomerate walls.

The road continues across an area of olive trees where, next to the houses in Riglos, some enormous hundred-year-old olive trees stand out, some of which are even included in the catalogue of unique trees of Aragón. The trail carries on along the steep streets, passing by some schools, and reaches the road next to the car park, where there are several informative panels and various restaurants and bars where you can enjoy the rich gastronomy of the region.

This first Stage ends in this unique town which stands out on account of its impressive mallos, recognised for being one of the best places nationwide for climbing and mountaineering and for being home to one of the most important nesting areas for griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*). You can also visit the church of Nuestra Señora del Mallo, the 11th-century chapel of San Martín Arcaz centre for bird interpretation.



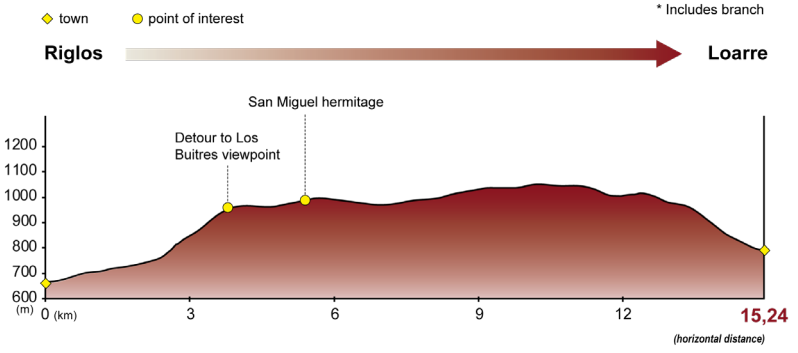
Level crossing at the Riglos halt and the mallo Firé

STAGE 2 RIGLOS → LOARRE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	430 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	305 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	15,74 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h 20 min

* Includes branch



BETWEEN VULTURES AND CASTLES

The second Stage of this Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca runs between the towns of Riglos and Loarre (municipalities of Las Peñas de Riglos and Loarre), with part of the route coinciding with the GR-1. On this trail, you can see the best views of the mallos of Riglos, of the valley of the River Gállego and of La Hoya de Huesca, as well as discovering two of the most important mediaeval castles in Aragón, that of Marcuello, which is currently in ruins and, in the vicinity of the trail, that of Loarre, regarded as one of the best preserved in Europe.



Conglomerate walls at the Church of Nuestra Señora del Mallo in Riglos



The Os Fils mountain range, with the Mirador de los Buitres viewpoint at its summit

This Stage of the Nature Trail leaves from the town of Riglos, taking a steep street next to the old, now renovated public washhouse, which leads as far as the square and the top part of the village. Here, the trail turns to the right and carries on along a narrow street until it comes to an informative panel on mallos, at the village's exit.

From here, the verticality of these reddish conglomerate walls, with a height of over 300 m, which rise above the small village built on the hillside, is breathtaking. Worthy of note is the outline of the chapel of Nuestra Señora del Mallo, at the foot of these formations that are so characteristic of La Hoya de Huesca, whose reddish tones due to ferruginous materials are enhanced even more at dawn. The trail leaves Riglos along a dirt track and a few metres further on it turns leftwards along a path signposted with signs for the GR-1 path, which ascends among crop fields and olive trees (*Olea europea*). A little further on, on your left, you come to a turn-off from the circular path of the mallos.

The Nature Trail continues next to a small pond of water, until you reach a turn-off that leads to the Bird Interpretation Centre of Arcaz, engaged in the dissemination and knowledge of birds in the Kingdom of the Mallos, which, in addition to featuring a glass viewpoint for bird watching, takes charge of organising different bird study activities for adults and children, who can contemplate first hand one of the largest colonies of vultures in Europe.

The trail continues straight ahead along a track at the foot of the small mallos (Colorado, Cored, Aguja Roja, etc.), in the direction of the bottom of the valley, with the steep rocky Wall of the Vultures and the mallo of Arcaz on the left and the massif of Os Fils on the right. This massif is a geological formation that is stratified with multiple horizontal layers stacked on top of each other like leaves or sheets, formed by the differential erosion of hard and soft sandstone layers.

The dense cover of kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*), box (*Buxus sempervirens*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), and juniper (*Juniperus communis*) which today cover these hillsides, is the result of slow but gradual natural regeneration following the devastating effect of a fire which, in August 2001, razed over 4,300 ha, even forcing the residents of Riglos to evacuate. Once again, nature is showing its recovery power, offering today a picture of great beauty.

If you look upwards, you will undoubtedly see a large number of vultures (Gyps fulvus) and other birds as you are definitely in the Special Protection Area for Birds (in its Spanish acronym, ZEPA) of the Sierra of Santo Domingo and Caballera and the River Onsella and the Site of Community Interest (SCI) of the Sierra of Santo Domingo and Caballera.

The path continues along the track that runs by the side of the ravine of La Mota. It goes around some bends and leaves on the right the turn-off for the path that leads to the via ferrata of Cubilillo, which ascends up to the viewpoint of Los Buitres via spikes. You will now find yourself at the foot of the "Paredón de los Buitres" or the Vultures Wall, which is full of vulture nests where one of the largest colonies in Europe of this carrion-eating bird breed.

The trail continues and narrows, turning into a path at the end of the valley, in the area known as the ravine of Los Clérigos, where kermes oaks, Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), box, gorse (*Genista scorpius*) and junipers, combined with Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*), offer natural mosaic colouring. After an upward Stage with sporadic railings and wooden steps, the valley begins to open up as does the path that turns leftwards, where another ascending sandstone Stage continues in natural steps and marls, reaching a more open flat area among gorse brushwood, where the path turns into at track.



'Paredón de los Buitres' (Vultures' Cliff)

A few metres further ahead, now on the hillock of Santo Román, you come to an intersection of the paths from where you can contemplate, to the northeast, the valley that leads to La Peña, signposted as the GR-95, with the snow-capped peaks in the background of the Interior Sierras of La Partacua and Tendeñera. Nevertheless, your path continues southwards along the track signposted in the direction of the vantage point, tower and chapel of Marcuello, where you can see how the geology has changed now with a prevalence of grey limestone.

The track makes headway through a brushwood area and ascends slightly. On your right, you can see the summit of the massif of Os Fils and the ravine of Los Clérigos, through which, in the distance, you can contemplate the mallos of Riglos, until you reach the turn-off for the Los Buitres viewpoint. From here as far as the viewpoint, you will have a 1.6 km track, which is worth walking to contemplate one of the best views of the mallos of Riglos and the valley of the River Gállego.

Return to the path and, after 250 m, you will come to the renovated 12th-century, Romanesque chapel of San Miguel, which only conserves its apse. Next to it, there is an informative panel on this interesting mediaeval site, which dominates the Sierra of Loarre, at an altitude of over one thousand metres.

From here, the trail takes a detour from the track for 300 m as far as the viewpoint of La Galliguera, next to the chapel of the Virgin of Marcuello and the tower of Marcuello, which formed part of the fortified site of the 12th-century castle of Marcuello, evidencing how these sierras were strategic points for defence and surveillance in the times of the advance of the Kingdom of Aragón.



Ruins of Marcuello Castle

OS FILS AND THE CASTLE OF MARCUELLO

Between the villages of Linás de Marcuello and Riglos, there stands the massif of Os Fils, an unusual formation of rocky cliffs, comprised of stacked leaves or sheets (Fils), which produce a beautiful landscape. The origin of this formation lies in the differential erosion that occurred in the different layers of harder rock positioned on top of layers of softer rock. These hard strata or layers that are interspersed between the soft layers result in its final stacked sheet appearance. The upper part of the massif is a kind of relatively flat plateau located at an altitude of one thousand metres, whose level is significantly different to that of the cliffs surrounding it and which dominate the Sierra of Loarre. In the middle in this location there stands the castle of Marcuello, which is currently in ruins.

The castle of Marcuello formed part of a chain of mediaeval fortresses created on the southern border with the Muslim territories of Huesca and Barbastro. Initially, around the 11th century, it belonged to the ephemeral Kingdom of the Mallos, together with Loarre, Agüero and Ayerbe, and a little later formed part of the Crown of Aragón of Alfonso I the Warrior in the first half of the 12th century. The structure, similar to other fortresses in La Hoya de Huesca, was formed of a large rectangular plan tower, in this case with four heights, surrounded by a walled enclosure.

At the present time, the sole elements that have been preserved are the western wall of the tower and the church of Nuestra Señora de Marcuello, a Romanesque temple that was renovated in the 17th century. It undoubtedly already formed part of the fortified site with its strongly defensive looking tower-belfry and its semi-circular apse, under which a crypt dedicated to San Esteban lies. The western end of the castle is the location of the viewpoint of the Vultures, which is home to one of the best views of the mallos of Riglos, Peña Rueba and the valley of the River Gállego, and the mallos of Agüero can even be seen in the distance.

From here, you can see even more closely the Wall of the Vultures, which is a nesting place mainly for the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) in addition to other birds of prey, such as Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) and bearded vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*) which are also common in this area. In order to access the viewpoint, there is also a via ferrata (known as Cubilillo) which has been recently outfitted and ascends the western face of the massif. It has become one of the most popular due to its moderate difficulty, excellent views and lush vegetation.

Close to the remains of the castle, you will find the chapel of San Miguel, which also dates back to the 12th century and, although it has been restored, it conserves its original apse covered with a quarter sphere and a barrel vault.

At the viewpoint, you will find several interpretative panels and spectacular views of the south face of the massif of Os Fils and of the part of the valley of the River Gállego, known as La Galliguera, between La Peña and Biscarrués, offering a broad view of the region of La Hoya de Huesca. The outline of this castle is visible from a large part of the region, which is a true visual reference for its people

Returning back to the turn-off, the trail once again heads in the direction of Loarre, abandoning, at this point, the route of the GR-1, in order to reach, in approximately one kilometre, the next turn-off, where the Nature Trail continues towards the left, leaving on the right the track that leads towards the village of Sarsamarcuello, located 3 km away.

Under the limestone crests of the Peña del Sol on the left of the trek, the path carries on in an easterly direction along the southern side of the Sierra of Loarre, where the initial part of the track is surrounded by an afforestation of black pines (*Pinus nigra*), with developed undergrowth of box and other brushwood.

In this area, as in a large part of the Pre-Pyrenees, the autochthonous forests of gall-oak (*Quercus faginea*), normally associated with humid, shady areas, were used far too much for firewood, so many of the forests even disappeared. Those that were afforested with black pines were part of these areas although, due to the loss of the soil's fertility, in many areas there is a predominance of box and gorse brushwood. Nevertheless, Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) fill the lands that are sunniest and driest.

From the clearings offered by the woodland, you can contemplate, on the right-hand-side of the path, beautiful views of the region of La Hoya de Huesca, which is covered with extensive crops and grooves formed by numerous riverbeds and strewn with villages with a great cultural tradition.



The Os Fils mountain range as seen from the La Galliguera viewpoint



Woodland of gall oaks

After a Stage that descends lightly down the side of the ravine of Layán, you pass by a small cattle grid and, in approximately 1.5 km, in the shade of the ravine of Palangás, you enter an area known as the Cajigar or Cachicar. Here, the path turns to the right, turning into a lovely, narrow path that makes its way between one of the best preserved gall-oak (known as cachico in Spanish) forests in the Pre-Pyrenees area, where, moreover, other species such as field maple (*Acer campestris*), Montpellier maple (*Acer monspessulanum*), bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), butcher's room (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) can be found.

After crossing a small stream via some stepping stones, you once again come to the wide track, which you will leave in some 200 m, this time on the left, to walk again under the shade provided by these magnificent forests, which constitute the perfect habitat for many animals such as the boar (*Sus scrofa*), the roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and the red squirrel (*Scirus vulgaris*), and a variety of birdlife with species such as the common wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*), the sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), the jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) and the common blue tit (*Parus caeruleus*).

In 300 m, the path crosses the track to descend a really easy walk as far as the fountain of San Damián, where trekkers will find an informative panel and a small bench to rest on and refresh themselves in the shade of the trees, listening to the tinkling of the bells of the cattle that is peacefully grazing in the nearby meadows

Carry on walking and, after leaving on the right the PR-HU-96 path, your trail once again turns into a wide track, which now continues through an area of brushwood as far as the ravine of Calderillas. Here, the path takes a southerly direction and heads downwards along the left-hand-side watershed of the eroded ravine in the direction of the town of Loarre.



The village of Loarre and the agricultural area of La Hoya de Huesca

If you turn your eyes to the left, you can contemplate, perched on a rocky outcrop, the impressive castle of Loarre, one of the jewels of Aragonese Romanesque architecture and declared a National Monument.

The track descends down the hillside until, after leaving a path on the left and passing through some almond tree fields, it reaches the first houses in Loarre.

By following the directions, you will come to the square of Moya, where you will discover excellent examples of Aragonese Renaissance architecture in the old 16th-century inn, sturdy stately homes and the nearby church of San Esteban, with a characteristic Gothic capitel. Next to the square, there is a Renaissance fountain, which produces undrinkable water. It was built in ashlar stones with a flattened rounded archway where, if trekkers are lucky, they can see, perching on its walls, a specimen of the largest night butterfly in Europe, the Giant Peacock Moth (*Saturnia pyri*).

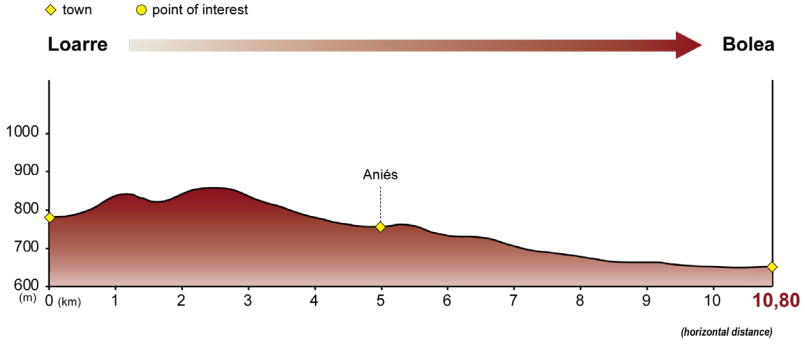


A close-up of the great peacock moth, Europe's largest moth

STAGE 3 LOARRE → BOLEA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	105 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	235 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	10,80 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 12 min



AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE ARAGONESE RENAISSANCE

The third Stage of La Hoya de Huesca Trail links the villages of Loarre and Bolea, crossing the primarily agricultural landscape of the municipalities of Loarre and La Sotonera, with their spectacular castle watching over you from above. This Stage, measuring almost 11 kilometres, mostly coincides with the GR-1 and terminates in the village of Bolea, which is famous for its collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor- one of the best examples of the Aragonese Renaissance- and for its amazing cherries.



Loarre Castle stands watch over the track linking Loarre and Aniés


Loarre Castle

The Stage begins in Loarre and crosses the bed of the River Astón via an ancient mediaeval bridge located at the exit to the village, where a game and rest area has been fitted out. Some 300 m from the bridge, next to the fountain of Canta Gallos, the path turns to the left surrounded by a field of almond trees (Prunus dulcis), until it reaches the HU-A-3163 road, which leads to the famous Romanesque castle of Loarre, immortalised in Ridley Scott's film Kingdom of Heaven. If travellers have time, they should ensure they visit this impressive bastion, as it is regarded as the best-preserved Romanesque castle in Europe.

After crossing the road, the trail carries on through an eminently agricultural area, among cereal and almond tree fields and treeless hillsides covered with brushwood with a clear Mediterranean influence, comprising species such as gorse (*Genista scorpius*), box (*Buxus sempervirens*) and kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*). Approximately one kilometre further on, you come to a path on the left that leads to the castle of Loarre, which is permanently on the lookout over most of the region. The trail continues straight ahead, making headway among crops, with the Sierra of Caballera as a backdrop.

Continuing along a track that is perfectly refurbished for the enjoyment of trekkers and cyclotourists, you leave on your right the eroded ravine of the River Moriñano and, within a few metres, the hill of La Collada, covered with a dense brushwood mass.

