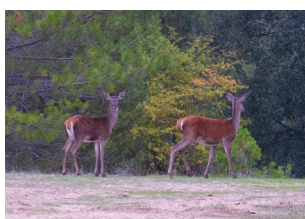
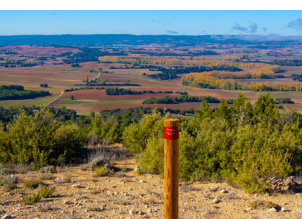


Júcar Nature Trail





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Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain



Júcar Nature Trail



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA
Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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The Júcar Nature trail runs virtually parallel to the river that gives it its name, following for 220 km the stretch of the river in the province of Cuenca. Starting at the river's source and ending in the provincial border between Cuenca and Albacete. The River Júcar sculps, through beautiful gorges and crooked meanders, different landscapes ranging from highlands pine forests to crop covered fertile plains.

The first phase of this Natura Trail travels, through 13 stages supplemented by 4 stages or alternatives, the stretch of the river that runs throughout the province of Cuenca.

In addition to the amazing landscapes of the Serranía de Cuenca and the gorges and meanders sculpted by the river, the Nature Trail allows the traveler to discover the cultural and architectural resource of the region, the monumental city of Cuenca (declared World Heritage in 1996) or the town of Alarcón (declared a historical-artistic complex in 1981) as main referents.

The River Júcar (*Xúquer*, in valencian), known as *Sucro* by the romans and *Xuqr* by the muslims, is the traveller's companion for the most part of the Nature Trail from its sources in "*estrecho del Infierno* (Hells' gorge)", leaving its course only occasionally. The first stages run in the *Serranía de Cuenca*, in a wild landscape surrounded by nature, and passing by one of the most visited places in the province, the "*Ciudad Encantada* (Enchanted city)".

After a little stretch in which the river valley is used by crop fields, the river is enclosed again in a gorge until it reached Cuenca. It is particularly recommended to spend time visiting the city. The trail enters a zone of crop lands, interrupted only when the trail runs throughout any of the mixed Mediterranean forest covered hills.

The Alarcón reservoir is the main protagonist of the next stages, the trail following its border until reaching the gorge in which the town of Alarcón is located. This town is also worth a visit. Back to the undammed course of the River Júcar, the last stages until the trail reaches the provincial border between Albacete and Cuenca run through the widely cultivated valley of the river.

The Júcar Nature Trail will grow further in the future, with the incorporation of the river's stage that runs through the provinces of Albacete and Valencia, until it reaches the River Júcar's mouth in the Mediterranean sea, in the municipality of Cullera.

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.

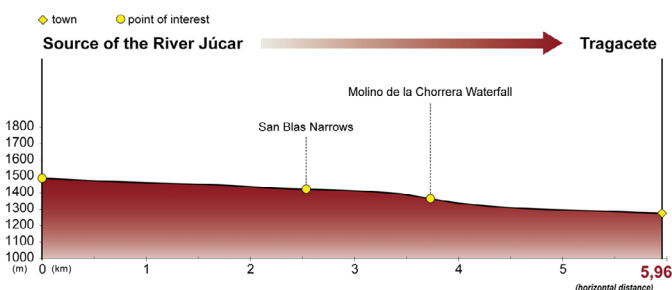
Basic information on each route: timetable, cumulative positive difference in altitude, cumulative negative difference in altitude, horizontal distance covered, annual season in which the assessment is carried out and type of route (outward, return, circular and crossing).

JÚCAR NATURE TRAIL

STAGE 1 ✂ SOURCE OF THE RIVER JÚCAR → TRAGACETE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	0 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	213 m	⬇
Route difficulty	2	🔪	Route lenght (actual distance)	5,97 km	📏
Amount of effort needed	2	🏃	Time	1 h 25 min	🕒



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 te-
rrain



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 re-
quired



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



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

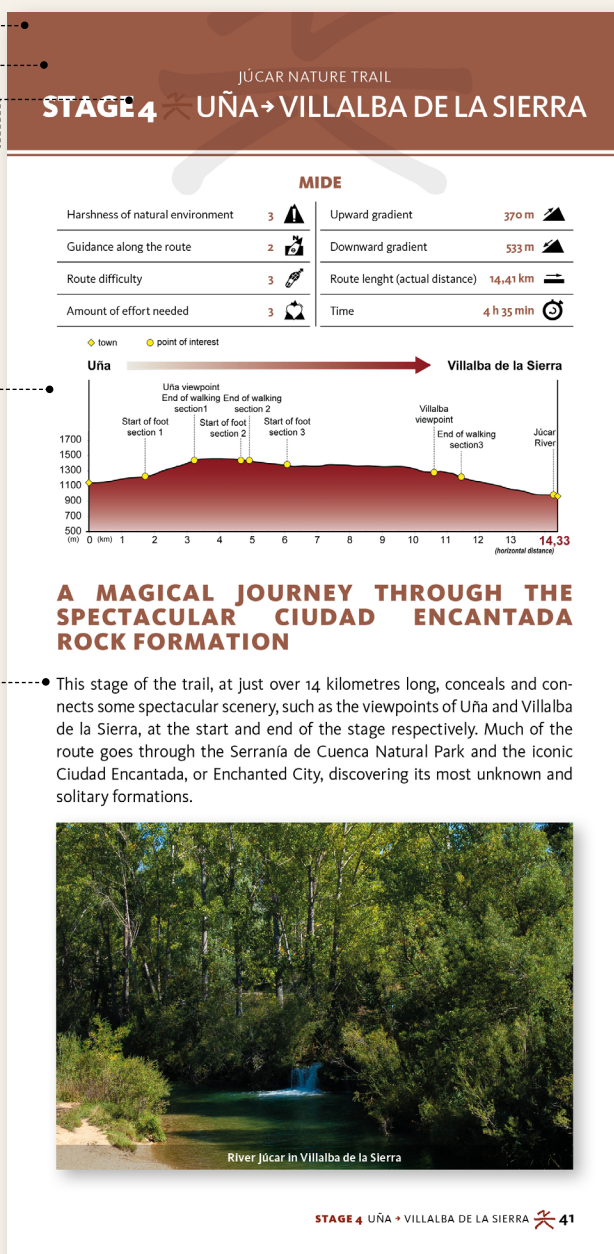
Colour indicative of the Geographical Sector in which it is located

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



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.

JÚCAR NATURE TRAIL

UÑA

Uña is a picturesque town in the province of Cuenca, located in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park that was repopulated in the 13th century by Aragonese and Castilian settlers after the conquest of Cuenca.

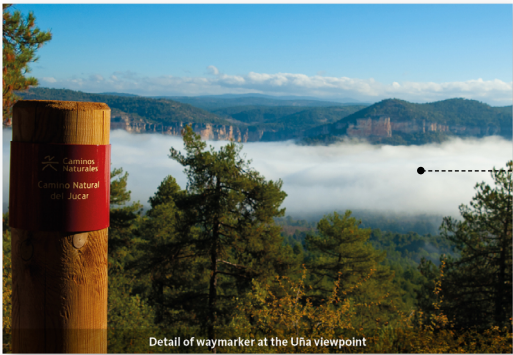
Outstanding among its architectural heritage is the church of San Miguel Arcángel, dating from the 13th century, as well as the town hall, located next to the church. Its inhabitants have traditionally been dedicated to agriculture, and nowadays the tourist sector is one of the main pillars of its economy, due to its abundance of natural heritage.