Extensive fields of almond trees dominate the landscape of this part of the path, combining mature plantations with some more recent ones. After passing the stream of La Gabardilla, the path joins the GR-1, with the octagonal tower of the church of Aniés standing out in the foreground.

After crossing a small ravine, you reach the River Riel, surrounded by a dense stand of poplars (*Populus alba*), willows (*Salix* sp.) and blackberries (*Rosa* sp.) which grow around its waters.

THE CASTLE OF LOARRE

The castle of Loarre, which represents the best Romanesque architecture of Aragón, is catalogued as a Building of Cultural Interest and a National Monument. It is also one of the most important and best-preserved mediaeval castles across Europe.

It dates back to the 11th century and was built by King Sancho III the Great of Navarre on land belonging to the Roman town of Calagurris Fibulariensis in response to the Reconquista of Aragón, Sobrarbe and Ribagorza, which he began himself. It is located on a limestone rise and its construction is fully integrated into the environment.

Its strategic location served to control La Hoya de Huesca, an agricultural region dominated by the Muslims who owned castles in Bolea and Ayerbe, and its importance was crucial in the conquest of Huesca and in the expansion of Aragón towards the south of the Pyrenees

The enclosure has been remodelled at different times and, apart from a castle, it has also served as a monastery. It was enlarged in 1071 when new buildings were constructed, such as the church of Santa María. Subsequently, the 13th century saw the building of the eleven-turret wall, a perimeter measuring more than 200 m long and a metre and a half wide, which enabled a path for lookouts to be built inside.

Inside the fortress, there is a series of towers, including the noteworthy Tower of Homage, which was initially for lookout purposes, and the Queen's Tower, whose function was to defend the castle gate and which served as a guardroom. The north tower is believed to have been used as a residence for the castle owners.

On the castle esplanade, there is a well that collected rainwater that was stored in cisterns, which are still useable today.

The only part still standing today of the Queen's vantage point, which was the court's favourite place for looking at the view, is an enormous picture window in the castle wall.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that it was in this castle where director Ridley Scott's film Kingdom of Heaven, starring actors such as Orlando Bloom, Eva Green, Jeremy Irons and Liam Neeson, was shot.



The octagonal tower of the Church of San Esteban in Aniés

A small slope now leads trekkers to the village of Aniés, where they can take a break in the designated rest area at the entrance to the municipality, where they will also find an informative panel on the route. In a small square, there stands the church of San Esteban, which still has its original Romanesque façade on its southern side.

On walking through the streets of this small rural town, you come to the main road, which you must take on the left to then immediately turn to the right. When you have covered 80 m, level with the only tree in the street, the path turns to the right along a narrow alleyway which leads to the road, where it turns once again to the left to reach a sharp bend, at the crossroads of the ravine of Fermelar

Worthy of note is the fact that a track leaves the town of Aniés that leads to the foot of the cave chapel of the Virgin of La Peña, located only 2 km from the town, whose privileged location, literally hanging from a rock, offers unbeatable views of the entire region. This spectacular cave chapel, which can be accessed via a steep path, belongs to the Route of Silence, next to the chapel of San Cristóbal del Barranco (Bolea), the chapel of San Julián de Andriá (between Lierta and Arascués), that of San Martín de la Val d'Onsera (San Julián de Banzo) and the chapels of San Chinés and of San Cosme and San Damián (Vadiello).

Continue along the Nature Trail and, once you have reached the road in the ravine of Fermelar, walk along it for some 140 m. Then, the path finally turns to the left, where Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) alternate with dry crops and olive (*Olea europea*) and almond trees.

In 500 m, you reach a path intersection where, on following the directions, you should choose the one on the right. In 50 m, take a narrow perpendicular path on the right, although it is poorly indicated, so you should pay attention at this point. On walking under the dense cover offered by Aleppo hardwoods, you once again come to a wide track that you should take in a south-easterly direction towards Bolea, coinciding with the route of the GR-1, an old path that linked Aniés to Bolea.

The path continues for 1.5 km along a gentle route between a mosaic of herbaceous crops, almond and olive trees and oak trees. From here onwards, the landscape begins to be dominated by almond and cherry trees, whose spring flowering offers visitors a marvellous spectacle of colours.

After crossing the River Sotón, you come to a turn-off to the chapel of Santa Quiteria, located some 500 m away. This same path leads to the impressive rock chapel of San Cristóbal, enclosed between the rugged walls of the ravine of the River Sotón, which also belongs to the Route of Silence of La Hoya de Huesca. Your path, nevertheless, continues straight ahead in the direction of Bolea, crossing the riverbed of the ravine of San Andrés, which allows you to see a powerful wall of alluvials and dense riverside vegetation.

Less than a kilometre away, you come to the end of the Stage, which is located at the entrance to Bolea, right on the crossroads with the road that heads towards Puibolea.

In Bolea, there is a circular route belonging to Stage 4 which leaves from this point and heads towards Calle Mayor as far as the square, to once again leave as far as the Puibolea road. This town, the capital of the municipality of La Sotonera, stands out not only on account of its famous 16th-century Renaissance collegiate church, but also because you can discover other venerated monuments such as the 18th-century Baroque church of La Soledad.



Panoramic view of the agricultural area of La Hoya de Huesca from Bolea

ERMITA RUPESTRE DE LA VIRGEN DE LA PEÑA

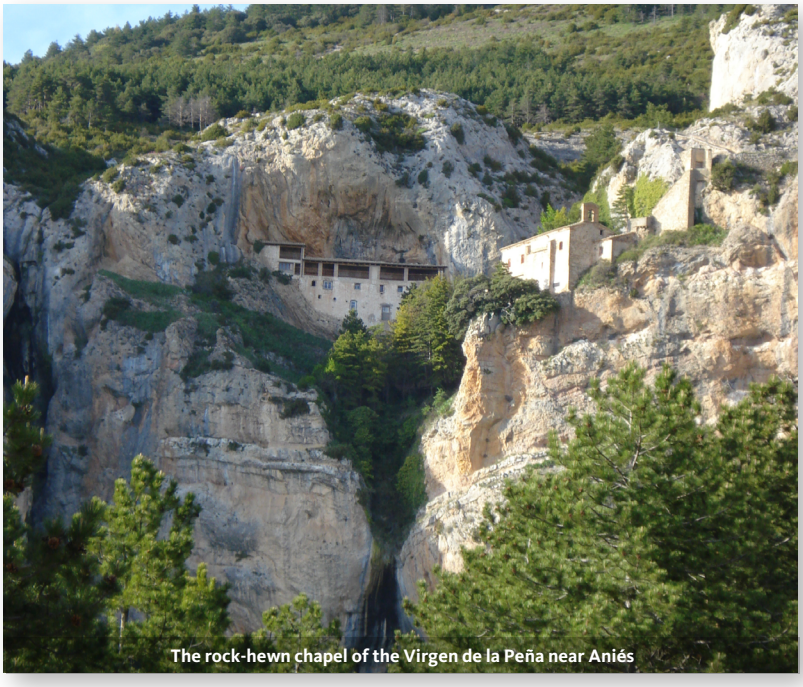
A unos 3 km de la localización de Aniés, encaramada en la cara sur de la sierra Caballera, se localiza la ermita rupestre de la Virgen de La Peña.

Este templo construido en la roca de la montaña es de origen incierto ya que, aunque las leyendas hablan del hallazgo de una imagen de la Virgen en una cueva, hay quien atribuye su localización a un mero carácter defensivo en el ámbito de las luchas durante la conquista cristiana.

Aparte de la ermita, de origen románico y consistente en una única nave rectangular de sillares con tejado a dos aguas y espadaña sencilla, completa el conjunto de este santuario la casa del santero, un edificio de dos plantas encajado completamente en la roca.

El acceso a la ermita se hace desde Aniés, abandonando el pueblo por una pista forestal que tan pronto llega al pie de la montaña se torna en un sendero zigzagueante de continua ascensión para salvar los cerca de cien metros de desnivel, aunque las impresionantes vistas una vez arriba hacen que el esfuerzo merezca la pena.

Se puede visitar el interior de los edificios a través de visitas guiadas.



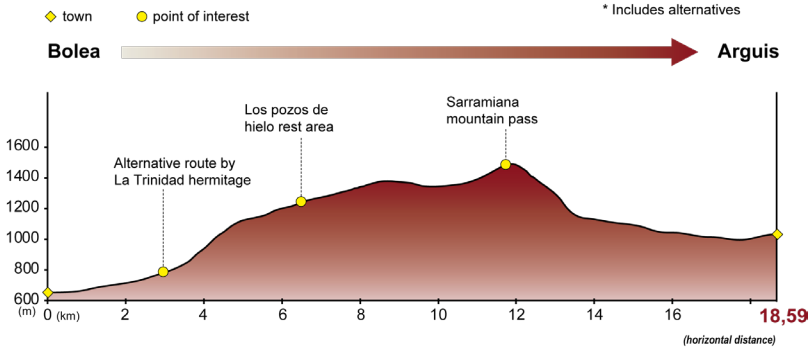
The rock-hewn chapel of the Virgen de la Peña near Aniés

STAGE 4 BOLEA → ARGUIS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	Upward gradient	905 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	525 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	20,07 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 7 min

* Includes alternatives



FROM THE PLAIN OF HUESCA TO THE PRE-PYRENEAN SIERRA

The fourth Stage of the path of La Hoya de Huesca leaves from the village of Bolea and ends in Arguis. It crosses the Sierra of Gratal through the municipalities of La Sotonera and Arguis and the first part of the route coincides with the itinerary of the GR-1. During this tough but beautiful Stage, you reach the highest altitudes on the Nature Trail. The highest point is on the hillock of Sarramiana, which offers excellent panoramic views of La Hoya de Huesca, the Sierra of Gratal, the Sierra of Bonés and of the Pyrenees. Visitors also have the opportunity to cross an area of great ecological value, the beech grove of Peiró.



Panoramic view of the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees from the Sarramiana Pass

THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF BOLEA

The so-called collegiate church of Bolea is currently the church of Santa María la Mayor de Bolea. Nevertheless, in around the 16th century, it functioned as a collegiate church; in other words, it was an important temple, which, although not an Episcopal See, was run by an abbot and boasted an important religious community, offering liturgy in a manner similar to cathedrals. It stands on the remains of a previous Romanesque church, which, in turn, had been built on an Arabic castle-palace when Muslims fought against Christians in these lands.

The present church was built between the years 1541 and 1559 and evidences the transition between the Gothic and the Renaissance styles. A variety of maestros contributed to its beauty. The building was created by Pedro de Irazábal and Miguel de Altúe. It is formed of three aisles of the same height, although the central one is wider than the side ones. The aisles are separated by pointed arches and the vaults are star shaped.

The painting on the collegiate church's main altarpiece is a masterpiece of Spanish Renaissance painting and was at the forefront of its style in Aragón. Its author was the so-named Maestro of Bolea, but his identity is unknown. The paintings are in tempera and represent diverse moments in the life of Christ and of the Virgin. Worthy of note are the expressions of the characters portrayed, the details in the plants and bushes and the colouring dominated by different red and green shades (Flemish school), as well as the perspective, lighting and shading (Italian school). The altarpiece carving was created by Gil de Brabante who was from the Flemish school and a resident in Huesca.

The altarpiece of San Sebastian, that of Santiago and the Baroque altarpieces of the Virgin of El Rosario, Nuestra Señora del Pilar, San Vicente, Santa Bárbara and the one dedicated to the crucifixion, located in the temple's different chapels, contribute to its exceptional beauty. Worthy of note is the carved walnut choir seating, where the armrests have been decorated with motifs relating to fire, water and alchemy symbols. In the centre of the choir, you can see the lectern, which is where the choir books were arranged. Finally, the 18th-century organ presides the central aisle.

In 1991, the Association of the Collegiate Church of Bolea was formed, created by popular initiative, which is tasked with its maintenance, protection and the dissemination of its cultural and touristic values.

It currently holds the titles of a Historic-Artistic Monument through the Ministry of Culture (1983) and a Site of Cultural Interest (2004) through the Government of Aragón.



Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor in Bolea

This 18.5 km Stage leaves from the point where Stage 3 ends, located to the north of Bolea, at the intersection with the road that leads to Puibolea (HU-V-3141). Taking the road to the left for 200 m, you reach an informative panel on the Nature Trail, which is the starting-point for the track you should take to Arguis. There is also a small circular route that enters along Calle Mayor as far as the square, which leads, once again, to this panel, after surrounding the village on its eastern side.

After taking the track that leads to the convent of La Trinidad, and which coincides with the route of the GR-1, you make your way among fields of fruit trees, mainly cherries (*Prunus avium*), passing on your right a couple of turn-offs for rural paths. A little further on, you come to a path intersection where there is an iron cross on your left; carry on following the signpost for Arguis.

Continue along the main track among olive trees (*Olea europaea*) and cherry trees (*Prunus avium*), passing a path intersection ahead, until you reach a fork on the left, some metres before an irrigation point with a fountain, a table and benches for resting.

Cross these fields where the well-known Bolea cherry is grown and, after a few hundred metres, you will come to a fork where there is an informative panel and a signpost for the alternative route by the chapel of La Trinidad. Here, travellers have two trail options; on the left following the alternative route or, on the right, towards the Snow Wells. Both routes join up again a little further on after the convent of La Trinidad.

Following the main route towards the Wells, you continue a few metres until you reach a fork, which is the starting-point for a track on the right for vehicles going to the Ice Well. The Nature Trail itinerary heads leftwards towards the Ice Well along a path, which, in a few metres, reaches the ravine alluvial, where it is joined by the alternative route from La Trinidad.

You can access the convent of La Trinidad, founded by the Barefoot Augustinians in the 17th century, via a track that ascends on the left-hand-side from the previous turn-off. This monastic site, which has been in private hands since the 19th-century disendowment, currently preserves the restored church, a fountain, a ruined inn and the remains of the walls of other buildings belonging to the site. Next to the chapel, you will discover a rest area and a building used in the pilgrimage that is held here on the Sunday after Corpus Christi. To the right of the site, the path heads downwards via some steps as far as the riverbed, joining the main route.

The path carries on along the right-hand-side of the ravine to then begin its ascent after crossing the irrigation canal of Alicastros, which brings irrigation water from the ravine to the kitchen gardens of Bolea.

You begin climbing via sections with steps and wooden railings, crossing an area of box brushwood (*Buxus sempervirens*), kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*), gorse (*Genista scorpius*) and thyme (*Thymus* sp.) to then enter the pine grove (*Pinus sylvestris*), where you can see natural sandstone rock steps that alternate with other grey limestone areas. The path continuously zigzags upwards across the pine grove and heads westwards via a less arduous steep area, where you will have good views of Bolea and La Hoya de Huesca.

The trail begins to climb once again and turns to your right to head across an area that is almost flat to a beautiful wild pine and box grove, where there are many pinecones on the ground. The path carries on bordering an area known as the Manantiales d´a Chordana where it crosses a ravine via stepping-stones and now continues eastwards among Pyrenean hedgehog (*Echinospartum horridum*), It borders the hillside as far as the hillock of the Wells, or Cuello d´os Pozos, through another impressive pine grove.



Convent of La Trinidad



Mata Menuda I ice pit at Cuello d'os Pozos

On the hillock, located at 1,256 m, you will come to the old ice well of Mata Menuda I and a rest area. The origin of the ice wells dates back to the 17th-century, and their purpose was to store snow in the wintertime so it could be used in the towns on the plain in the hot months. Due to the fact that, at this time, it was a product of great value, they were managed by the most important families in the area.

Several paths merge on this hillock; towards the west the track that leads to Aniés via the chapel of La Peña; towards the south, the track that leads to the chapel of La Trinidad and Bolea; towards the north the turn-off to Bentué de Rasal via the GR-1, and towards the west, the track that leads to Arguis, which is the route of the Nature Trail.