An example of this heritage is the Uña lagoon, which collects the waters of the fast-flowing Rincón stream. Over the years, the precipitation of calcium carbonate formed the Uña travertine, a natural tuff dam with a viewpoint for visitors to enjoy the spectacle.

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

After the effort of the climb, we are rewarded upon reaching the Mirador de Uña viewpoint, the perfect place for some respite and to regain strength while taking in the panoramic views of the upper course of the Júcar, the Serranía de Cuenca and the town of Uña, a picture postcard panorama. Explanatory tables inform the traveller of the most outstanding geographical features and of the rest of the natural values of this magical spot.

After that short break, we continue our journey along the dirt track from the viewpoint. The route then reaches kilometre 4 of the stage and, shortly afterwards, the fire extinguishing tower, where a short cross-country section begins. The route continues following the Caminos Naturales signposts before crossing the CM-2104 road, taking all necessary precautions, to continue along the dirt track.



Detail of waymarker at the Uña viewpoint

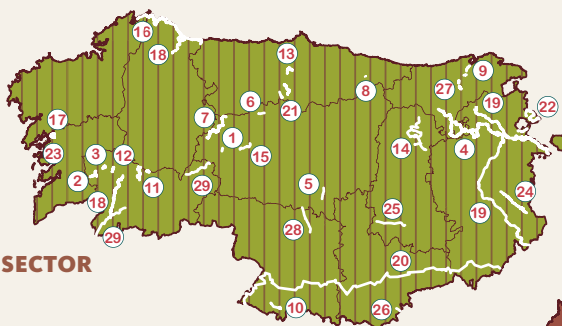
Photograph of the route, layout, monuments or natural highlights, with respective informative caption

NATURE TRAILS

I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

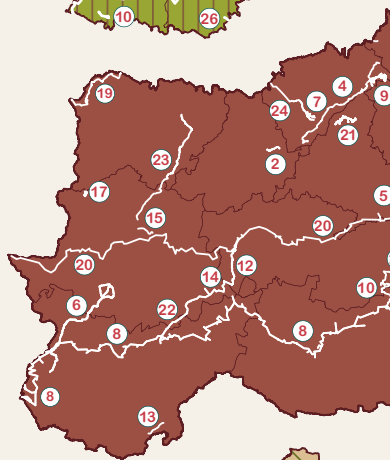
- Cacabelos - Quilós (1)
- Carballada de Avia (2)
- Dos Arrieiros (3)
- Ebro (4)
- Esla (5)
- Laciana. Villablino to Villaseca section (6)
- Mirada Circular: Ancares Leoneses from Guímara to Balboa (7)
- Muñigo - Covadonga (8)
- Pas (9)
- Sayagués Agricultural Landscape (10)
- La Ribeira Sacra (11)
- 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)
- Vía Nova (29)



VI. CENTRAL PENINSULAR SECTOR

- Agua Soriano. Antonino Route (1)
- Campo Azálvaro (2)
- M^a 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

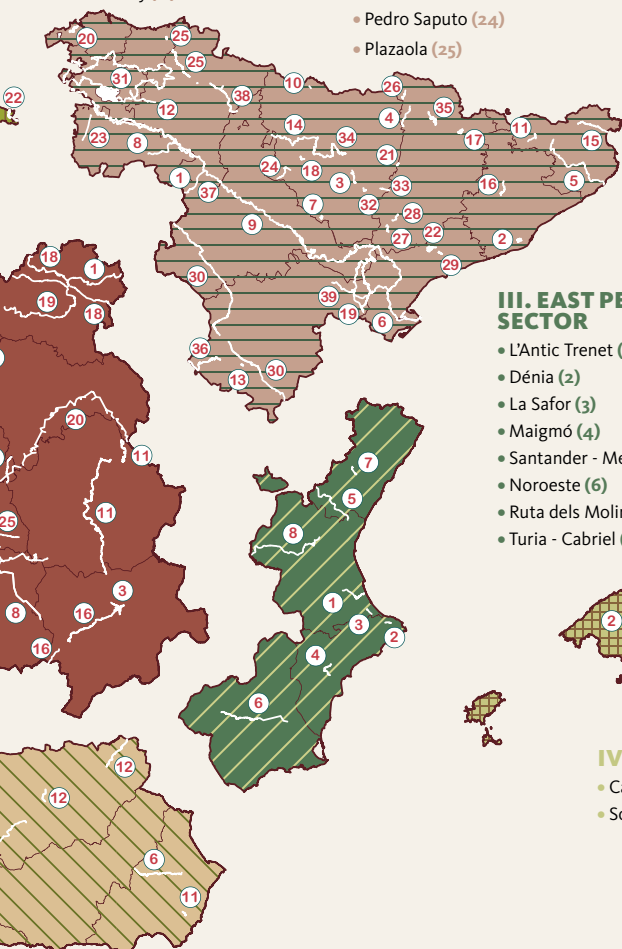
- Anaga-Chasna (1)
- La Gomera Coasts (2)
- La Gomera Peaks (3)
- Fuerteventura (4)
- La Palma (5)
- Lanzarote (6)
- Traditional Trails of El Hierro (7)

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)
- Maigmo (4)
- Santander - Mediterráneo (5)
- Noroeste (6)
- Ruta dels Molins d'Aigua (7)
- Turia - Cabriel (8)



IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

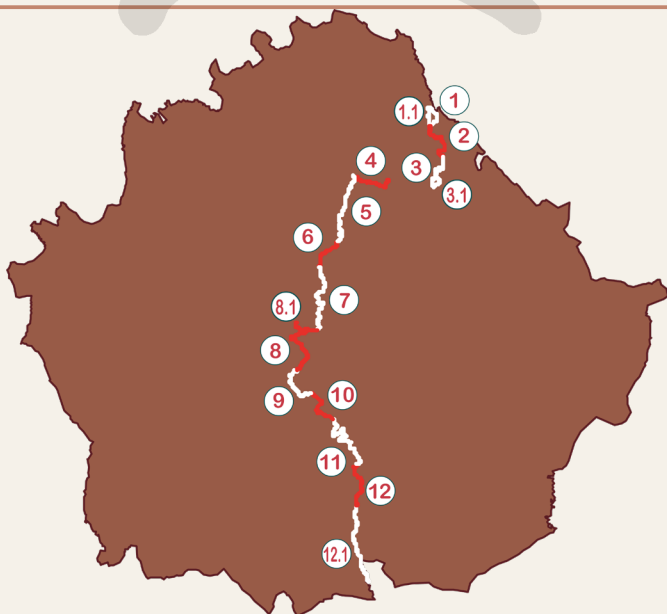
- Camí de Cavalls (1)
- Son Juny (2)

V. SOUTHERN PENINSULAR SECTOR

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

JÚCAR

NATURE TRAIL



JÚCAR NATURE TRAIL

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STAGE 12 BRANCH • EL PICAZO → PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY	95



Molino de la Chorrera Waterfall

STAGE 1 ✂ SOURCE OF THE RIVER JÚCAR → TRAGACETE

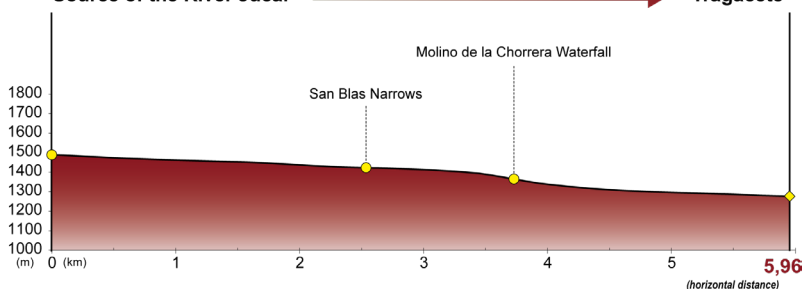
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	0 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	213 m	⬇
Route difficulty	2	🔪	Route length (actual distance)	5,97 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🍏	Time	1 h 25 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest

Source of the River Júcar

Tragacete



A GREAT RIVER RISES, AN AMAZING JOURNEY BEGINS

The undisputed star of this Nature Trail, and thus of this first stage, is the River Júcar and, specifically, the place where it rises. A short yet spectacular stage where you can enjoy the surroundings, with spots of such great beauty as the El Infierno Narrows, the San Blas Narrows and the Molino de la Chorrera waterfall, all of which are in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park.