The trail leaves the route of the GR-1 at this point, leaving behind the dense pine grove to enter a brushwood area dominated by a formation of box and Pyrenean hedgehog. This latter species is thorny brushwood with a cushioned appearance that is endemic to the Central Pyrenees, covering eroded hillsides, ledges and crests with shallow stony soils, mainly in limestone lands. In addition to its mainly protective role against erosion, especially in these areas where other species cannot survive the harsh climate, the Pyrenean hedgehog also has great aesthetic value since, during its summer flowering, it covers these hillsides with a yellow carpet.

After climbing up the hillside and leaving behind a beautiful view of the Pyrenean peaks, you come to a small hillock where a panel containing information on the path stands. On the right, on the edge of the ravine, there is a rest area with an interpretative panel that forms a true natural balcony towards the Sierra of Gratal

and La Hoya de Huesca. From here, visitors can contemplate the pyramid silhouette of the peak of Gratal, which, without being the highest point, is one of the most well-known altitudes of the eponymous sierra.

Once you have returned to the path and crossed a small stream where the fountain of El Zapo surfaces, you reach the entrance gate to a private estate, which you must cross via a side passageway. After a gently descending Stage, you pass by a path on the right with a gate that leads to Puibolea, and continue along the track enjoying the landscape where the box plants are larger than in the part of the route you have already covered.

The trail continues by crossing halfway up the hillside. After passing through the riverbeds of two small ravines, an upward Stage begins which becomes harder after taking a sharp bend on the left, where a path with a metallic gate merges that links up to the peak of Gratal, in the area of La Sarramiana.

The beauty of the surrounding area eases this long, arduous climb, which continues in a northerly direction ascending the Tacho irrigation ditch. Without barely any shelter from the sun and leaving the silhouette of the peak of Gratal behind you, you come to the highest point of the Nature Trail, the hillock of Sarramiana, which offers a spectacular view of the peak of Peiró and of the frequently snow-capped Pyrenees.

Now a path from this point onwards, the trail begins to descend through the surprising beech grove of Peiró, one of the most southerly in Huesca, whose natural values have made it worthy of the category of a Site of Ecological Importance under the name Monte Peiró-Arguis SCI.



Viewpoint in the Sierra de Gratal, with Gratal Peak on the right



Peiró Beech Forest

EThis luxuriant beech tree forest, containing specimens that are easily over 200 years old, is unusually associated with the yew (*Taxus baccata*), a long-lasting and highly toxic tree (the entire tree is toxic except for the red arillus covering the seed), instead of the habitual fir trees which appear in other beech groves in the Pyrenees. Other species such as box, honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.) and the wild violet (*Viola* sp.) appear in the undergrowth of this unusual beech grove.

The descent is steep and the frequent humidity of the land makes it slippery on occasions, which is why you must pay attention in this Stage.

After the steepest slopes, you will come to an explanatory panel and a turn-off to the peak of Peiró, on the left of the route. At this point, the path turns rightwards to then continue descending halfway down the hillside, now with a much gentler gradient, protected by numerous sections of wooden railing and metal towropes. The more open sections of the forest offer an excellent view of the peak of Peiró and its characteristic vertical strata of limestone rock.

After leaving the north-facing ravine and the beautiful beech grove, the path heads eastwards where, little by little, other species such as gall-oak (*Quercus faginea*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremula*), whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and snowy mespilus (*Amelanchier ovalis*). make an appearance. In front of you, you will see the Sierra of Bonés and, to the east, the reservoir of Arguis in the foothills of the Sierra of El Águila. The path turns leftwards and descends a very steep Stage crossing a black pine grove (*Pinus nigra*), with box undergrowth.

At the end of the descent, you will reach a forest track that leads, on the right, straight to the dam of Arguis, but the Nature Trail continues leftwards as far as the beautiful village of Arguis. After going around a sharp bend, take the next fork on the right and carry on for some 800 m until the trail turns off the track to the left and changes into a path. After walking next to a small clearing among a dense pine grove, you will arrive at another track, next to the crossroads of the River Isuela.

On continuing along this track, you will enjoy an unusual landscape of meadow terraces and marl lands, with countless channels produced by the erosion of these sedimentary rocks of marine origin. This greyish, muddy landscape, in some places almost lunar, will accompany you as far Arguis. You will reach this town after crossing the riverbed via two passing places, which, on heeding the signs, you should only use when the river permits.

Now in the village of Arguis, surrounded by typical mountain architecture with stone houses, slate roofs and typical Pyrenean cone-shaped chimneys (chamineras in Spanish), you will come to a panel located next to some public washhouses where this tough but beautiful Stage comes to an end. Worthy of note in the village is the church of San Miguel, which dates back to the 12th century, whose altarpiece was made later in the 15th century by the Maestro of Arguis and which is currently located in the Prado Museum.

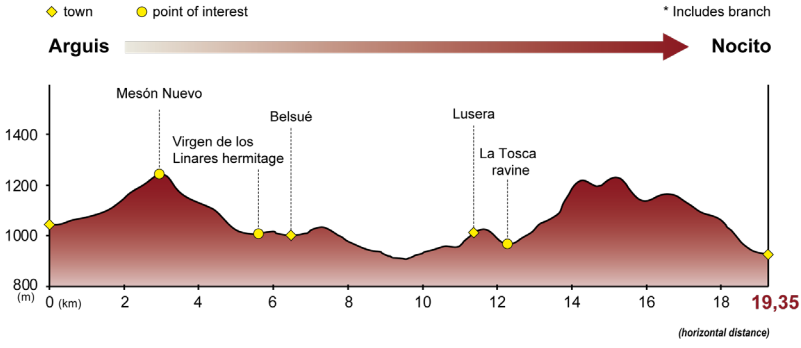


The Church of San Miguel in the village of Arguis

STAGE 5 ARGUIS → NOCITO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	675 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	790 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	20,65 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 10 min



UNINHABITED VILLAGES AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE PYRENEES

The fifth Stage of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca goes through the villages of Arguis and Nocito covering, along its 20.2 km, the valleys of Belsué and Nocito, which are hidden on the northern side of the Sierras of Gabardiella and Guara, respectively. They cross the municipalities of Arguis and Nueno, which are home to several rural villages, some of which are deserted at the present time, and where you can notice the influence of the Pyrenees both in their landscape and in their popular agriculture. A large part of the path coincides with the route of the GR-1 and in the final Stage with the GR-16.


A typical mountain house in Arguis, with the characteristic Pyrenean chimney (chaminera)



Waterfall on the Bonés irrigation channel on the climb up to Mesón Nuevo

The main route of this Stage leaves from the Nature Trail's informative panel located next to the public washhouse of Arguis and goes along one of the village's traditional streets in the direction of the church of San Miguel. After leaving on your right a turn-off to the chapel of Soldevilla and going around the church, you continue as far as the road, where you walk some 50 m to the right.

After taking a signposted turn-off on the left to the chapel of La Magdalena and El Mesón Nuevo, the trail continues between the houses to cross a small stream. Once it has passed over it, the trail ascends through a marl area until it reaches a bench, which, like a viewpoint, looks over the reservoir of Arguis, the oldest operating reservoir in Aragón. The continuous upward and downward sections across these greyish hills follow on after each other, making headway between long irrigation ditches and channels excavated in the lead-coloured sedimentary rocks on which gorse (*Genista scorpius*), thyme (*Thymus* sp.), boxes (*Buxus sempervirens*) and Pyrenean hedgehog (*Echinospartum horridum*) survive.

Crossing the southern face of the Sierra of Bonés, the Nature Trail reaches a small riverbed where there is an old shepherd's hut in ruins. Some metres further on, you will coincide with the route of the gas pipelines, which is marked with typical yellow signs. Following a slow but continuous climb and after passing by a large rock next to the path, you will reach a high-voltage tower. The path then turns into a track and leads to a service road that passes over the tunnel of the A-23 highway.

Several metres further on, after passing over the tunnel, you come to a beautiful waterfall created by the water from the irrigation canal of Bonés that passes under the Belsué road and flows into the stream of El Fulco, which empties its waters in the reservoir of Arguis.

In a few metres, you will come to La Venta del Mesón Nuevo, located on a hillock between the Sierra of Bonés and the Sierra of El Águila. This venta or inn, located at a compulsory passing point for travellers and shepherds in the pass of Monrepós, is an excellent example of a "block house" of Upper Aragón, typical of 17th-century popular architecture. It was important as a support point for the pastoral routes that were used by nomadic shepherds to guide the cattle in the mountains to other grazing areas and as an essential passing place for goods and people from the valley of the River Ebro, until the opening of the pass' new road through Nueno in the 80s.

The trail covers the old road of the Monrepós pass and takes a path next to the informative panel between the inn's two buildings to then begin to descend across the left side of the valley of Belsué, among box plants, gall-oaks (*Quercus faginea*) and the occasional grey marly chalky outcrops, where you can see the village of Belsué in the distance.

The slope flattens out in the bottom of the valley where pines begin to appear and the path becomes wider crossing another marly area covered with ravines. Further on, you come to a turn-off on the left leading to the chapel of the Virgin of Los Linares, where the trail ascends a Stage with steps and wooden railings.

This chapel – which owes its name to the widespread use or cultivation of flax as in other areas of Aragón, until the arrival of cotton – is thought to have been Romanesque in origin and was subsequently modified in modern times. Next to the chapel, there is an informative panel, a rest area and signposts to Belsué by crossing a stream. A little further ahead, the trail turns off from the track to the right to pass between two crop fields and then climb the hill on which Belsué stands, where you will come to an informative panel.



The Belsué Valley, with the village in the background



The village of Belsué, with its Church of San Martín as a highlight

In the small rural village of Belsué, the houses are arranged in a stepped shape adapting to the land's topography and preserving traditional mountain architecture. Among its buildings, worthy of note is the 11th-century, Lombard Romanesque style church of San Martín, catalogued as a Site of Cultural Interest by the Government of Aragón, as is the neighbouring church of Santa María de Belsué.

The trail descends as far as the road and, after crossing it, continues leftwards passing over a stream with luxuriant vegetation. After crossing it, it emerges into a more open area on outcrops of grey marls comprising many bivalve and foraminifera fossils, among box, thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) and Pyrenean hedgehog brushwood. The path carries on parallel to the marly limestone strata and you will begin to see, in the distance, the Pardina de Ascaso, which you will reach in a few minutes. It is located in an idyllic setting beside the River Flumen, which forms visible terraces and pools or badinas on this site.

The Pardina de Ascaso is a typical mountain construction of Upper Aragón – currently in ruins – which has a three-storey main building with hipped roofing and whitewashed walls. There is a farmyard, a dovecote and even a bread oven annexed to it.

The path descends to cross a ravine via a wooden walkway and climbs once again through an area protected by a railing with a metal towrope, which carries on along the right-hand-side bank of the River Flumen. Here, you will once again see steps formed of limestone strata, which are ochre in colour, on account of the washing of the river, and pool areas, which are bluer.

After making its way through a thick pine grove, the trail once again goes down to the riverbank to then cross it via a walkway, which was built taking advantage of the old stone pile of a bridge that disappeared a long time ago. Next to the walkway, you will discover a fountain from where you can see the remains of an old waterwheel. In fewer than 200 m and along the left-hand-side bank of the riverbed, you come to the remains of the deserted village of Santa María de Belsué.

Worthy of note among its buildings is an 11th-century church, which, as does the church of San Martín de Belsué, combines its Mozarabic flat chevet with Lombard blind arches, features that make them unique within the Romanesque style. Next to the deserted village, there are several informative panels and a rest area with bicycle parking racks from where you can enjoy this privileged natural setting, in which the terraces of the River Flumen and the reservoir of Santa María de Belsué stand out.

The trail leaves the deserted village and continues along the left-hand-side bank of the River Flumen going around a meander through a steep limestone area over the river, protected by a metallic railing. Before descending a small ravine and beginning the ascent that goes around the meander across the limestone escarpment, you leave, on your right, a path, which, after crossing the meander twice via stepping-stones, leads you to an asphalted track. In the pleasant poplar grove of Belsué next to the reservoir, you will find a sculpture called "As árvores florecem em Huesca" by the Portuguese artist Alberto Carneiro from the Art and Nature Program of the Art and Nature Centre (CEDAN).



The Church of Santa María de Belsué in the deserted village of the same name

Continuing along the main route from this branch's junction and after climbing a small hillock, you will see on your right the reservoir's tail; in front of you, the houses of the village of Lúsera; and behind you, the ruins of the village of Santa María de Belsué. Carry on along the path between box brushwood and some gall-oaks, crossing the occasional small ravine and sections with metallic railings as far as the intersection with a track that leads to Lúsera.

The Nature Trail crosses this track and continues on the other side in the direction of Lúsera, which is 800 m away. After going down some wooden steps and crossing a stream, climb up the hill this village stands on, walking across a cobbled area that leads you to the entrance. An old fountain has been restored 30 m in a southerly direction from the aforementioned stream.

On entering Lúsera, you come a sign that warns of the danger of landslides, due to the collapse of some house walls close to the edge of the precipice and which are being restored. Hence, we recommend taking the sign-posted turn-off, which, once you have passed the church and the informative panel, surrounds the village on its western side, to once again return to the original route once you have passed the cliff.



Flumen River



Panoramic view of the Belsué reservoir and the Flumen valley from Lúsera

At the present time, Lúsera is practically deserted with the exception of the occasional building that has been restored in recent years. Worthy of note among its buildings of traditional Pyrenean architecture are the 17th-century church of San Miguel Arcángel, a mediaeval well-fountain and two vaulted passageways that can still be found in the streets, which are made out of very coarse, porous, lightweight stone that is usually used for traditional chimney building. One of Lúsera's other attractions is its geographical location, at the top of a hill on the edge of the cliff dominating the valley with the Belsué reservoir in the background, revealing its defensive origin.

After taking the track towards the edge of the village to avoid the landslide area and continuing a few metres to the right along the track surrounding the village, the path turns leftwards where there is a signpost to Ibirque. The narrow path descends under tree cover surrounding the summit of Lúsera, to then, in some 300 m, reach the Nature Trail's original route, which comes from Lúsera on the edge of the cliff.

The path carries on along the stream's right-hand-side bank until it reaches the Tosca ravine, a beautiful spot where stepping-stones will help you cross the riverbed. It then continues climbing across a marl hillside until, little by little, it enters a pine and oak wood area, until it comes to a small hillock.

The narrow path makes headway under the thick woodland as far as another ford with stepping-stones in the ravine of Santa Coloma. After crossing it, a steep zigzagging climb begins, with the rocky Tozal de Manzanera standing out on the left of the route. The climb ends at the hillock of Santa Coloma, which offers a wide panoramic view of the valley of Belsué.



Sandstone strata and wooded areas in the Belsué Valley

You now descend down the shady side until you come to the fountain of La Tosca, a small ground-level stone trough in a fresh spot where ivy (*Hedera helix*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.) and small hepaticas (*Hepatica* sp.). grow in the vicinity. Another climb begins as far as the hillock of Barbero, which separates the valleys of Belsué and Nocito and where there are incredible views of the north face of the Sierra of Guara (Tozal de Guara). You then go down to the ravine of El Palomar, where you come to the turn-off from the path that leads to Ibirque along the GR-16. At this point, you have to cross the riverbed via stepping-stones and then carry on in the vicinity of La Pardina de Orlato crossing a flat pasture area as far as the road that leads to Nocito.

The path crosses the road on three occasions descending along the valley of Nocito with El Tozal de Guara watching over you on your right between box plants and Pyrenean hedgehog brushwood. A little later on, you will cross an area of sandstone slabs where you can see paleosoils featuring typical fossilized cracks caused by desiccation, and after crossing a ravine dominated by the gall-oak grove, you pass by a field with a fence. You will soon come to a hillock with an informative panel, where you can now see the village of Nocito at the bottom of the valley, with El Tozal de Guara on your right.

The path continues in a downward direction and, as you draw closer to the village, small stone walls and fenced fields appear. You enter Nocito behind a house in the district of San Juan and join the main street next to an informative panel and a fountain. Some 100 m on the right, you come to a mediaeval bridge which links together the two districts separated by the River Guatizalema, where you will find several informative panels and a small rest area that brings this long but beautiful route across the valleys of Belsué and Nocito to an end.

The town of Nocito features several houses with typical mountain architecture, some dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, as is shown by the coats-of-arms on their facades, although most were rebuilt in the 19th century, such as the church of San Juan Bautista. One of the attractions of this lovely town is its mediaeval bridge, formed of two rounded arches and a two-sided, curved panel with stone parapets, which was widened after it was built and which forms part of the group of bridges over the River Guatizalema, such as those of Sipán and Siétamo.



View of the Tozal de Guara from the Pardina de Orlato area

THE ARGUIS BRANCH TO THE CHAPEL OF SOLDEVILLA

A small branch, measuring a little over one kilometre, forks off from the path and leaves the village of Arguis. It links up with the chapel of Soldevilla and La Foz fountain area. The path begins behind the church of San Miguel and leaves in the direction of the dam of Arguis between stonewalls. A little later on it widens, offering an excellent view of the village of Arguis with its typical Upper Aragón chimneys (chamineras in Spanish).

The trail continues as far as the chapel, which can be accessed via a path that climbs up to the stone construction, where, nearby, there is a rest area with an informative panel and a viewpoint with a panoramic stand from where you can see the entire reservoir and the surrounding sierras. The building, which has a rectangular floor plan, has recently been restored. Although it dates back to the 16th century, its origin is thought to be much earlier from the Romanesque period.

After descending the wooden steps, you return to the path that continues over the marls where the chapel stands. It passes over a small stream with a wooden walkway to then border a field and cross the ravine of the River Fulco via another walkway, this time made of concrete. The path turns into a track to access the chalets and buildings in the area of La Foz fountain, the end of the branch. From here, you can continue towards the reservoir's circular route round the dam of Arguis, which is less than a 1 km away.



Arguis Reservoir as seen from the Soldevilla Chapel

DESERTED VILLAGES

On account of the changes that occurred in Spanish society at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, basically caused by the arrival of industry, diverse rural areas in La Hoya de Huesca, linked to traditional mountain economy (sheep farming, wool and subsistence agriculture), gradually became deserted.

This situation also produced a change in the conception of territorial land planning which sought the economic development of the site; hence, large-scale afforestation policies and the building of major reservoirs were promoted. As a result, several villages had to be relocated in other unflooded areas or their inhabitants emigrated to the cities.

Some of these villages were abandoned by their residents, although they still kept their houses and, today, private ownership is maintained. Santa María de Belsué, Lúsera and Nocito are some of these villages.

SSanta María de Belsué is located at an altitude of 934 m and is built on an islet in the River Flumen. The spot where this village is located is unique, both for the scenic importance given to the River Flumen as well as to the cultural heritage of the area that is also linked to the river. In the surrounding area, the remains of a waterwheel, a mill and an irrigation aqueduct can be found.This village is mentioned for the first time in an 11th-century document, although its population was never very large. Worthy of note is its church of Santa María on account of its mid 11th-century Romanesque architecture. However, it is currently in a totally abandoned state and even its roofing is missing, in spite of the fact that it is catalogued as a Site of Cultural Interest by the Government of Aragón.The building of the Santa María de Belsué reservoir, in the 20th century, entirely changed the landscape of the area and the village ended up becoming deserted.

Lúsera is located at an altitude of 1035 m and its population fell drastically in the 1960s and 70s. The last inhabitant was the mayor who left the village in 1968. Some houses have recently been refurbished although many are in ruins. This village was documented for the first time in the 13th century, and its layout, with the buildings located on the edge of the cliff over the River Flumen, appears to be related to its defensive origin. It features some interesting buildings of traditional Pyrenean architecture, such as the 17th-century Parish Church of San Miguel Arcángel, and the mediaeval well-fountain, which is in good condition.

(continue)

Nocito is located at an altitude of 981 m and the village is divided in two by the River Guatizalema; a mediaeval bridge was built to allow both parts to communicate with each other. The village is cited in the 10th-century, as an anchorite, San Úrbez, who chose to settle down in this spot, lived in the vicinity of the village. He also died here at the age of 100 and a Sanctuary was built in his memory between the 16th and 17th centuries. A town is also recognised as having existed in prehistoric times and Roman remains have been found next to the Sanctuary.

In the village, there are interesting buildings of mountain architecture, such as the church of San Juan Bautista and the chapel of Santa María. Most of the buildings date back to the 19th century, but there are also earlier ones from the 16th and 17th centuries. Most of its houses have been restored and there is currently a steady population the year round.



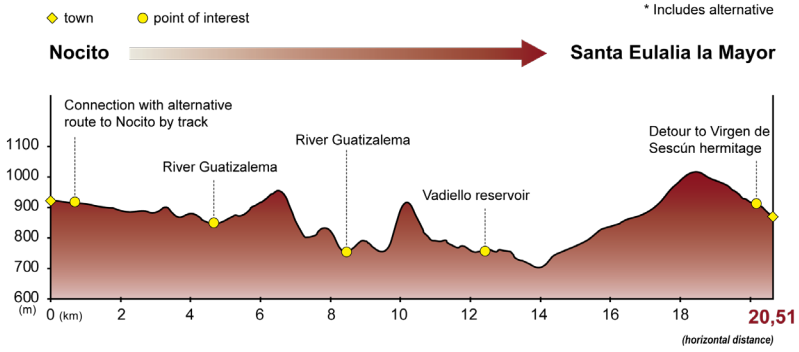
View of the abandoned village of Lúsera, currently undergoing restoration

STAGE 6 NOCITO → SANTA EULALIA LA MAYOR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	4	Upward gradient	725 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	780 m
Route difficulty	3	Route lenght (actual distance)*	21,83 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 25 min

* Includes alternative



FROM THE SIERRA OF GUARA TO THE SOMONTANO OF HUESCA

The sixth Stage of this Nature Trail crosses the Sierra of Guara on its extreme western side, covering the valley of the River Guatizalema with its typical gorges and conglomerate walls of the area of Vadiello, until it comes to the flat area of the Somontano de Huesca. Along its 21.6 km, it crosses the municipalities of Nueno and Loporzano and the extreme western edge of the Natural Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons.



Panoramic view of the valley and the village of Nocito



Medieval bridge at Nocito

Leaving from the mediaeval bridge of Nocito, the path offers two alternatives: one crossing the district of San Pedro on the other side of the bridge, and the other directly along the track towards the Inn of Nocito and Vadiello, both merging a little further ahead.

After crossing the mediaeval bridge, you enter the district of San Pedro via a sloping cobbled street filled with beautiful mountain houses, some with coats-of-arms embellishing their facades. At the top part of the village, the path turns rightwards and descends as far as the last houses, where it turns to the left along a cobbled path next to the campsite. A very tiny branch, which is also cobbled, leaves this cobbled path on the right, leading you to an old fountain.

On returning to the main path, it carries on leaving on the left the turn-off to the chapel of San Andrés and crossing the River Guatizalema via a small walkway. A few metres further on, it joins a track that comes directly from the bridge of Nocito, parallel to the River Guatizalema, and which runs as far as this point among estates where you can see horses grazing.

From here, the track continues following the River Guatizalema and, in approximately 1 km, you reach a typical mountain stone building with a courtyard and an oven, the Mesón de Nocito, where you will find the entry sign for the Natural Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons. A little further on, you come to a turn-off on the left that climbs up to El Tozal de Guara and the ravine of La Pillera; however, you should carry on in the same direction until you reach the river. At this point, the trail leaves the track that fords the riverbed to take a signposted path on the right staying on the right-hand-side bank of the River Guatizalema in the direction of Vadiello, which is 13.3 km away.

In its initial Stage, the path passes next to the riverbank, which runs over pleated limestone strata forming terraces, to then separate and climb among vegetation comprising a good deal of box plants (*Buxus sempervirens*), gall-oaks (*Quercus faginea*) and pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) along the right-hand-side of the valley that begins to widen. After fording the ravine of the River Cajical via some stones right next to the informative panel on the Natural Park, in a few minutes, you will come to a turn-off on the right to the dolmen of El Palomar and Santa Eulalia la Mayor via the Cuello Bail. Your path begins to descend towards the river across an area of steps and railings, until you cross a track, drawing close to the riverbank itself, via a more luxuriant area where you will carry on between meanders.

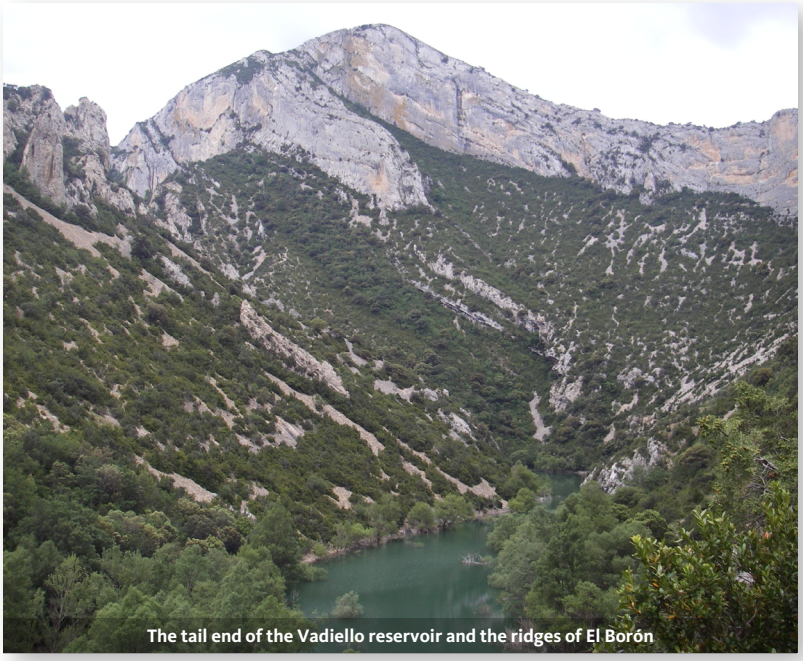
The path crosses the River Guatizalema thanks to the stones placed there for this purpose. You must take care at this point as, depending on the time of year, some of them might be covered with water and even dragged by the current. Once on the left-hand-side bank and following the sign for Vadiello some 10.5 km from here, the path rises across a woodland area of thick oak trees, which alternates with clearer areas where you can see above you the whitish limestone walls of the Fragineto Peak and, below you, the River Guatizalema, which, little by little, tucks further into the bottom.

The path continues among abundant vegetation crossing an area of stone slabs, with views of the gorges of the River Guatizalema at the bottom of the valley, and limestone walls and crests at the top of both sides of the valley.

You will carry on gaining altitude until you reach a point where the path begins to descend rather abruptly through a wooded area, crossing the occasional stone block that has fallen from the limestone walls overhead, and continue descending towards the riverbank, which you will see closer to you.



Terraces and pools in the River Guatizalema



The tail end of the Vadiello reservoir and the ridges of El Borón

The path goes as far as the riverbank next to an area where the vertical limestone walls on both sides close the valley. In order to cross the river, you will find some stones arranged for this purpose but, as with the previous crossing, you must take care as, depending on the time of year and the floods, some may be missing or covered by water, as you are practically at the tail end of the Vadiello reservoir. You cross the river in a spectacular setting surrounded by limestone walls and you begin to climb once again along the right-hand-side bank between thick woodland and scree under the Proyectil peak, with the vertical strata of the western face of the Fragineto on the opposite bank and, in the bottom of the valley, the stagnated waters of the tail end of the reservoir following the curves of the orography.

The path narrows a good deal and carries on over sections of scree with loose stones and box (*Buxus sempervirens*) and gall-oak (*Quercus faginea*), brushwood, with the precipice over the reservoir on the left, where a cave appears in the limestone walls that rise overhead. A little further on, the path begins to descend close to the riverbank, on one of the reservoir's bends, where there is a naked limestone rock area with timber on the floor to make it easier to cross.

From here onwards, the path begins to zigzag upwards quite abruptly across scree until it reaches a small viewpoint with an informative panel on the gorges of the River Guatizalema and the Guara canyons, which offers a spectacular view northwards of your path.

The trail begins to descend across the eastern side of the peak of El Borón with the reservoir precipice on the left, crossing scree and quite exposed areas. In some sections

protected by metallic towropes, you will see ever closer the steep conglomerate walls of the southern part of the reservoir. The path crosses a hillock from where you can see the crags of El Huevo and San Cosme on the opposite bank of the reservoir, and the mallos of Ligüerri, on the side you have been walking along.

After passing several sections protected by a metal towrope railing, you reach the transition area between the limestone of the northern part of the reservoir and the conglomerates of this southern area, right where the path begins to turn rightwards to go round the branch of the reservoir known as the ravine of El Diablo, which you cross via a metallic walkway. The path continues southwards, ascending as far as a small hillock, from where you can see, in the bottom, the road and, on your left, a wall of conglomerates outfitted with pegs for climbing.

The trail goes down to the bank and soon comes to a rest area outfitted with informative panels, wooden benches and a walkway that accesses the end of the road and the old bridge, which has partly collapsed, under impressive extremely vertical conglomerate walls. You are now in the area of the mallos of Ligüerri, geological formations whose origin is similar to the famous mallos of Riglos, but with their characteristic darker grey strips, more rounded appearance and, in general, smaller. In this case, they are also ideal for practising rock climbing.

In Vadiello, you will discover two massifs separated by the reservoir; on the left-hand-side bank, you will see the walls of La Predicadera, El Huevo de San Cosme and the area of the Sanctuary of San Cosme and San Damián; whereas, on the right-hand-side



The Vadiello Reservoir in the transition zone between the limestone ridges and the Huevo and Peña San Cosme conglomerates



Mallos de Ligüerri, la Aguja de la Mitra

bank, you will see another massif formed of several groups of mallos; those of Ligüerri to the east next to the reservoir, those of Lazas in the centre, and those of Los Pepes in the western part, where the cave chapel of San Chinés is also concealed.

You must not forget that, as you are inside the Natural Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons, climbing and canyoning are regulated activities, with specific periods for the practice of these sports in the different sectors, avoiding nesting seasons and the breeding of birds and other protected species.

After crossing the walkway, the path continues through a tunnel and joins the road, which is cut off by a fence on the other side of the tunnel. Along the road, you pass through a second tunnel, leaving on your left a small parking area, and you continue through a third tunnel, this time a little longer and also unlit, which ends at a car park located next to the hut of the Hydrographic Confederation of the River Ebro. Here, there are different informative panels and an asphalted turn-off on the left that leads to the reservoir of Vadiello, which was built in 1971 to supply the city of Huesca with drinking water.

The trail continues along the road, crossing a final tunnel and leaving the houses of Vadiello on your right. It carries on for some 400 m as far as a bend where the path turns off the road along a path on your right towards Santa Eulalia la Mayor. You will find yourself in the Ravine of Vadiello, which provides access to several itineraries and climbing routes, such as the area of the cirque of Ligüerri and the Palomo channel.

After some metres, you will come to a panel containing information on the path and a bicycle park, and on the left, on the other side of the stream, a rest area under a beautiful, shady poplar tree. On returning to the trail, and after walking a few metres, cross the ravine of Vadiello via some stones and then climb upwards through a wooded pine area. After continuing across the flat hillside under the impressive walls of the cirque of Ligüerri, the path turns to the left entering a thick afforestation pine grove(Pinus nigra) which covers this terraced hillside, to then, in 500 m, return to the clearing and continue almost flat as far as a reed-filled area in the ravine of Los Terreros. Here, you will come to a pond and a panel containing information on the path.