The River Júcar awakens each day to the sweet twittering of the various bird species that inhabit this environment. This enclave invites travellers not to start the stage immediately but rather to stop unhurriedly to enjoy every second here, which will undoubtedly remain engraved in their memory.

This is the source of the River Júcar, in what is known as the El Infierno Narrows. An area in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park, where, due to the calcareous nature of the rock, numerous springs gush premium-quality crystal-clear water.

Upon leaving this enclave and starting this first stage, travellers already have in their backpacks sensations they will never forget, such as the sound of the water of this nascent River Júcar. A few metres after leaving the interpretative panel behind, you leave the path to the right along which the branch of stage 1 will reach the source of the Júcar.

The traveller then continues straight on, mainly downhill through pine woods with specimens of different ages. If you are in a small group and, most importantly, if you travel in relative silence, you will quite easily observe such beautiful animals red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and fallow deer (*Dama dama*). Moreover, if you make the trip in autumn, you will be able to hear and enjoy the bellowing and rutting of the stags of red deer and fallow deer respectively.

SOURCE OF THE RIVER JÚCAR

In the Montes Universales, in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park, is the source of the great rivers that will gradually grow and wash much of the Iberian Peninsula. They include the River Júcar, which rises in the area known as Ojuelos de Valdeminguete, in the Muela de San Felipe.

The River Júcar is the result of the combination of small springs from which pure and crystalline water emerges from the limestone rock itself in a small canyon known as El Infierno Narrows. Over its first few metres, between the aforementioned El Infierno Narrows and the San Blas Narrows, the waters of the River Júcar appear and disappear owing to the more or less permeable nature of its course.

From the San Blas Narrows, it runs a continuous course for a total of 509 km, washing the provinces of Cuenca, Albacete and Valencia. It has 22 tributaries in total, such as the Húcar and the Cabriel and reservoirs such as Alarcón or El Naranjero. On its journey it crosses the Serranía de Cuenca in its upper course, where the mountain landscape contrasts with the extensive citrus groves so characteristic of its lower course, before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea, at the village of Cullera.

After passing kilometre two of this stage, the signage indicates that you can visit the Pino del Ocejón, a spectacular specimen of laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*). This itinerary is not included within the Júcar Natural Trail and is more than 4 kilometres from this point, so travellers, at their own risk, must make the decision that best suits them.



Without stepping off the nature trail, you will reach the San Blas Narrows, a place of special beauty where the cliffs present a spectacular range of colours. The River Júcar appears and disappears between the El Infierno Narrows and the San Blas Narrows, due to the nature of the materials forming its bed, but from here onwards it has a continuous course of crystalline waters fed by new springs. The San Blas Narrows invites you to take a break and enjoy the spring bearing the same name, which contains an image of the saint of the same name, the rest area and the car park that are there.

A few metres later, beside the kilometre 3 market for the stage, you will find the San Blas Youth Hostel, which offers a range of activities and accommodation services to allow you to enjoy the Serranía de Cuenca to the full. From the hostel, the Júcar Nature Trail is asphalted and continues downhill, reaching the car park from where you can visit the Molino de la Chorrera waterfall vantage point.

After you pass the aforementioned mill (now in private hands), a small botanical path (PNSC-So6) leads off, allowing you to enjoy the beauty of the Molino de la Chorrera waterfall in all its splendour. An impressive waterfall that once powered the mill and today delights the traveller's senses.

As you continue you will reach a dirt car park and shortly thereafter the Tío Portero fountain, beside kilometre five of the stage. From this point on, small family vegetable gardens run by the residents of Tragacete begin to appear. After passing the San Antonio shrine, you will encounter a succession of fountains such as La Trinidad and La Toba, which precede the end point of this first stage of the Júcar Nature Trail, in the highland village of Tragacete.

TRAGACETE

A beautiful village in the province of Cuenca, in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park.

It has a forestry culture and tradition, and is surrounded by large masses of mainly Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*); it also features green valleys with plentiful pastureland irrigated by the many streams that flow down from the mountains, with the River Júcar, which rises in the El Infierno Narrows, a spot a few kilometres from the village of Tragacete, standing out from the rest.

Fountains and springs pepper this municipality, and some of them feature what are known as *gamellones* or *tornajos*: wooden trunks from the nearby forests in which an inner hollow has been carved out which acts as a channel for the water from the fountain while at the same time acting as a watering place for both wildlife and domestic animals.

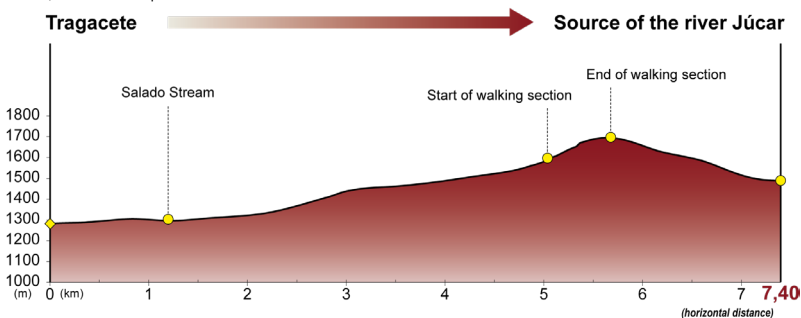
STAGE 1 BRANCH ✂ TRAGACETE

→ SOURCE OF THE RIVER JÚCAR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	⚠	Upward gradient	423 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	215 m	⬆
Route difficulty	3	👉	Route length (actual distance)	7,45 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	3	👉	Time	2 h 10 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest



THE SOURCE OF THE RIVER JÚCAR IS WELL WORTH A SECOND VISIT

With its spectacular surroundings, the Júcar Nature Trail offers a new opportunity for travellers to enjoy it in all its splendour with a branch of the first stage that starts in the highland village of Tragacete and ends at the source of the River Júcar, plunging through the interior of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park.





Passage through the Salado stream

The interpretative panel where the first stage ends also marks the start of this branch, which for the first few metres advances towards the town's bullring, crossing the CM-2106 road, hence extreme caution is recommended.

Leaving the aforementioned bullring and the heliport on the right, and the municipal swimming pool to the left, you will leave the village under the watchful eye of some livestock farms.

The route continues through meadows used by the excellent cattle raised in these lands. The first ascent of this branch ends at the kilometre 1 marker, before immediately starting a short descent that ends at the Salado stream. A riverbed where the oldest residents of the village used to come to refresh themselves in summer.

After traversing another kilometre and a new stream, the meadows gradually give way to the laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*) and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*).

The uphill slopes predominate in this section; some of them are steep enough to test the touring cyclist's fitness. This physical effort will be rewarded by the beauty of these forest masses, which are well worth stopping to enjoy in detail, while re-charging your batteries to continue on your way.