Behind you, ever watchful, are the conglomerate walls of the ravine of Vadiello, on whose ledges you can see feral domestic goats or "cimarronas", sharing territory with the most characteristic inhabitants of these geological formations: large birds of prey such as the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), bearded vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*), the royal eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) and the royal owl (*Bubo bubo*). Other small birds also make an appearance, such as the wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), which nests in the Pyrenees but usually spends the winter in Vadiello; the blue rock thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), the black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), the black wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*) and red-billed choughs (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*).



Mallos de Lazas and Los Pepes in Vadiello

VADIELLO RESERVOIR AND MALLOS

The Vadiello Dam impounds the River Guatizalema in its middle reaches, making use of the gorge that encloses the river in the Sierra de Guara. It is a gravity dam over 100 metres high at the crest, the construction of which was completed in late 1971. The water from this reservoir is used to supply and irrigate neighbouring towns.

The beautiful, secluded landscape formed by the reservoir waters, the steep-sided course of the River Guatizalema and its ravines, and the monumental rock formations that surround it, as well as its proximity to Huesca (just over 20 km from the provincial capital), make this area a popular destination for anyone interested in exploring the Sierra y los Cañones de Guara Natural Park.

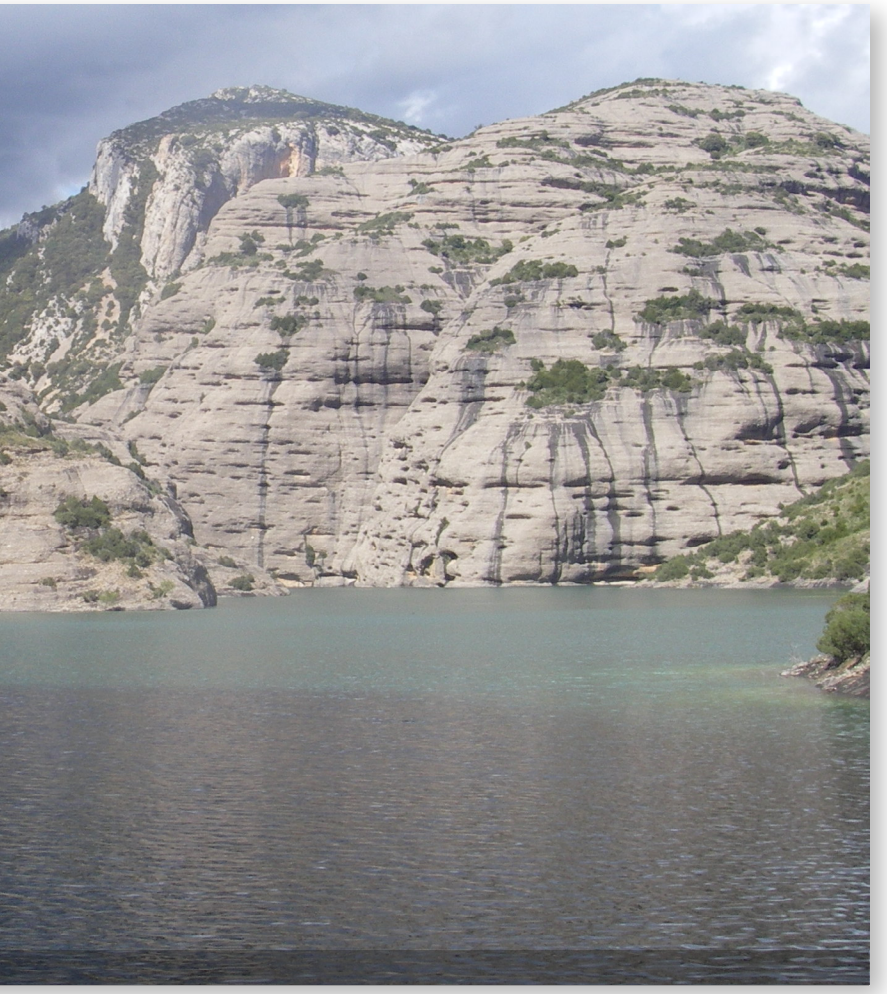


Vadiello Reservoir as seen from the end of the road, with Fragineto Peak in the background

In the central part stand the so-called 'mallos', formations of conglomerate rock comprising large, isolated vertical walls. Those found here are known as the Mallos de Ligüerri and are dominated by the monoliths known as La Mitra and El Puro, alongside the Isarre ravine, where the chapel of San Chinés is situated. Other famous rock formations include the 'Huevo de San Cosme', the Mallos de la Patata, the Mallos de los Pepes (or d'Aliana), the Lazas, the Crestas del Borón and the peak of San Jorge.

Furthermore, the Escomentué, Diablo and Lazas ravines, as well as the Canal del Palomo, are situated in the reservoir area and are home to numerous vulture colonies.

This area is the starting point for a range of outdoor sports tourism activities: hiking, with routes such as the one to the rock-hewn chapel of San Chinés or to that of San Cosme and San Damián; and, for the more adventurous, rock climbing on the mallos or caving in the surrounding caves.



The trail continues among pine groves leaving on one side the turn-off to the chapel of San Chinés, next to the Hut of San Román, zigzagging upwards until it reaches another track that comes from Vadiello, heading towards Santa Eulalia. You will carry on climbing with impressive views behind you of the steep conglomerate walls of the mallos of Lazas and Los Pepes, until you reach a hillock where the path towards the ice wells of Cuello Bail emerges on the right. The Nature Trail continues straight ahead making its way through the pine grove, until it takes a bend on the left where the trees give way to a brushwood area of box and juniper, which offers spectacular views of La Hoya de Huesca.

The path continues downwards to Santa Eulalia la Mayor, going around the Forcas hill, as far as a small rest area located at the viewpoint of La Gabardiella, right at the turn-off towards the chapel of the Virgin of Sescún and the mediaeval tower of La Atalaya. Next to this 12th-century chapel with a rectangular layout, you will find a rest area and a fountain, and, a little further on, you will reach the tower of La Atalaya, which was recently rebuilt and belongs to a Muslim castle of uncertain origin that changed into Aragonese hands in the 11th century. From this location, you will have impressive views both of the southern face of the Sierra of Guara and of the flat area of La Hoya de Huesca.

From the turn-off, you immediately enter the village of Santa Eulalia la Mayor, taking another turn-off on the right that leads you to an informative panel next to the first houses and another a little further down next to the 17th-century church of San Pedro, which separates the village into two districts. In the lower district, there are typical manor houses of the area, with rounded arches and their coats-of-arms on the facades, in this place also known as Santolaria.



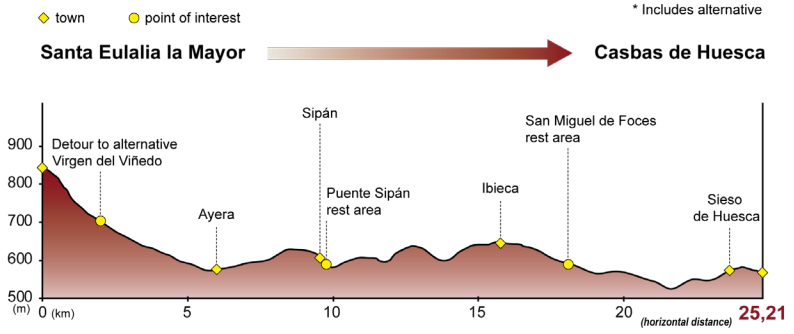
Panoramic view of the Sierra de Guara from the Santa Eulalia Lookout

STAGE 7 SANTA EULALIA LA MAYOR → CASBAS DE HUESCA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	240 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	510 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	26,30 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 32 min

* Includes alternative



THROUGH THE OLD ABBOTSHIP OF MONTEARAGÓN

This long Stage of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca runs through villages of the former Abbotship of Montearagón, where you can visit a large number of sites of great cultural and ethnological interest, such as the mediaeval bridge of Sipán, the church of San Miguel de Foces, the chapel of San Esteban and the Monastery of Casbas. Along the route's 25.7 km, you will cross the municipalities of Loporzano, Siétamo, Ibieca and Casbas de Huesca through a landscape of agricultural crops and oak groves located in the Somontano of the Sierra of Guara.



Panoramic view of La Hoya de Huesca, with the Santa Eulalia Watchtower on the right



Chapel of Virgen del Viñedo

The path leaves the town of Santa Eulalia la Mayor by descending the road towards the plain, to then turn off on a sharp bend on to a track that heads rightwards among olive fields (*Olea europaea*). You continue downwards among the olive and almond trees (*Prunus dulcis*) for around 900 m and after a chasm on the right and then on the left, the trail carries on among dry herbaceous crops, with the picture of the village of Castilsabás on the side of a small hill.

After some 500 m, you come to a turn-off on the right to an alternative route by an Oil Mill and by the chapel of the Virgin of El Viñedo. If you follow the sign, you will come to the old mill, a rectangular, one-eaved building that stands next to an explanatory panel. Both the building and its interior have recently been restored; its original structure has been maintained and inside you can still see the grindstone, the press, the basins and channels needed for the entire process for transforming olives into oil. From here, the trail leaves in the direction of the neighbouring chapel of Nuestra Señora del Viñedo, which is surrounded by olive trees and is a little over 100 m away. Nearby, there is El Viñedo Visitors' Centre, which is oriented towards the Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons.

After crossing the road, you continue along a track, which, as occurs with a large part of the route, is perfect for cycling. Surrounded by extensive cereal fields, you leave on your left Castilsabás, which is located on a hill covered with oak trees (*Quercus ilex*), kermes oaks (*Quercus coccifera*) and junipers (*Juniperus communis*).

Carry on along the main track where you will see several posts marking the Nature Trail and the outline of the great castle of Montearagón on the horizon. After leaving the path to Loporzano on your right, in less than 1.5 km, you will come to the first of the numerous chapels that you will find along the route. The ruins are of the chapel of San Fertús, located on a small plateau where a small mediaeval village used to stand.

The path continues in a southeasterly direction towards Ayera, which, after taking a sharp bend on the left, now appears in front of you. Once you have crossed the small village along its main road, you should turn to the left along a gravel track leading to the chapel of San Esteban.

After a few metres, you will come to the ruins of this modest chapel, which was built between the 13th and 14th centuries, on a hillock from where large sandstone blocks have fallen and where the excavated remains of two silos and a mediaeval necropolis containing anthropomorphic graves are preserved. After your visit, return to the path and carry on for 1.5 km across the cereal plain, which is only interrupted by a small slope among oak trees.

After climbing this small rise, carry on along the trail past two intersections 800 m apart, which you must cross straight ahead to reach the small village of Sipán, where the 16th-century Renaissance church of Santa María is located.

Leave Sipán by crossing the A-1227 highway and carry on downwards among oak trees as far as the rest area located next to the mediaeval bridge of Sipán, which was built taking advantage of a small narrowing of the River Guatizalema.



Medieval necropolis around the Chapel of San Esteban



Sipán Bridge, spanning a narrow stretch of the River Guatizalema

After crossing this simple but well-preserved bridge and enjoying the rewarding setting offered by the river, you once again enter an area where there is a predominance of cereal crops that are interspersed with the rounded tops of the oak trees that speckle the landscape. After passing over an intersection, continue straight ahead, where the trail bears to the left turning into a narrow path that now descends in the shade of a kermes oak grove towards the bed of the ravine of La Ripa.

After crossing a small riverbed via some stones, you being climbing across a sandstone area covered with oak trees, kermes oaks, box plants (*Buxus sempervirens*) and gorse (*Genista scorpius*), where you can see several sandstone landslides caused by the erosion of the lower clayey materials, which are softer and more easily weathered. In the last part of the climb, the path changes into a track that continues by crossing a landscape dominated by Holm oak groves and, after passing by two small crop fields, you arrive at a track where you must turn to the left, following the instructions for the path for Ibieca, which will come into view in a few metres. On continuing along the main path, you will pass over a junction as you gradually draw nearer to Ibieca across a landscape that is increasingly dominated by dry crops.

After passing the area of the fountain of Aquillán, you will come to Ibieca's cemetery, where the trail turns rightwards, sharing its route with the road that leads to the village. You will pass by its large rectangular square, where several houses with pointed arches and large segments over their doors and coats-of-arms on the main facades stand out.

From the square you head leftwards passing by the sturdy church of San Clemente, to then, level with an iron cross on the outskirts of the village, turn to the left, towards the chapel of San Miguel de Foces.

Carry on across a clearly agricultural landscape where there are some fields of olive trees and disperse Holm oak groves, among the predominant dry crop fields, until, in a little over 2 km, you come to the chapel of San Miguel de Foces. This superb construction, which was declared a National Monument, was built in the Romanesque to Gothic transition period and is regarded as one of the most important Gothic buildings in Aragón.

After the rest area next to the monument, the trail turns leftwards along a path that continues beside a small stream among blackberries (*Rubus* sp.), rushes and a herbaceous carpet that denotes some humidity.



A panoramic view of the Somontano region in Huesca, on the outskirts of Ibieca



Crops, scrubland and cork oak forests alternate in this part of the Somontano region of Huesca

After crossing the track, the trail carries on under the rounded tops of the oak trees creating a beautiful natural tunnel, and, in 150 m, it merges once again with the track that continues across the almost flat crop fields. The landscape changes for a moment on crossing the ravines of Alvarín, of Las Hoyas and a little further on that of Cañeto, with some sandstone blocks jutting out and where the tree vegetation is somewhat more abundant. Next to these small riverbeds, typical riverside vegetation grows, comprising plenty of blackberries, poplars (*Populus* sp.), ashes (*Fraxinus* sp.) and the occasional large Holm oak tree.

Walking along the path of Las Velillas, you leave on one side the chapel of San Blas or the Virgin of Los Olivares, from where you can now see the tower of the refurbished church of San Martín de Sieso de Huesca.

With the end of this Stage now in sight, you should cross Sieso de Huesca via one of its streets and, on the outskirts, take a track on the right to Casbas. After two stone bollards that prevent vehicles from passing, you will come to the A-1228 highway, which you should cross to enter Casbas de Huesca. Next to the crossroads, you will find a rest area and a bicycle park with an informative panel, which is the end of this long Stage of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca.

Worthy of note in Casbas de Huesca is the female Cistercian monastery of La Gloria, a diverse group of buildings from different eras, which currently belongs to a foundation that is attempting to renovate it.



THE ABBOTSHIP OF MONTEARAGÓN

Around 1085, the Aragonese King Sancho Ramírez, following in the footsteps of his grandfather King Sancho III in the Reconquista he began from Loarre southwards, decided to build a fortress at the entrance to Huesca, from where he could initiate an attack on the city, although it was to be his son, Pedro I, who completed its conquest in 1096. In 1093, the construction of the church began and a monastery was founded by the Augustine order, which was fed by the canons that were in Loarre, to end up unifying religion and military strategy under its jurisdiction; thus creating the abbotship of Montearagón.

Little by little, the King increased his power and the privileges of the Abbey with the incorporation of new territories such as La Almunia del Romeral, Ayera, Bandaliés, Barluenga, Castilsabás, Chibluco, Loscertales, Loporzano, San Julián de Banzo, Santa Eulalia la Mayor, Sasa del Abadiado and Sipán. To this very day, these twelve towns are still known as the Abbotship of Montearagón and the Virgin of El Viñedo is the site's centre of religious and historic life. Even with Felipe II, now in the 16th century, the Abbotship of Montearagón held jurisdiction over 77 towns and villages, although monastic life ended with the disendowment of Mendizábal in 1835.

(continue)

Subsequently in 1845, the castle of Montearagón was burnt down, which left it in its current ruined state. In 1931, it was declared a National Monument. The central government and the Association of Friends of the Castle of Montearagón are currently seeking a purpose for this monument that will enable it to be restored.

Worthy of note among the chapels linked to the twelve original villages of the abbotship of Montearagón is the chapel of the Virgin of El Viñedo. From 1092 and during the reign of Sancho Ramírez, this chapel, whose origin results from the appearance of the Virgin before a shepherd in the 11th century, belonged to the Abbotship of Montearagón. So that they would believe his story, the Virgin told him that the palm of his hand would become joined to his cheek, and that is what happened. The villagers erected a chapel in the place shown by the child.

Another tradition that has lasted until this very day relates to a favour that was granted by the Virgin in the 12th century, when a fatal illness spread among new-borns, wiping out all the children. The inhabitants of the area met and held a procession and mass and begged the Virgin to end the epidemic. As it ended a short while later, the residents took a vow to hold a procession to the chapel from then onwards. This takes place on May 1, the day when the twelve villages in the Abbotship stage a procession to the chapel.

Other interesting Romanesque chapels, although they are currently deserted, are those of San Fertús, located halfway between Ayera and Sasa del Abadiado, and the chapel of San Esteban and its necropolis, in the vicinity of Ayera. The chapel of San Miguel de Foces, which was restored in 2003 and 2004 and is located in an unparalleled spot with the Sierra of Guara in the background, marks the transition from late Romanesque to Gothic styles, as it was built in the 13th century, with the building of the Foces family vault. It has been a National Monument since 1916.

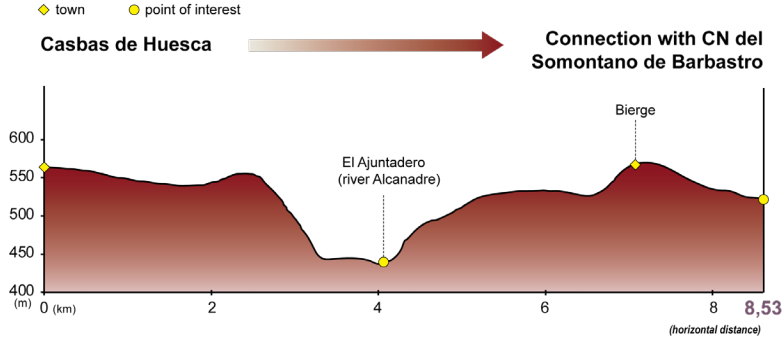


The monumental Chapel of San Miguel de Foces

STAGE 8 CASBAS DE HUESCA → BIERGE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	160 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	200 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	8,59 km
Amount of effort needed	2	Time	2 h 30 min



A LAND MARKED BY ITS RIVERS

This Stage, the shortest on La Hoya de Huesca Nature Trail, joins together the towns of Casbas de Huesca and Bierge, enabling it to link up to the Nature Trail of El Somontano de Barbastro in the vicinity of El Salto de Bierge. Along this 8.6 km route, you will cross and walk beside several rivers, such as the Formiga, the Isuala and the Alcanadre, which cross the Sierra of Guara perpendicularly from north to south, forming deep valleys on their way.



Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Glory in Casbas, Huesca

To begin this Stage, you must leave the designated rest area at the entrance to the town of Casbas de Huesca. Heading towards the town, you will come to the Cistercian monastery of Nuestra Señora de la Gloria, a group of several buildings where a beautiful 12th-century Romanesque façade is maintained as well as a 15th-century cloister and the Renaissance Abbey's Palace. On this monastic site, several infrastructures relating to water use, such as an old fountain with a lowered arch and a washhouse next to it, have also been preserved.

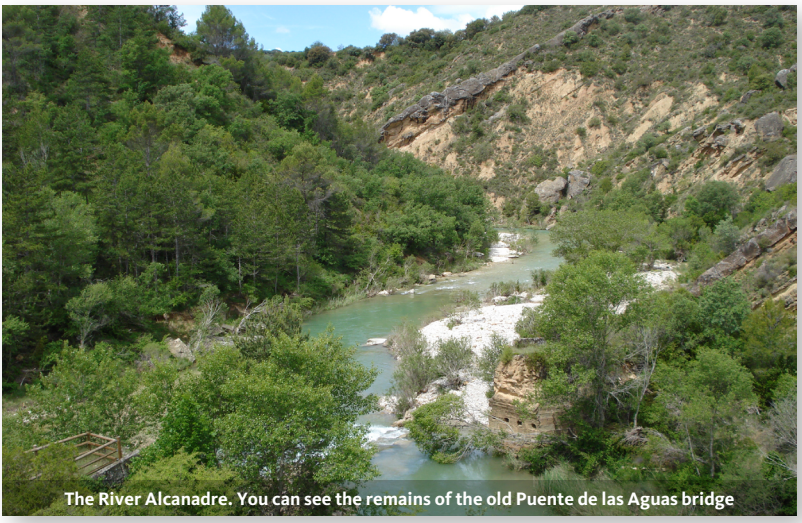
After this recommendable visit, return to the trail by crossing the town and, on the outskirts, turn off by taking a dirt track on the left towards Bierge. Here, you will enjoy the characteristic landscape of this region of Huesca, where the cereal plain is interspersed with Holm oak trees (*Quercus ilex*), offering a beautiful, colourful mosaic, with the Sierra of Guara dominating the horizon.

Some metres before the irrigation canal stream, after walking close to 1 km, leave the path on the right, passing next to an estate with some vineyards. Some metres further ahead, the path forks and you should continue along the one on the left. Level with the 18th-century chapel of San José, located on a sandstone hillock, you should take the signposted fork to the left and carry on along the path among olive (*Olea europaea*) and oak trees until you come to a wooden railing where the trail turns into a path and you begin walking down to the River Formiga.

This winding descent across the hillside offers beautiful views of the region and of the ravine of the River Formiga, with steep rocky sandstone sides.



A section of the route involving a stepped descent towards the Formiga River Gorge



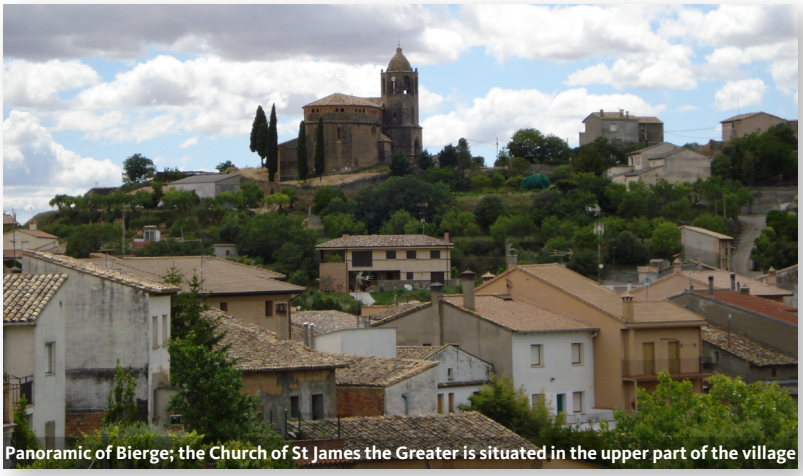
The River Alcanadre. You can see the remains of the old Puente de las Aguas bridge

Walking down through a beautiful oak grove, comprising species such as strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), junipers (*Juniperus communis*), kermes oaks (*Quercus coccifera*), gorse (*Genista scorpius*), honeysuckles (*Lonicera* sp.), prostrate Canary clover (*Dorycnium pentaphylum*), and lavender (*Lavandula* sp.), there are different sections of railing and wooden steps in the steepest areas until you come to a track that leads you to a walkway that enables you to cross the River Formiga, which some metres further on pours its waters into the River Alcanadre.

Having crossed the riverbed, the trail continues along a track for some 30 m and turns to the left changing into a path that climbs up the hillside, offering excellent views of the River Alcanadre on the right of the route. The path once again descends among kermes oaks, oak trees and the occasional Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) as far as the riverbed, which you will walk beside for a few hundred metres, among numerous remnants dragged by these crystal-clear waters.

You will see in front of you the remains of the bridge of Las Aguas, one of the oldest bridges built over the River Alcanadre, the fullest and longest river along El Somontano. This bridge of Romanesque origin connected both riverbanks together, allowing the muleteers who transported goods from the high lands of El Somontano to the flatlands of La Hoya de Huesca to pass over it, forming part of a bridle path known as "the carriers" and of a Royal Path.

Its collapse was notified in April 1994 and all that remains at the present time is part of the abutments that rested on the rock, the central pillar and part of the two pointed arches that formed the bridge's spans. Here, large stones have been arranged like stepping-stones so that the river, which in this area is known as the Ajuntadero or the "joiner", can be forded. Its waters merge with those of the River Isuala, increasing its flow and its strength. This river should be crossed with care as, depending on its flow, some of the stones could be covered with water or be slippery.



Panoramic of Bierge; the Church of St James the Greater is situated in the upper part of the village

Now, on the other bank, you begin to walk down a steep path that offers excellent views of both rivers' basins, with a clear V-shaped profile and very tilted strata of different hardness, showing the differential erosion between the softest (clays) and the more resistant (sandstones) materials. After the climb, you walk under oak trees around a crop that you will leave a few metres ahead, to then continue along the valley of the River Alcanadre, which allows you to see the town of Bierge in front of you. After continuing for some 700 m next to diverse dry crops, the path merges with a track on the left that heads towards the town.

The Nature Trail carries on following the main track among olive trees, cereals and oak trees, reaching the ravine of La Tejería, where there are some kitchen gardens and fruit trees. One last slope leads you to the path of Batanaz, and, after a turn-off to the right, you enter the town of Bierge, the gateway to the Natural



Bierge Weir, a weir built on the Alcanadre river

Park of the Sierra and the Guara Canyons, where a large number of active tourism companies and services are gathered offering a diverse array of nature activities.

The late Gothic church of Santiago el Mayor, which was built over another of Romanesque origin, stands on your left at the top of the town. You pass by the door of an old restored oil mill and continue as far as a car park and a play area where you can consult a panel containing information on the Nature Trail. From here, the path continues among olive trees and cereal crops as far as the A-1227 highway.

At the exit from Bierge to Rodellar, you will find the Interpretation Centre of the Natural Park of the Sierra and Guara Canyons. In the village, you can also visit the 13th-century, Romanesque style chapel of San Fructuoso, declared a Historic Artistic Monument.

When you reach the A-1227 highway, you must walk beside it with great care. In a distance of 50 m, the path crosses it and climbs a small hill on the right via a path, to then descend as far as the small ravine of Viatres. Once the trail arrives at the road again, but without crossing over, it turns to the right along a track that continues as far as the connection with the Nature Trail of El Somontano de Barbastro, the end of the Stage and of the Nature Trail of La Hoya de Huesca.

In just 200 m, you will come to a car park and several informative panels on both Nature Trails around the popular Salto de Bierge; a weir built to operate one of the eleven flourmills that existed on the River Alcanadre and which has now become a popular leisure spot. In summer, access to the Salto de Bierge is restricted and you need to buy a ticket (for more information and to buy tickets, visit https://saltodebierge.info/).



RIVER ALCANADRE. BRIDGE OF THE WATERS

This river's name comes from the Arabic Al-qanatir,the plural of Al-qantara and means "the river of the bridges". It is the longest and fullest river of those that cross the outer Sierras of Huesca, although its regime is very irregular and runs both high and low depending on the year.

It owes its name to the fact that, from its source in the Sierra of Galardón as far as its mouth on the River Cinca, in the town of Ballobar, the remains of sixteen old stone bridges have been preserved.

This river crosses the Sierra of Guara and forges deep ravines, canyons and gorges, which, every year, welcome canyoners of all nationalities. The four sections that are formed are called Gorgas Negras (the hardest Stage for canyoning in the whole sierra), Barrasil, Peonera Superior and Peonera Inferior.

Its most important tributaries are the Rivers Balcés, Mascún, Flumen and Guatizalema.

Out of all the old bridges that have remained standing, the purpose of the bridge of "Las Aguas" of Bierge or of "as cabras", which has not been used since 1994, was to facilitate the traffic of goods that were headed towards the high lands of El Sobrarbe, and passed through Bierge towards Casbas and from there to the plateau of La Hoya de Huesca. It also formed part of a Royal Path from Huesca to Alquézar.

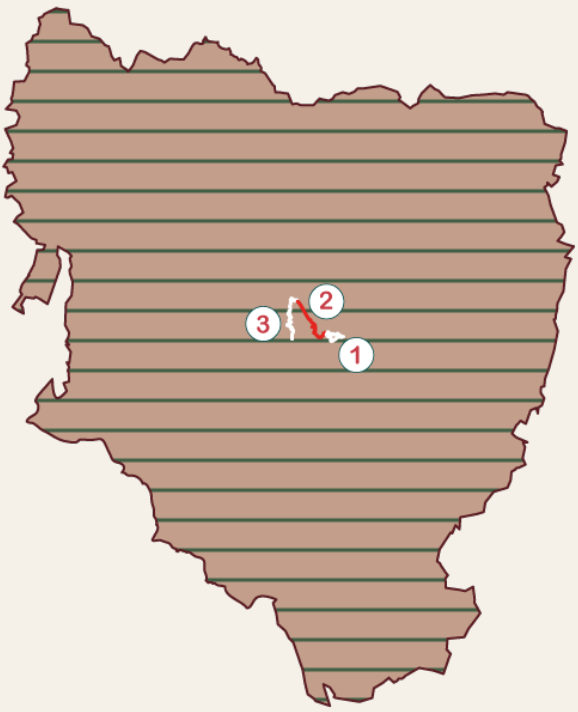
This bridge dates back to the late 16th or early 17th century. When it was in use, it was formed of two pointed arches separated by a pillar that rested on a rocky area of the river and upstream it had a triangular breakwater with a pyramidal structure. On the arches, there rested a gabled, paved, slightly tilted deck, whose centre was approximately at the point where it met the dome of the breakwater. The bridge channelled the current via fan-shaped, staggered flaps and was built out of blocks joined together with mortar and in regular rows.

At the present time, following its collapse, the only elements still remaining are the abutments, which are partly resting on the rock, the central pillar and the stem of the arches on both sides.



Alcanadre River

SOMONTANO DE BARBASTRO NATURE TRAIL



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INTRODUCTION
SOMONTANO DE BARBASTRO NATURE TRAIL

More than 50 km long, the Somontano de Barbastro Nature Trail runs through the region that shares its name, in the province of Huesca. It crosses the municipalities of Colungo, Alquézar, Adahuesca y Bierge, using old paths and trails that had been refurbished.

Most of the itinerary runs within the limits of "La Sierra y los Cañones de Guara" (Guara mountain range and canyons) Natural Park, the biggest protected natural space in Aragón. A land characterised by the beauty of its landscapes, the work of the erosional processes of its fluvial network.

Rivers like Vero, Alcanadre, or Balced, and their tributaries had excavated a network of canyons in these karstics terrains, making the area an international reference for the practice of canyoning, attracting adventure sports fans year after year.

Its situation, between the Pyrenees and the Ebro Depression, and with its climate, which varies between Atlantic and Mediterranean, causes a strong difference between the north and south slopes of its mountains. This resulted in the appearance of many endemisms. Among its wildlife, stands out the trout population, and the presence of the Pyrenean mountain newt, and endemic species in the Pyrenees area. The steep walls make the ideal shelter for large birds of prey, like the golden Eagle, the bearded vulture or the griffon vulture.

In addition to this privileged natural environment, the Nature Trail also allows the user to discover the rich heritage of the region. The historical complex of Alquézar, Colungo's Rock Art Centre, bridges full of history (and legends) like those of Villacantal, Fuendebaños or "el Diablo" (Devil's bridge), or hydraulics infrastructures like the weir known as Salto de Bierge (Bierge Waterfall), formerly for flour mill, then a little hydroelectric station and nowadays a popular recreational area. In fact, a large portion of the route is within the Parque Cultural del río Vero (River Vero Cultural Park), and administrative that pursues the promotion and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of this area.

This itinerary ends near Salto de Bierge, where it links directly with the end of Hoya de Huesca Nature Trail. This fact, in addition to the large network of routes in sierra de Guara and the Somontano de Barbastro region, allows the visitor to keep on knowing this spectacular area of the province of Huesca.