Continuing along a wide forest trail, you will reach a right turn and, soon thereafter, on the left, you will pass between both turns kilometre 4 of the route. Meanwhile, you will continue to ascend, enjoying a spectacular panoramic view of the sierra, which appears as a natural window amidst the leafy vegetation that surrounds the area.

TIMBER RAFTING ON THE RIVER JÚCAR: THE TRADE OF THE RAFTER

In the upper course of the River Júcar, and in many other rivers, the whole logs were transported along the course of the river until very recently; they are known as *maderadas*.

The people responsible for guiding this river journey were rafters, whose work began on the banks of the river itself, where lumberjacks brought the whole logs to be transported. The basic tool they used for their work was the *gancho*, a pole made of hazel or juniper wood with an iron hook at one end.

The organisation of these rafters was commanded by *the great rafter or river master* and was divided into three groups according to the rafters' position with respect to the timber: vanguard, centre and rearguard. This now-extinct trade can still be seen in demonstrations held by various cultural and ethnographic groups in the area, which revive the harshness of people's daily lives in the past.

Shortly after passing kilometre five and a challenging uphill slope, the Júcar Nature Trail turns right, leaving the wide track that has been used to this point, and starts a stretch of path on foot along a steeply-sloping path, as the signs indicate.

The hiker will ascend, albeit with some effort, the route that coincides with the Pequeño Recorrido PR-CU-79, and will see, besides the standard Caminos Naturales signposting, the yellow and white lines characteristic of this type of route.



Beginning of the walking section of the Nature Trail



After a little under 700 metres from the start of this walking section, you will reach a clearing known as the Garrafa pass, where you can catch your breath comforted by the unbeatable views.

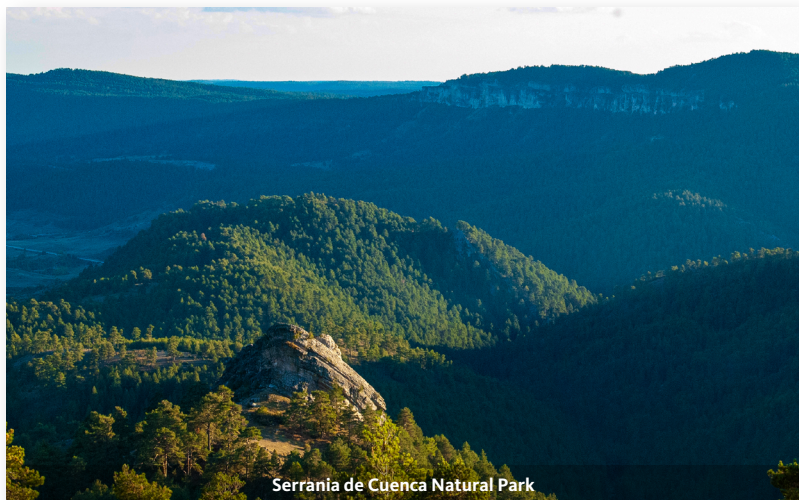
After a well-deserved rest, the final descent starts on a broader, stony path. After passing kilometre 7, you will reach a left turn and then face the last exciting metres that will lead you to the longed-for source of the River Júcar in the El Infierno Narrows. This is a place where you can enjoy the beauty of the surroundings in peace and quiet, before returning to Tragacete by retracing your steps or following stage 1 of the Júcar Natural Trail.

SERRANIA DE CUENCA NATURAL PARK

Protected Natural Area declared a Natural Park on 8 March 2007. It has more a protected area covering more than 74,000 hectares, all of them in the province of Cuenca. The most representative forest masses are pine forests, in which three of the Iberian species coexist: the Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), the laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*) and the resin pine (*Pinus pinaster*).

These forests, along with those in the Alto Tajo Natural Park, are geographically united, forming a huge area that provides refuge and home to populations of many species of fauna such as red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and fallow deer (*Dama dama*), whose autumn rutting season attracts numerous visitors.

No less representative are the geomorphologic formations caused by the mainly limestone rocks, which form buttes, canyons and gorges of unparalleled beauty.

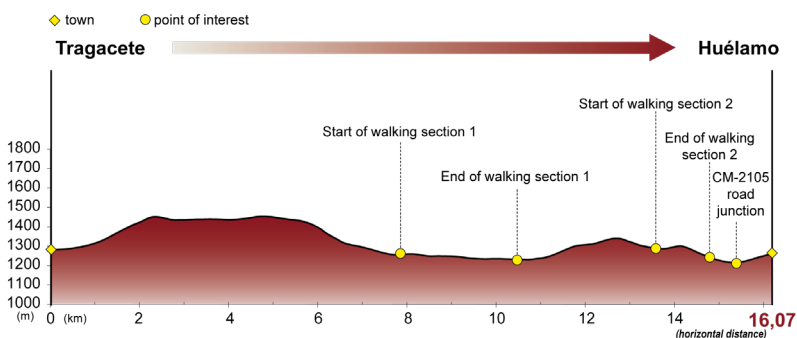


Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park

STAGE 2 TRAGACETE → HUÉLAMO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	389 m 
Guidance along the route	2 	Downward gradient	388 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	16,14 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	4 h 30 min 



EXPERIENCING FIRST-HAND THE LIVESTOCK CULTURE OF DROVE ROADS

This route allows you to discover the municipalities of Tragacete and Huélamo, two beautiful villages in Cuenca, the beginning and end of the stage. Among them, there are countless landmarks that travellers must not miss. The Tragacete vantage point bids a last farewell to the source of the River Júcar. Excellent pine forests and a section through the Cordel de Huélamo, where the River Almagrero meets the River Júcar, will delight hikers. Finally, it descends to the “Xúquer” as it is known in Valencian, before climbing to reach the end point at Huélamo.



Gall oak (*Quercus faginea*) grove in the Serranía de Cuenca



Natural Trail before the Tragacete Vantage point

The interpretative panel beside the CM-2106 road marks the start of this second stage, while also marking the beginning of the branch of stage 1 and the end of stage 1 itself.

Without further ado, the traveller will advance a few metres along this road as it passes through Tragacete. This highland village is well worth a visit to immerse yourself in its distinctive streets, where you can also enjoy the Serranía de Cuenca Nature Reserve Interpretation Centre.

On the other hand, if you would like to faithfully follow the route of the Nature Trail, turn right from the road into Calle Cervantes and, after you reach the square, you will arrive at the parish church of San Miguel Arcángel on the left. Then, briefly turn left along Calle Fernando Royuela and, following the red and white markings characteristic of the Gran Recorridos (GR), go up Calle de la Fuente until you leave the village along a path on the right, following the GR markings.