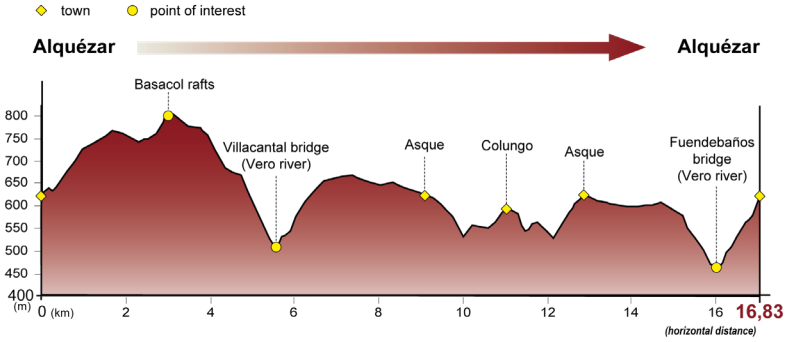


The River Vero downstream of the Villacantal bridge

STAGE 1 ALQUÉZAR → ALQUÉZAR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	890 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	890 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	16,85 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 25 min



HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE CANYONS OF THE RIVER VERO

The first stage of the Somontano Nature Route is a circular path that starts and ends in the town of Alquézar. Along the way, you'll discover the area surrounding the river Vero and its tributaries nestling between limestone cliffs, and enjoy the heritage to be found in villages such as Alquézar, which was declared a Historic Site, and Colungo.



Panoramic view of Alquézar

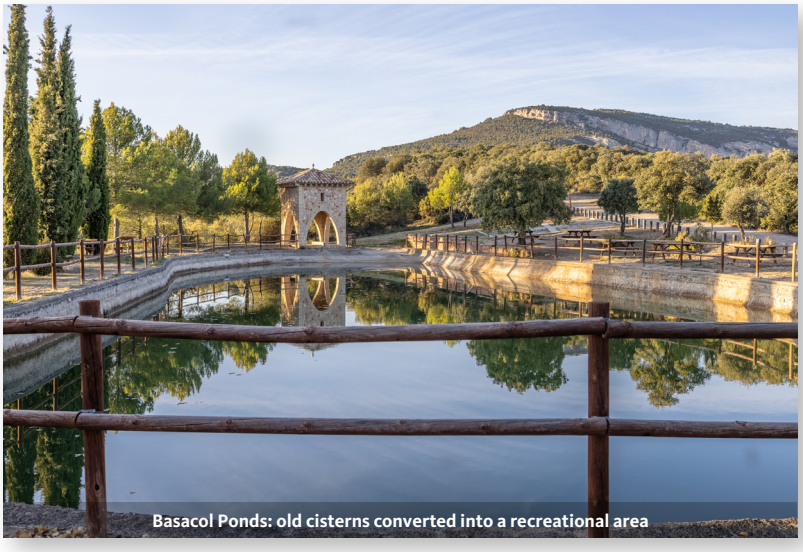
This first stage of the Somontano Nature Route of Barbastro starts in Alquézar, near the parish church of San Miguel Arcángel. Before setting off, take a moment to look around Alquézar, a historical town (dating back to the 9th century) that was declared a Historic-Artistic Site in 1982. The most notable feature, standing out from a hilltop, is the collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor. The first kilometres of this stage coincide with Stage 2, which takes you to Las Almunias de Rodellar.

The Route immediately enters the historical quarter of the town, running through cobbled streets surrounded by picturesque buildings for several hundred metres before leaving the town and heading north.

Then you come to a slope that heads in the direction of the hermitage of San Gregorio, passing close by a reservoir, the aljibe de San Gregorio. You pass along a broad forested track right at the diversion that takes you to the hermitage. Although the route continues along the forest trail, it's well worth paying a visit to the hermitage to see the fantastic views of Alquézar and the canyon of the river Vero. Another option is to pass by the church and keep walking until you reach a bird observatory, from where you can see carrion eating birds that come here to feed off the nearby '*muladar*' (midden).

Continuing along the Nature Route through the forest trail for another kilometre, you come to a fork in the path. At this point Stages 1 and 2 separate. If you continue on the trail, you'll be taking Stage 2, but if you want to continue with this stage, take the narrower trail that heads off to the right.

This part of the trail follows a traditional water course that takes you to an area called the Balsas de Basacol, a group of ancient Moorish aljibes (water cisterns) that were used to keep the water that supplied Alquézar. The area was rehabilitated, tables and seating were installed, and is now a popular location for picnics and hiking.



Basacol Ponds: old cisterns converted into a recreational area



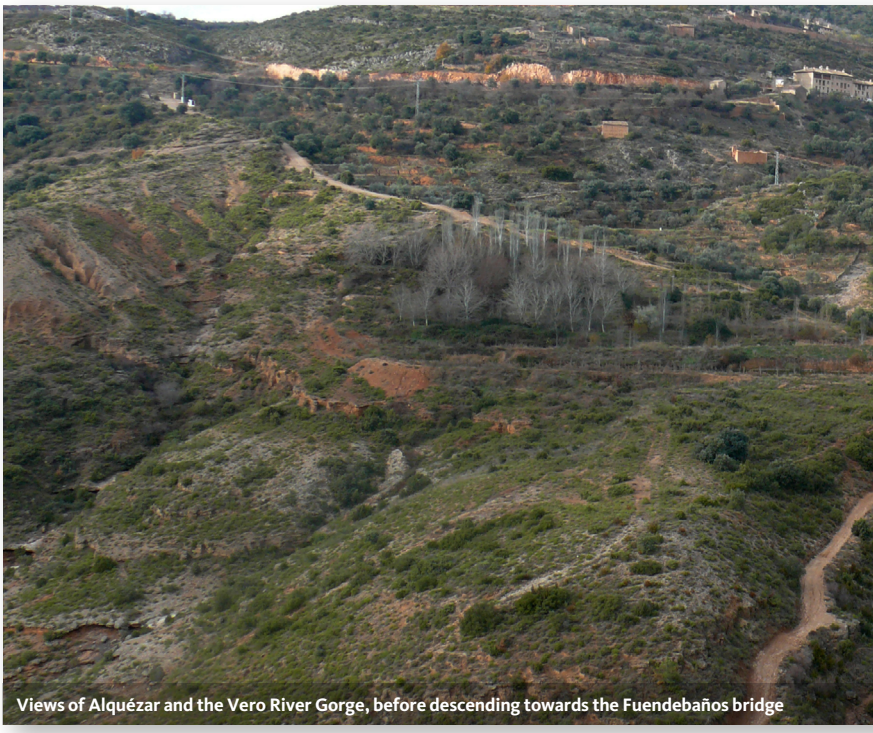
Asque, with its church in the foreground, and Colungo in the background

Heading south, you leave the Balsas on a trail that goes upwards to a natural esplanade, from where another trail takes you down towards Alquézar From here there is a wonderful view of the southern part of the town, and of the canyons of the river Vero to the north east. The route continues along a trail that heads down to the river Vero. Once there, you cross the river over the bridge of Villacantal, a stone built bridge with two arches and the unusual feature of being built at an angle. At the bottom of the gorge of the Vero there are some impressive rock formations surrounding the canyon, which explains why lovers of canyoning pass through here on their way down from the beautiful village of Lecina.

The route heads upwards to reach the other side of the canyon of the river Vero. After an uphill walk of about one kilometre, you come to a pass from where you set off along a small path that takes you to the shelter of Regacens, which was once used as a corral and still has some examples of rock art. The trail itself, however, continues eastwards towards Asque. You reach this small village, which forms part of the municipality of Colungo, by heading down towards the gorge of Malpaso and going back up the other side.

The Route enters Asque along the main street until you come to a plaza, where it splits. To continue along the route, you need to take the east route to leave Asque and head off towards Colungo, or you can go west to return to Alquézar.

If you set off towards Colungo, the route goes down to the gorge of Fornocal, where you cross over the bridge of El Diablo. Probably of medieval origin, this stone built bridge with a pointed arch gets its name from the legend that building it was so difficult that it must have been the work of the Devil himself, who left a mark on the mortar that is still fresh.



Views of Alquézar and the Vero River Gorge, before descending towards the Fuendebaños bridge

After an upward stretch of one kilometre from the gorge, you finally come to Colungo. Like Alquézar, this small village dates back to the Middle Ages. It also has a centre of rock art with information about the cultures that lived in the area surrounding the river Vero. It is also the setting off point for guided visits to the rock shelters and caves in the region of the Somontano de Barbastro, organised by the Cultural Park of the river Vero.

After wandering around the picturesque streets of Colungo, if you want to continue along the Nature Route you have to head back towards Asque, and continue in the direction of Alquézar along a stretch that runs alongside section GR 1.1 of the GR 1 historical route between Girona and Araba/Álava.

About 3 km of a gentle downwards slope take you back to the canyon of the river Vero, where you get another panoramic view of Alquézar, this time from the south. The trail slopes more sharply on its way to the river, where you come to the historical bridge of Fuendebaños. This is a good place to appreciate the importance of the Vero in the development of Alquézar, since here you can see some mills that were once here just after crossing the bridge.

Now you come to an upward slope that heads up the canyon and comes to the starting point of the Route in Alquézar. Along the way, after about half a kilometre, a diversion to the right connects with the end point of the routes of the Vero, an impressive trail where you can walk between the rock faces of the river canyon, sometimes directly above the water along some aerial walkways anchored into the



rock. You need to make a reservation beforehand if you want to do this route (for more information, contact the tourist office at Alquézar or go to http://pasarelas-dealquezar.com/es_ES/).

If you want to complete the 17 km of the first stage, you just have to continue upwards for another half a kilometre to come the starting point next to the parish church.

ALQUÉZAR

The small town of Alquézar (from the Arabic al-Qasr, fortress), took shape around the skirts of the mountain where the fortress that gave it its name was built. The fortress itself dates back to the 9th century and was one of the main defensive bulwarks of the Andalusi region of the Barbitania.

Taken by Christians in the 11th c., the town's population began to increase and with that the town began to spread out beyond its walls, to form what is now the current town structure (*Burgo Nuovo Alquezarensis*). The only remaining inhabitants of the castle were clerics, which led to its transformation into the collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor, one of the most recognisable sights of Alquézar.

(continue)

A notable feature of this religious complex is the 16th c. church, containing a richly coloured altarpiece, chapels, the organ and the Cristo de Lecina, a 13th c. carving. Another feature well worth seeing is the cloister, unique in Aragon for conserving all its frescos, painted between the 14th and 18th centuries.

A visit to the other parts of the town is also highly recommended, where you can take a walk along the typically medieval streets interconnected by narrow winding lanes. The buildings have maintained the traditional architecture of local stone, adobe, brickwork and mud walls, and some houses date back to the 14th and 15th centuries. Two of the three gates that gave access to the town are also still preserved. The historical quarter of Alquézar was declared a Historic-Artistic Site in 1982.

This walk through the history of the town can be completed with a visit to the "Casa Fabián" ethnological museum in a 17th century house on top of a medieval oil mill built into the rock.

But the town has a lot more to offer besides it rich historical heritage. Its central position in a natural setting of great beauty right in the heart of the Sierra and Cañones de Guara Nature Park, has transformed the town's economy, leading to a shift from dry land farming to the service sector and making it a starting point for a wide range of activities in rural and sports tourism such as hiking and canyoning.



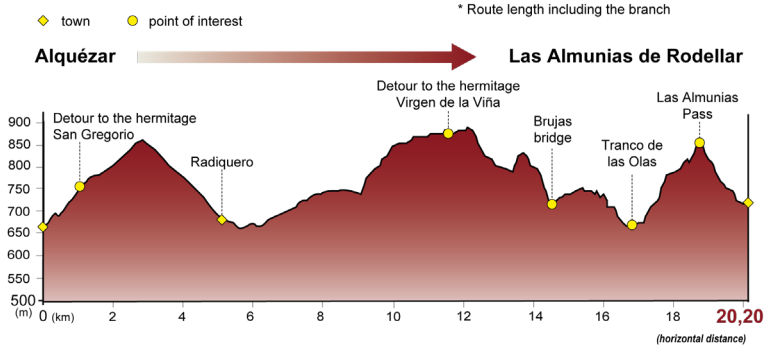
Collegiate Church of Santa María la Mayor in Alquézar

STAGE 2 ALQUÉZAR → LAS ALMUNIAS DE RODELLAR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	1115 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	1040 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	21,08 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 35 min

* Route length including the branch



FROM ALQUÉZAR TO LAS ALMUNIAS DE RODELLAR VIA THE NARROWS OF THE BALCED

Although this stage is one of the longest and toughest on the Nature Route for its steep slopes, it is also contains the widest range of landscapes to be seen in the Natural Park of the Sierra y los Cañones de Guara: wander along the hillsides converted into fields and pastureland on the outskirts of Alquézar, Radiquero and Las Almunias de Rodellar, or lose yourself on a hill full of scrubland, gall oaks and hom oaks; walk between rock faces when the trail reaches the canyon of the Balced (as this section of the river Isuala is called) and discover the strange karst formations carved out by water.



A typical mosaic of the Somontano landscape, with the village of Radiquero in the background



Panoramic view of Radiquero and the surrounding area from near the chapel of Santa Águeda

The second stage of this Nature Trail starts at the same point as the first and follows the same route as it until a crossroads just past the turn-off for the San Gregorio chapel. To avoid repeating the information, the description of this shared section can be found on page 88 of this guide.

From the point where stages 1 and 2 diverge, the route continues uphill in a northwest direction on the forest trail until you come to a hilltop where you have to take another broad trail that heads downwards to the southwest towards Radiquero. Just like the return trip to Alquézar from Asque in the previous stage, the first kilometres of this stage coincide with the GR 1.1 section of the GR 1 historical route.

Before setting off downhill to Radiquero, a village that forms part of the municipality of Alquézar, stop to enjoy the views of a landscape that is typical of the Somontano de Barbastro, with wheat fields, vineyards (*Vitis vinifera*), olive groves (*Olea europaea*) and almond orchards (*Prunus dulcis*), that alternate with scrubland and slopes covered with groves of gall oaks (*Quercus faginea*) and holm oaks (*Q. ilex*).

Once you reach Radiquero, walk through the village, passing by the church and you come to the A-1233, although the Route separates from the road almost immediately along a track that heads off to the northwest and takes you to the ruins of the hermitage of Santa Águeda, where we recommend stopping to take a break and enjoy the amazing views to be seen here.

The next part of the route passes through land that was once an important area for livestock, but after gradually being abandoned has now been recolonised by a forest of holm and gall oaks. The slopes have also been repopulated by groves of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*).

After passing the Modovil ravine, take the old mountain trail, which is a bit narrower. It starts with a slight slope then zigzags upwards to the dividing line between this ravine and the gorge of the Avellaneras. Here the slope becomes gentler and the Route carries on along a slope covered with dense Mediterranean scrub until it crosses a wider track that takes you to the hermitage of La Virgen de la Viña.

Go left, and walk for about a kilometre downhill all the way to reach the hermitage. It's well worth the walk, since there is a beautiful view of the canyon of the Balced and the peaks of Guara. The simple church is the backdrop for a popular religious procession that takes place every 23 April, and a leisure and picnic area has been built nearby.

Head back to the main route and set off along a narrower track that passes through several limestone ravines. The intense erosion in this area has led to the vegetation prospering mainly on slopes that are less steep, or in the bottoms of valleys and small depressions, while the steeper areas are bare of vegetation, thus making what look like authentic walls of stone.



Chapel of the Virgen de la Viña



The Bruxas Bridge, spanning the Cautiecho ravine

The basin of the Balced offers a wide range of rock formations throughout the Route and encourages the presence of Mediterranean forest, which was once intensely pastured and has a wealth of vegetation. Here you can discover kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*), juniper and savin juniper (*Juniperus* sp.), rockrose (*Cistus* sp.), rosemary (*Rosmarinus offinialis*), strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*), lavender (*Lavandula* sp.) and thyme (*Thymus* sp.), as well as holm and gall oaks in the areas with deeper soil and Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) in shadier areas. A testimony of the region's pastoral importance can be found in the area called the Corral Nuevo, where large flocks where brought together on their way through the sierra.

Now the route comes to Las Palomeras, an area of great geological value. The limestone terrain here has been highly eroded and given shape by water, and seen from the south at a distance looks like a flock of doves.

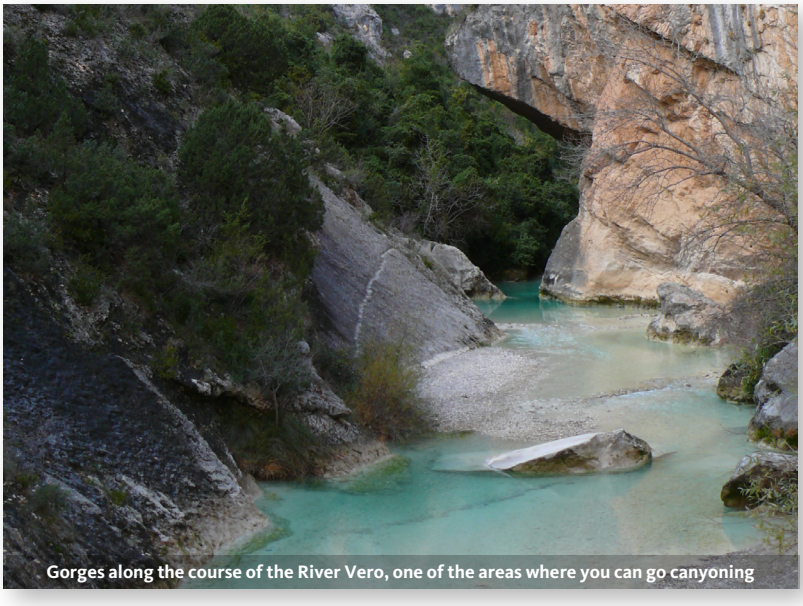
Continue and cross a narrow ravine (Barranco de Cautiecho) on the bridge of Las Bruxas. Normally, in this intricate and inaccessible terrain, where the silence is only broken by the sound of the wildlife that lives there, the water courses are seasonal. However, after heavy rainfall, this area can offer the spectacular sight of a veritable explosion of water that descends via a multitude of water courses.

CANYONING IN THE SIERRA DE GUARA

The gorges of Guara were unknown until a Frenchman, Lucien Briet, discovered and explored them in 1904. His first journey of discovery included the gorges of El Gorgas Negras, La Peonera, El Vero and Mascún. In the 1950s a group of compatriots entered the gorge of La Choca for the first time. Then in the 1960s, groups of Spanish explorers discovered other gorges such as Otín, Gorgonchón, Cueva Cabrito, Chimiachas, etc. The Barranco d'os Fornazos was the last one to be discovered in 1996.

And now, although the times of exploration and discovery have ended, the Sierra of Guara still offers many hidden treasures to those who want to enter into the heart of the area, with more than 60 sports ravines that offer a wide range of techniques, settings and attractions. For this reason the region is now widely known as the cradle of canyoning in Europe and every year the number of visitors who come to do this sport increases.

All the gorges form part of the Natural Park of the Sierra y los Cañones de Guara, and so canyoning is regulated. This sport inevitably has some impact on the flora and fauna of the local ecosystems, and so visitors are responsible for minimising the effect of their presence by not touching animals or plants while they are in the gorges. After all, it's the canyoner who's the visitor here.



Gorges along the course of the River Vero, one of the areas where you can go canyoning

The Route continues along the left hand side of the Balced canyon, passing through small ravines and heading down to the river in the area called Tranco de las Olas. Cross the river over a rather unique structure made of metal located at a point where the river narrows. Here you can see the Marmitas de Gigante, a set of unique rock formations in the river bed caused by water erosion and small stones that gradually widen the walls of small natural wells.

Cross to the other side of the river, where the route finally leaves the Balced canyon and continues along the valleys excavated from the rock by their tributaries. Now there is a tough ascent that culminates at the crossing point with a forest trail at the point called the Collado de Las Almunias. Here you can find a rest area and one of the main access routes to the narrows of the Balced, along with some parking areas for people who want to take the forest trail to the west.

The Route leaves the trail at Collado de Las Almunias and continues along a narrow path that goes downhill all the way. As the valley opens up you can see the surrounding area of the village of Las Almunias de Rodellar, with fruit tree orchards and pastureland replacing the Mediterranean mountain.

Cross the HU-341, and head off down the last few hundred metres of this stage through the fields and pastureland of Las Almunias del Rodellar, a small village that forms part of the municipality of Bierge, where this stage ends.

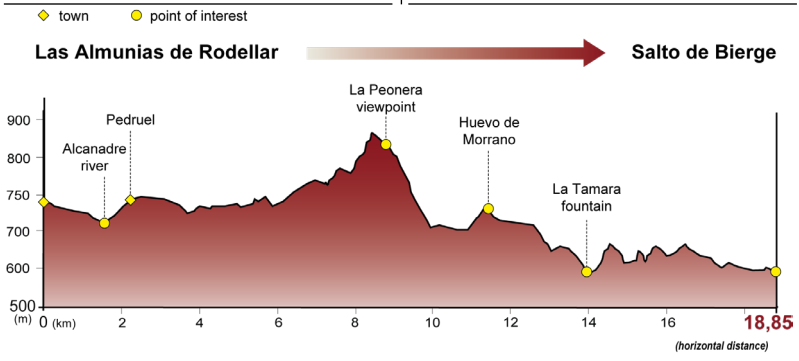


Panoramic view of the village of Las Almunias de Rodellar, with views of the Sierra de Guara

STAGE 3 LAS ALMUNIAS DE RODELLAR → SALTO DE BIERGE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	795 m
Guidance along the route	2	Downward gradient	895 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	18,87 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	6 h 35 min



ROUTE TO EL SALTO DE BIERGE ALONGSIDE THE RIVER ALCANADRE

The river Alcanadre is an almost constant companion in this last stage of the Nature Route. The river wastes no time in heading off between limestone rock faces towards the final point at El Salto de Bierge, an old weir that was used for a mill and to supply a small hydroelectric station.



Sheep grazing on the pastures at the foot of the mountains on the outskirts of Las Almunias de Rodellar

The Route passes around Las Almunias del Rodellar without actually entering the village and then joins up with an asphalted road that gently slopes down to the river Alcanadre between pastures and cropland. Then, to your left just before you cross the bridge over the river you can see an example of how people crossed watercourses in the Sierra de Guara: the Pasaderas de Pedruel. It consists of a set of square-shaped stepping stones embedded in the river bed at a distance of a one and a half metres from each other.

After you take one way or the other to cross the river, the route continues along the road for another 200 m, and then splits off towards Pedruel along an old path that takes you to the centre of Pedruel; a small village that forms part of the municipality of Bierge. Not many of the houses are occupied now, but they are well conserved.

Before you continue on the route, and if you have time, it's worth walking upriver for a kilometre to see the medieval bridge of Pedruel, a simple but beautiful one arched stone bridge, halfway between Pedruel and Rodellar.

From Pedruel, the route continues along the path that starts at the church in the southern part of the village and heads off for several kilometres in the same direction as the river Alcanadre at the bottom of the valley between the sierras of Arangol and Balced. Along the way you'll see how the bottom of the valley gets narrower and steep slopes covered with vegetation take the place of farmland.

Then you'll start to make out the entrance to the canyon of the Alcanadre, in an area called section La Peonera. The route crosses the ravines and streams that flow into the river, while on each side you'll find diversions that take you to other interesting local



The Pedruel fords on the River Alcanadre, a traditional way of crossing rivers in the Sierra de Guara



Peña Falconera, or Huevo de Morrano, a curious rock formation that stands out amongst the pine forest

sites that are not on the Nature Route. One is the diversion to the hermitage of La Trinidad, on a high point that looks out over the river, near the Fuente Güega and a reservoir, or the two routes to the so-called Castillo de Naya, a rocky enclave with impressive views over the valley.

The next strecht is a tough uphill walk on a path that takes you to a viewing point that offers a fabulous view of the surrounding mountain ranges. To the south you can see the Peña Falconera or Huevo de Morrano, as it is known locally, a unique rock formation caused by erosion that stands out over the forest that spreads out over the slopes, and is home and nesting place to a population of griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*). To the east, the viewing point looks out over the river canyon.

The route then leaves the viewing point and sets off along the same path. A small trail to the left heads down to the river on its way to the hermitage of San Martín, a simple building next to the river itself, just under the rock face whose summit is the viewing point you left a little while ago.

The Route then drops sharply and enters the dense pine forest of Morrano that you saw from the viewing point. After passing over a small hilltop, the route continues on the hillside right under the Huevo de Morrano and takes you to a crossroads. Go right and continue until you come to the village of Morrano.

Take the track that sets off to the south east, an old bridle path that goes down to the river Alcanadre. For the first kilometre or so you can see the south face of the Huevo de Morrano to your left.



The steep slopes that flank the Alcanadre riverbed for much of this stage

Then you arrive at the river Alancadre at a point called Fuente Tamara. This beautiful stretch of the river forms a natural swimming pool created by the water that runs down from the Fornazos coming together with water that filters through the limestone of La Tamara. This place is very popular locally and has a rest area. Some large stone blocks have been put in place as stepping stones to enable you to cross the river Alcanadre. Although it doesn't often happen, the river sometimes floods here and when it does, this crossing point is impassable.

Mixed vegetation of pine, holm oak, gall oak and abundant scrubland are the main feature of the last kilometres of the Somontano Nature Route, which heads away from the river along a track that goes up a hillside. Along the way you cross the ravine of Tamara and come to the Fuente de Puntillo, a beautiful series of small waterfalls that pour out from emerald green rock pools. In this section of the route the river Alcanadre (now on the right hand side) once again runs between rock faces in an area called Estrechos del Puntillo.

The trail starts to broaden and you can see changes in the vegetation, with areas of pasture and cropland. Turn to the right and the trail comes to a parking space for the leisure area that has taken shape around El Salto de Bierge, an old weir once used to supply a watermill and a small hydroelectric plant, and that has now become one of the most popular places in the Sierra de Guara to cool down in the hot summer months. Access to the area is controlled and you have to buy an entrance ticket in the peak season (more information and ticket buying at https://saltodebierge.info/).

The spectacular sights of the Somontano Nature Route end here, but there is a direct connection at this point with the Hoya de Huesca Nature Route, where you can carry on discovering just how beautiful the province of Huesca really is.

SIERRA Y LOS CAÑONES DE GUARA NATURAL PARK

The Sierra y los Cañones de Guara Natural Park is the largest Protected Natural Space in Aragon, with 47,637.66 hectares of Natural Park and 34,064.63 hectares of Protected Outlying Areas. The Sierra de Guara Natural Park lies in the centre of the area called the pre-Pyrenean ranges of Huesca, which despite its name extends out over both sides of the range for 40 km and includes other smaller mountain ranges. The highest points are Tozal de Guara (2078 m) and the Tozal de Cubilas (1942 m). The limestone that is a predominant feature in the Natural Park has created a landscape shaped by water erosion, with caves and chasms, upwellings, sinkholes and the rock formations typical of the region of Hoya de Huesca: the "mallos". One of the most notable features of this mountain region is the contrast between the vegetation in the northern and southern areas.

The south consists of Mediterranean and continental ecosystems, where holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) are common, replaced by Mediterranean scrubland in more desolate areas and Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*) in the lower valleys. Higher up you'll find European box (*Buxus sempervirens*) on the slopes and gall oak (*Quercus cerroides*) in the shaded areas of valley bottoms, and Scots pine in the sunlit areas. Box trees are replaced by broom (*Echinospartum horridum*) in stonier terrain. Rocky outcrops and ledges are colonised by highly specialised plants, some of which are unique to the region, such as the "romperrocas de Guara", a type of carnation (*Petrocoptis guarensis*) or the rosette mullein (*Ramonda myconi*).

The north on the other hand does not experience the dry seasons typical of the Mediterranean. which allows Euro-Siberian ecosystems to appear. The gall oak takes the place of the holm oak, while higher up the Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) starts to predominate. Valleys with deeper soils may be home to small groves of silver firs (*Abies alba*). The slopes may also contain some local species such as columbine (*Aquilegia guarensis*) or scurvy grass (*Cochlearia aragonensis*).

The unique nature of the terrain has enables many cliff-nesting birds to make it their home: griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*), lammergeyers (*Gypaetus barbatus*), golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), eagle owls (*Bubo bubo*), Bonelli's eagles (*Aquila fasciata*). Birdlife is also abundant in the forested areas: black woodpeckers (*Dryocopus martius*), short-toed eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*), booted eagles (*Hieraaetus pennatus*), the common pern (*Pernis apivorus*)...

(continue)

Local mammals include roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), boar (*Sus scrofa*) and otters (*Lutra lutra*), along with small predators such as badgers (*Meles meles*), common genets (*Genetta genetta*), and a growing population of Spanish ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*). Some local species of amphibians and reptiles are of special interest, including the Pyrenean newt (*Calotriton asper*, only found in the Pyrenees and pre-Pyrenees), the ladder snake (*Zamenis scalaris*) and the asp viper (*Vipera aspis*). The predominant species of fish in the region are the common trout (*Salmo trutta*) and the barbell (*Luciobarbus bocagei*).

Invertebrates in the area include the white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and over 130 species of butterfly.

The Natural Park is also home to an extensive historical heritage. The region has been occupied since prehistoric times, evidence of which can be seen in the rock art of the Upper Palaeolithic (40000 BCE to 10000 BCE) in Cueva de Fuente del Trucho, along with examples of Levantine art (8000 BCE - 3000 BCE) on the slopes of the river Vero and Schematic art (5000 BCE - 1500 BCE). Megaliths of the 3rd millennium BCE can also be found in the area. This heritage has increased over the centuries with the construction of castles and fortifications, churches, weirs and mills, etc. While traditional farming, livestock keeping and forestry activities have seen a downturn in recent decades, there has been a growth in tourism and leisure, with activities such as canyoning, hiking and mountaineering, which have opened up new sources of income for the local residents of the Natural Park.



The griffon vulture, an almost constant presence in the Sierra de Guara

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **ABIEGO COUNCIL**
  www.abiego.es/ 974 31 72 03
- **ADAHUESCA COUNCIL**
  www.adahuesca.es/ 974 31 81 51
- **AGÜERO COUNCIL**
  www.aguero.es/ 974 38 04 89
- **ALQUÉZAR COUNCIL**
  www.alquezar.es/ 974 31 89 60
- **ARGUIS COUNCIL**
  www.arguis.es/ 974 27 20 01
- **BIERGE COUNCIL**
  www.bierge.es/ 974 31 81 02
- **CASBAS DE HUESCA COUNCIL**
  www.casbasdehuesca.es/ 974 26 03 97
- **COLUNGO COUNCIL**
  www.colungo.es/ 974 31 81 41
- **IBIECA COUNCIL**
  www.ibieca.es/ 974 26 02 90
- **LOARRE COUNCIL**
  www.loarre.es/ 974 38 26 09
- **LOPORZANO COUNCIL**
  www.loporzano.es 974 26 20 55
- **MURILLO DE GÁLLEGO COUNCIL**
  www.murillodegallego.es/ 974 38 31 88
- **NUENO COUNCIL**
  www.nueno.es/ 974 27 10 81
- **LAS PEÑAS DE RIGLOS COUNCIL**
  www.laspenasderiglos.es/ 974 38 31 17
- **SIÉTAMO COUNCIL**
  www.sietamo.es/ 974 26 22 13
- **LA SOTONERA COUNCIL**
  www.lasotonera.es/ 974 27 22 00
- **THE HOYA DE HUESCA REGION**
  https://turismo.hoyadehuesca.es/en/ 974 23 30 30
- **SOMONTANO REGION TOURISM PORTAL**
  https://turismosomontano.es/en/ 974 30 60 06
- **GUARA MOUNTAINS AND CANYONS NATURAL PARK**
  www.rednaturaldearagon.com/parque-natural/parque-natural-de-la-sierra-y-canones-de-guara/

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.