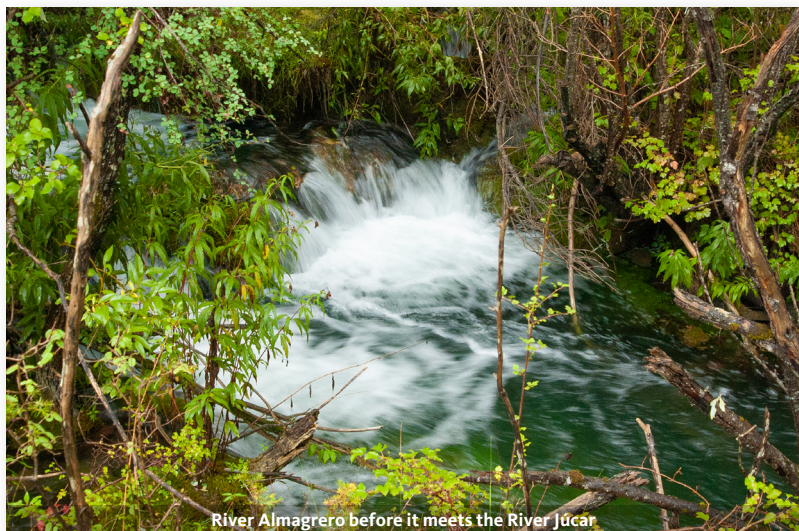
The route ascends flanked by pine woods on the right and meadows to the left, leaving the village of Tragacete behind. Before reaching the second kilometre of this stage, the path turns right, revealing to the traveller the classic landscape of the Serranía de Cuenca. A panoramic view in which you can see the buttes and cliffs eroded into the limestone rock, where you can often see imposing specimens of griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*).

This climb ends shortly after the aforementioned kilometre marker, reaching the Tragacete Vantage Point (Cerro del Colmenarejo). To do so, the hiker will have to have diverted a little more than 250 m from the route of the Nature Trail, retracing his/her steps after enjoying the beautiful panoramic views of Tragacete, the surroundings of the source of the River Júcar and the Serranía de Cuenca this vantage point offers.

The next part of the stage runs through a good example of the most characteristic forest masses in the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park: pine forests. It will not be difficult to find sheep ranging freely in these forests. Meanwhile, you can continue to enjoy the mountain scenery and the variety of scents with which the shrub and herbaceous stratum of these forests bewitches the touring cyclist's sense of smell.

The kilometres pass with the traveller immersed in this sensory experience. A downhill section begins shortly before kilometre marker 6 and, once past this marker, you will Los Chorros Royal Drove Road. The stage does not abandon its transhumance and livestock farming roots and, after leaving the wide forest track and completing the descent, it turns right, where an interpretative panel offers further information about transhumance.

Once on the Cordel de Huélamo, there begins a long pedestrian section more than three kilometres long, along a narrow and sometimes cross-country path, so it is important to pay special attention to the Caminos Naturales signage. In this pedestrian section you can see the mouth of the River Almagrero emptying into the River Júcar from an enviable perspective. In fact, it was precisely at this mouth that most of the timber rafting along the Júcar began; this ancient practice consisted of transporting whole trunks of wood from the sierra along the course of the river. The people responsible for this work were rafters, who travelled along the river with only the help of a pole called a *gancho*.



River Almagrero before it meets the River Júcar



Walking section in Cordel de Huélamo

Then, a 100 m stretch marked as dangerous again forces hikers to sharpen their senses. Several small streams cross the route to meet the waters of the Júcar shortly afterwards. There are some stone steps and two wooden footbridges so you can cross them with no difficulty.

The walking section ends at kilometre point 11 of the stage, and there begins an ascent along a wide track into a new stand of pine trees where, after a little more than a kilometre, you will have to open a metal livestock gate to continue your journey; the gate must be properly closed after you pass through it.

After completing the ascent, cliffs and buttes rise up in the landscape, delighting the hiker's eyes. This particularly beautiful spot also features specimens of gall oak (*Quercus faginea*) and other species in the genus *Quercus*, as well as spectacular species such as the Montpellier maple (*Acer monspessulanum*). Hikers should also keep their ears open here, especially if travelling in autumn, to enjoy the intense bellowing of the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and even to listen to the twittering of various bird species and the ripe acorns falling from the gall oaks.

Cattle accompany travellers, who now leave the wide path and turn left onto a narrow path that precedes the beginning of the second and last pedestrian section. Shortly after kilometre 14 of the stage, there is a new gate, which travellers must open and close properly to prevent cattle from escaping.

CORDEL DE HUÉLAMO

A drove road 37.5 m wide or less, starting from the Cañada Honda rest area.

Here it links to the Cañada Real de Los Chorros (the eastern branch of the Cañada Real Conquense), ending in the Prado de los Esquiladores area, connecting again with the Cañada Real de Los Chorros, this time in the municipality of Cuenca. Adjacent to the Juan Romero Recreational Area is the resting place known as the Fuente de El Medio. This cattle trail, along with the Cañada Real Conquense, is one of the few drove roads still in active use today, with flocks of sheep and herds cattle moving along them.

These corridors were of great importance for centuries, since 1273, when Alfonso X the Wise formed the *Concejo de la Mesta de los Pastores del Mio Reyno*. Thanks to the establishment of this body, livestock farming would enjoy its golden age, with Merino sheep being the most abundant of all, the quality of its wool achieving international renown and becoming one of the economic pillars of the era.

The descent starts from here. Huélamo and its hill are witnesses to this part of the stage and will be the star attractions until the end. At the end of the pedestrian section, which is just over one kilometre long, the route continues to descend until it reaches the CM-2105 road. After a few metres, cross the road using extreme caution, turn right and continue along the CM-9231 road. After crossing the River Júcar, the



European fallow deer (*Dama dama*) on the Júcar Nature Trail

Nature Trail forks into two different routes, one for walkers and one for cyclists. The hiking route runs 600 m along the PR-CU 07 and is signposted with two parallel yellow and white horizontal stripes, as far as the village of Huélamo. Cyclists, in contrast, can make the final climb, with extreme caution, along the CM-9231 road for 1,200 m. This is a stretch with bends shared with road traffic as far as the interpretative panel, which brings this second stage to an end in the village of Huélamo.

HUÉLAMO

A village in the Serranía de Cuenca that sits at an altitude of over 1,300 m above sea level near the Cerro del Castellar. The borough has been inhabited for millennia, as confirmed by Bronze Age ruins found at the Covacha de las Grajas site. Its name, which is of Arab origin, and the ruins of the castle on the adjacent hill, are the greatest surviving traces of that period. Later, after the Christian Reconquest, it belonged to the Order of Santiago.

Its economy has been based on agriculture, but the tourist sector is increasingly important thanks to its location in the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park, with the River Júcar as a witness to its entire history.

The patron saint festivities are held on the first Sunday in September, in honour of Ntra. Sra. del Rosario, where a representation of the three municipal powers (the local council, the Church and the military), known as “Los Cargos,” is the central theme of these festivities.

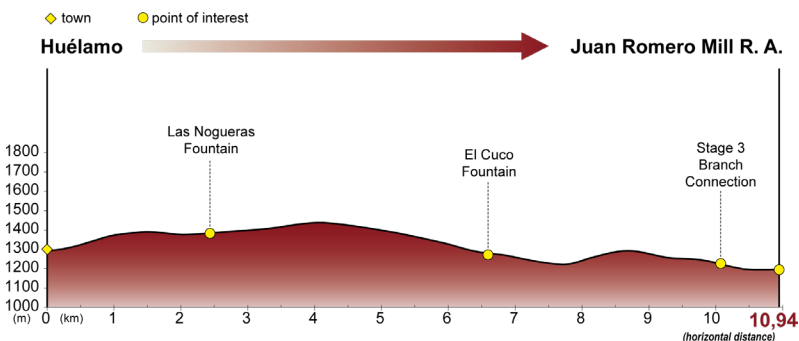


Huélamo

STAGE 3 ✂ HUÉLAMO → MOLINO DE JUAN ROMERO REST AREA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	230 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	329 m 
Route difficulty	1 	Route length (actual distance)	10,94 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	3 h 5 min 

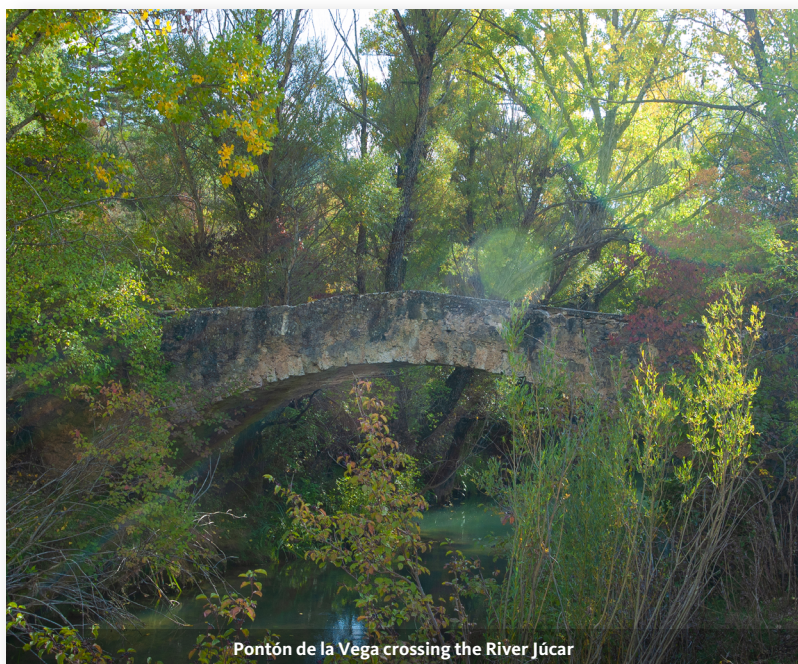


WANDERING THROUGH PINE FORESTS WITH LIVESTOCK CULTURE

Huélamo bids farewell to the traveller with its hill bearing witness to the characteristic pine forests of the Cuenca mountain range. Here wildlife roams freely in an environment spattered with springs, with the Juan Romero Recreational Area as the stage's finishing touch.



Shrub undergrowth on the sides of the Nature Trail



Pontón de la Vega crossing the River Júcar

The route begins at the entrance to the village of Huélamo, beside the Caminos Naturales interpretative panel. Other panels near this one offer the traveller various options to enjoy this beautiful environment. Moreover, facing them, a monument in honour of los cargos pays homage to the three figures around whom the patron saint festivities revolve with a character all of their own.

After visiting the village, touring cyclists must climb the streets of the village spread across the hill where it stands. Go up Calle Molino, which leads to the CM-9231 road, which gives access to the village. The route naturally continues along Calle la Fuente which, after finishing, zigzags to reach the El Pozuelo recreational area. This recreational area has a special charm, having been built by retired locals, as well as being fitted out with barbecues, fountains and tables, and it offers pleasant shade that will delight *huelameros*, as the locals are known, and tourists alike, before they leave the village once and for all.

You will continue to climb up towards the Huélamo vantage point, where, besides catching your breath, you can enjoy views that provide a beautiful postcard image of the village and high-quality snapshots of the landscape of the Cuenca mountain range. As you now advance through more favourable terrain, the density of shrub and tree species increases, with a predominance of pine trees.

After kilometre point 2, a wooden sign indicates the Fuente de Las Nogueras, on the right-hand side of the route, once again highlighting the multitude of springs in this mountainous area due to its highly porous limestone. Pine woods in this area are arranged into lines, which suggests that they were planted by people.

After kilometre 4, and with the impressive snapshots of this itinerary still fresh your memory, you will leave what, in principle, seems to be the main trail that turns sharply to the right. Walkers must continue straight on, following the Caminos Naturales signage, which will leave them in no doubt. At this point a descent begins into the thick pine forest where, besides the vegetation, you can see the ruins dotted with old sheepcotes or tainas that recall the livestock farming tradition of this district in the province of Cuenca.

The rapid descent, particularly if done on a bicycle, continues, arriving at a spot where the Fuente del Cuco fountain, the Fuente de La Tocona fountain and the dilapidated construction of what may have been an old forest refuge stand together. Guarded on either side, like erect spears, the trunks of the pines accompany the traveller while their crowns provide pleasant shade, carpeting the route with a needles in certain sections.

The downhill section comes to an end before reaching kilometre 8 of the stage, on a sharp turn to the left, which is properly signposted. From this point onwards, the cyclist will face an uphill slope, with a steep incline, especially in the final part, which will require considerable effort to negotiate. In this area the pine trees are older and more irregularly spread, suggesting they may be of natural origin.

Although travellers may not be aware of it because they are immersed in the coniferous forest, from the start of the ascent (k.p. 8, approx.) you will advance parallel to the Cordel de Huélamo and the River Júcar, and so continue for the remainder of the stage. The climb ends before you reach kilometre 9 and a predominantly downhill section begins. The route thus gives some respite, offering as it does no technical difficulties so that cyclists, even less experienced ones, can cycle the route and enjoy the views.



At kilometre point 10, the forest track in the branch of stage 3 enters the route on the left, which will share a path from this point until the end of the stage.

After crossing a small stream via a purpose-built cemented level crossing, the route heads towards its final section, reaching the signpost and a barrier that blocks motor vehicle traffic. This marks the entrance to the Juan Romero Recreational Area, where its enormous pine trees, green meadow and stone tables round off this stage, inviting you to rest in this history-filled place.

PINE FORESTS IN THE SERRANÍA DE CUENCA

Along with the cliffs, buttes and canyons, the result of the geomorphological processes that have occurred over many years in the Cuenca mountain range, there are the extensive pine forests. Three species of indigenous pines coexist in them: Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*) and resin pine (*Pinus pinaster*).

Logging has been carried on for centuries according to principles of sustainability and perpetuity of these forests, with the timber rafting of the past standing out. In this traditional practice the rafters transported the wood from the sierra along the course of the most abundant rivers, in this case the River Júcar.

Numerous species of wildlife coexist in these forests, as well as a large number of livestock that uses the fresh pastures. Specimens peppered with other species such as maples, hollies, yews and lime trees also form part of the biodiversity while increasing the range of colours seen in the landscape.



Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) near the A. R. Juan Romero

STAGE 3 BRANCH MOLINO DE JUAN ROMERO R. A. → MOLINO DE JUAN ROMERO R. A.

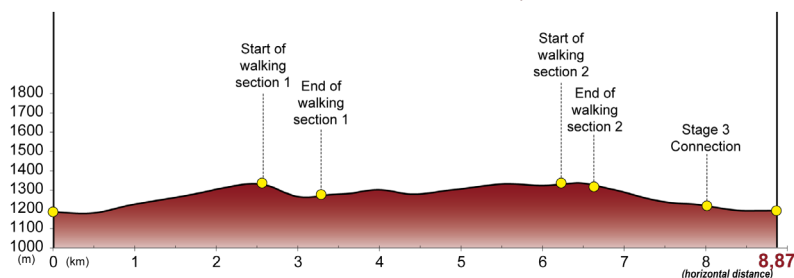
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	260 m 
Guidance along the route	2 	Downward gradient	254 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	8,92 km 
Amount of effort needed	2 	Time	2 h 55 min 

◆ town ● point of interest

Juan Romero Mill R. A.

Juan Romero Mill R. A.



SKIRTING THE PEÑA DEL CASTELLAR AND THE CERRO DEL NOGUERÓN

A circular route that begins beside the River Júcar, in the Juan Romero Recreational Area and which, skirting the Peña del Castellar and the Cerro del Noguerón, visits some small tributaries of the Júcar, such as the Magdalena and Pedregoso streams. This unique journey shows an environment brimming with life.



Footbridge over the Magdalena stream



Bench in panoramic views of the Nature Trail

This new stage begins beside the Caminos Naturales interpretative panel at the entrance to the Juan Romero Recreational Area. From this point, cross the CU-V-9112 road, which leads to the village of Beamud, exercising extreme caution. The route leaves behind on the right the old Juan Romero mill, on the banks of the River Júcar.

First you descend through a cemented section with logs arranged lengthwise that will make your bicycle bounce. Shortly thereafter the route returns to the dirt track, crossing, for the first time in this stage, the Magdalena stream, via an overpass that is also cemented with logs arranged lengthwise, located shortly before it empties into the River Júcar.

After this, you will leave the dirt track and ascend a slope with an uneven surface and loose stones, where you can see various pine trees dotted on either side of the slope. Following the Caminos Naturales markers, each easily distinguishable from the previous one, you will continue to climb up a stony path which sometimes tends to narrow.

Shortly before reaching kilometre point 2, you will arrive at a section with a wooden fence on the left. Here there is a wooden bench, which was installed there due to the spectacular views you can have from it, making it hard to resist stopping to enjoy the surroundings.

After this short break, continue uphill along the path through the pine trees until just after kilometre 3 of the stage, where the Caminos Naturales signs indicate a 90° left turn coinciding with the beginning of the pedestrian section and the descent. The route continues on a very attractive section through a pine forest, which at first gives way to gall oak (*Quercus faginea*) before reaching the gallery forest characteristics of the course of the Magdalena stream. At this point, you will cross this watercourse for the second time via a beautiful wooden bridge purpose built for this Júcar Nature Trail.

After crossing it for the second time, you will climb up to the CU-V-9112 road, where the pedestrian section ends. You then have to cross the road, exercising extreme caution, albeit this time you will be moving along a very wide path with a good surface, which will allow touring cyclists to return to this section again while enjoying their favourite sport.

The route continues mainly uphill, winding through a sparsely-wooded area featuring conifers alongside lush vegetation. This is undoubtedly a good place to visit in autumn, when the season offers a colourful spectacle that will delight the traveller's senses.

After passing kilometre point 4, you will reach Peña del Castellar, an area brimming with history and legends that has been inhabited since ancient times. The next section, which has a gentle relief, advances through the fertile plain of the Noguerón stream, turning left towards the Rodenillo ravine. In these small river courses, river-side woodland is scarce, sometimes limited a few specimens of black poplar (*Populus nigra*) arranged in lines, always close to the watercourse.

After leaving kilometre point 6 behind, ascend for a few metres, before the route turns left along a poorly-defined path; you must pay attention to the Caminos Naturales markers that will indicate the direction to follow. The hiker will then approach the ruins of an old sheepcote, where in the past sheep were sheltered from the inclement weather. Continuing along the trail, the route enters a new pine forest, where, after less than 200 m, it turns left onto a broad forest track that is in very good condition.



Peña del Castellar

The descent continues, with no technical difficulties, making it easy to pass kilometre point 7 and, shortly afterwards, the Pedregoso stream, where a cemented platform enables traffic to pass without incident. After passing kilometre point 8, this path joins another of similar characteristics, which is the itinerary of stage 3 of the Júcar Nature Trail. The branch turns left, sharing the end of the stage with stage 3, crossing a small riverbed via a cemented platform, before soon reaching the pedestrian access to the Juan Romero Recreational Area. End point of this circular branch of the Júcar Nature Trail.

BEAMUD

A village in the province Cuenca in the heart of the mountains, whose name is very clearly of Muslim origin. The village had been inhabited previously, as evidenced by Bronze Age sites found in the surrounding area. There is also evidence of a human presence in the Roman era, when the salt mines began to operate.

The main architectural heritage in this municipality is the parish church of Santiago, which suffered the convulsions of the Spanish Civil War, but it remains in good condition thanks to its restoration.

The village's privileged natural setting, surrounded and sheltered by several valleys, means that it features numerous springs; it is possible to visit, among others, the Fuente de los Hontanares via a signposted route.

The patron saint festivities take place in honour of San Antonio de Padua in mid-August.



Beamud Church

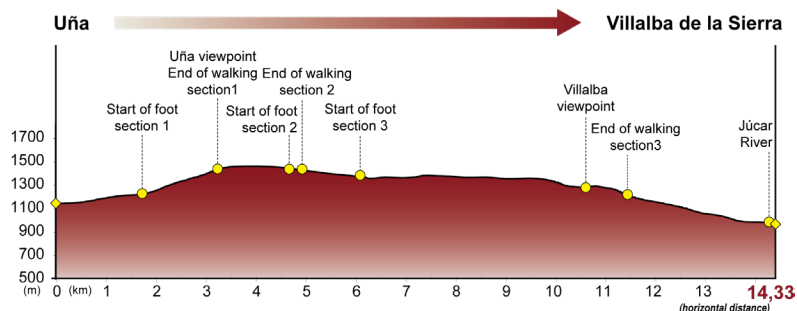
STAGE 4 ✂ UÑA → VILLALBA DE LA SIERRA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	3	⚠	Upward gradient	370 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	533 m	⬆
Route difficulty	3	🔪	Route length (actual distance)	14,41 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	3	🍏	Time	4 h 35 min	🕒

◆ town

● point of interest



A MAGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE SPECTACULAR CIUDAD ENCANTADA ROCK FORMATION

This stage of the trail, at just over 14 kilometres long, conceals and connects some spectacular scenery, such as the viewpoints of Uña and Villalba de la Sierra, at the start and end of the stage respectively. Much of the route goes through the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park and the iconic Ciudad Encantada, or Enchanted City, discovering its most unknown and solitary formations.



River Júcar in Villalba de la Sierra



Panoramic view of Uña

The fourth stage of the Júcar Nature Trail begins next to the interpretative panel at the car park in the town of Uña. A wonderful starting point located in an impressive natural setting formed by the Uña lagoon and the typical cliffs of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park.

As we embark on the stage we say farewell to the picturesque town of Cuenca, heading towards the capital along the CM-2105 road. First, we walk along a pavement before continuing on the hard shoulder, so extreme caution is recommended. After crossing the river Júcar, we cross the road and leave it for good, taking an asphalt track. Before continuing along the route, it is well worth taking a brief detour to follow the signs to visit the Uña travertine, a geological formation of great interest and beauty.

Further on, the trail begins to climb uphill. We pass a recycling bring centre and Uña cemetery on the left, at which point it becomes a dirt track. We then enter a coniferous forest, mainly made up of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and black pine (*Pinus nigra*), which is becoming more and more evident. As the forest becomes more and more dense, it offers the traveller some pleasant shade.

We then reach a perfectly signposted crossing, taking the left. Shortly thereafter there is a sign indicating the beginning of a section on foot, just as the steep slope that will dominate this section begins.

From this point on, travellers will need a firm and determined attitude as they tackle this stretch of just over 1.5 kilometres that will test their physical fitness while at the same time delighting those who love the mountain scenery. This section runs entirely along a path that zigzags uphill to avoid the steeper slopes.

UÑA

Uña is a picturesque town in the province of Cuenca, located in the heart of the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park that was repopulated in the 13th century by Aragonese and Castilian settlers after the conquest of Cuenca.

Outstanding among its architectural heritage is the church of San Miguel Arcángel, dating from the 13th century, as well as the town hall, located next to the church. Its inhabitants have traditionally been dedicated to agriculture, and nowadays the tourist sector is one of the main pillars of its economy, due to its abundance of natural heritage.

An example of this heritage is the Uña lagoon, which collects the waters of the fast-flowing Rincón stream. Over the years, the precipitation of calcium carbonate formed the Uña travertine, a natural tuff dam with a viewpoint for visitors to enjoy the spectacle.

After the effort of the climb, we are rewarded upon reaching the Mirador de Uña viewpoint, the perfect place for some respite and to regain strength while taking in the panoramic views of the upper course of the Júcar, the Serranía de Cuenca and the town of Uña, a picture postcard panorama. Explanatory tables inform the traveller of the most outstanding geographical features and of the rest of the natural values of this magical spot.

After that short break, we continue our journey along the dirt track from the viewpoint. The route then reaches kilometre 4 of the stage and, shortly afterwards, the fire extinguishing tower, where a short cross-country section begins. The route continues following the Caminos Naturales signposts before crossing the CM-2104 road, taking all necessary precautions, to continue along the dirt track.



Detail of waymarker at the Uña viewpoint



The Júcar Nature Trail in the Ciudad Encantada

We soon reach kilometre marker 5, confirming we're on the correct route. Almost without realising, the traveller is immersed in the spectacular Ciudad Encantada rock formations. Even if the trail won't take us to the most famous geological formations, this opportunity to discover the less explored corners of this beautiful spot should not be passed up. Enjoy the flora and fauna that quieter travellers can observe in peace and quiet.

There is a succession of changes in the surface of the trail from path to cross country, as we follow the official Caminos Naturales signage. Where possible, we recommend using a mobile device with the official route on the Caminos Naturales website (<https://caminosnaturales.es/en/red-de-caminos-naturales/camino-detalle/sector-centro/jucar>).

After passing kilometre 7 of the stage, the most curious rock formations of the Ciudad Encantada come into view. Calmly chiselled by the passage of time, they offer an invitation to the traveller to stop and play at imagining, together with his fellow travellers, what these formations might resemble. Shortly after passing kilometre point 8, turn left at the crossroads and, before another kilometre marker, take the path to the left at a fork in the road, which continues along the crest, enjoying spectacular views of the mountain scenery.

The route gains metres in altitude as it climbs to the Mirador de Villalba de la Sierra viewpoint. A spectacular spot where you can look back and enjoy what you have done and what lies ahead. Before continuing, this place is worthy of a brief stop. You can take some time to regain your strength on the specially placed bench and learn more about the species of ungulates that inhabit the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park thanks to a panel located next to the bench.

After this well-deserved break for body and soul, the descent begins, which is firstly along a path and then metres later takes the dirt track on the left, all duly signposted. The rapid and comfortable descent zigzags down the slope as the dense pine forest, predominant throughout the stage, gives way to a holm oak forest with a rich undergrowth populated by the species typical of Mediterranean scrubland.

The end of the descent is marked by an interpretative panel offering information about the nearby Salto de Villalba, also well worth a visit, as is the nearby Ventano del Diablo. At this point, the holm oak grove also disappears, and the land is occupied by agricultural crops in the nearby fertile lowlands of the River Júcar.



The journey continues, turning left and continuing parallel to the CM-2105 road until it crosses it. On the other side, there is a bridge over the river Júcar and an interpretative panel indicating the end of the fourth stage of the Júcar Nature Trail, which welcomes you to the town of Villalba de la Sierra.

VILLALBA DE LA SIERRA

This town is part of the El Campichuelo-Serranía Media municipal district, just 20 kilometres from the city of Cuenca itself. Its origins date back to the Bronze Age, as attested to by remains found in the vicinity of the Lituero hill. Although the current urban centre was probably inhabited at different times, its consolidation as it is known today took place after the repopulation promoted by King Alfonso VIII.

An area traditionally dedicated to agriculture, livestock and forestry, today, due to its privileged location with respect to the Serranía de Cuenca Natural Park, tourism has become one of the driving forces of its economy. From an architectural point of view, the Romanesque church of Nuestra Señora de la Natividad, patron saint of the village, stands out, and local festivals are held in her honour at the beginning of September.

One of the most important events to take place in the town was the inauguration of the El Salto hydroelectric power station by King Alfonso XIII in 1926. Its construction and operation doubled the population and consolidated the municipality in demographic terms. The river Júcar has always been linked to Villalba de la Sierra, forming beauty spots such as the Ventano del Diablo and its gorge, with cliffs reaching heights of 200 m, dotted with rapids and backwaters.



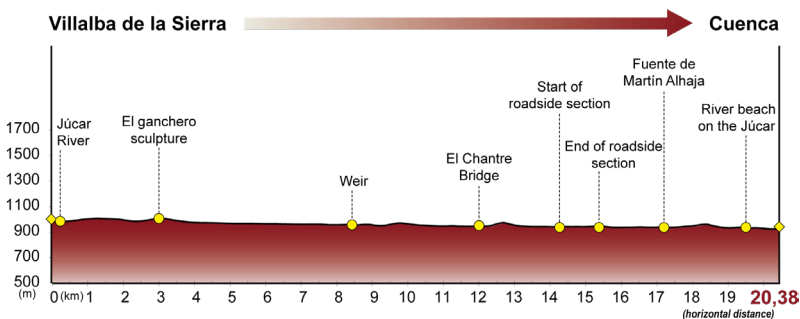
Panoramic view of Villalba de la Sierra

STAGE 5 VILLALBA DE LA SIERRA → CUENCA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	159 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	214 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	20,45 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	5 h 20 min 

◆ town ● point of interest



BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE, THE JÚCAR GORGE, A PRELUDE TO THE MONUMENTAL CITY

Villalba de la Sierra marks the start of this stage of just over 20 kilometres. The path runs parallel to the river Júcar, enjoying the hydraulic engineering works and bridges, such as El Chantre, before finally entering the Júcar gorge. From now on, the river and its rocky cliffs will be the absolute protagonists. The section concludes in the best possible way, in the city of Cuenca.



Panoramic view of the city of Cuenca and the Júcar river gorge



Directional sign with Villalba de la Sierra in the background

The stage starts in an incomparable setting, with the interpretative panel located next to the river Júcar in the town of Villalba de la Sierra. The route continues over the bridge, taking the CM-2105 road. At this point, caution is required.

The traveller's steps now take a wide dirt track that turns to the right shortly afterwards, following the signs, to run parallel to the course of the river Júcar, a situation that will not be abandoned for practically the entire stage.

The more curious traveller may want to stop here for an interesting information panel that explains, in detail, how the monumental city of Cuenca is supplied by the excellent quality waters of its mountain range. The stage progresses through gentle terrain, although not devoid of short uphill and downhill slopes, with dry farming land dotted with patches of pine forest and Mediterranean scrubland that sometimes grow near the riverbed, with the permission of the omnipresent gallery forest.

After passing kilometre marker 3, the monument to El Ganchero rises ahead. Built in corten steel, which protects the sculpture from corrosion, this monument pays homage to the ancestral trade of transporting the timber made up of shafts of laricio pine (*Pinus nigra*) along the upper course of the river Júcar and other rivers and streams of the Serranía de Cuenca. The timber was transported using this method to more accessible places where the logs could be processed or transported by other means.

The route continues to meander through pine forests and crops, with the River Júcar always to the right, protected by its riverside canopy. At kilometre point 6 the riverbed comes even closer to the Nature Trail. For more than 2 kilometres, it meanders through a spectacular river landscape, reaching the La Torre waterfall, from where the water flows at a faster rate to the nearby La Torre hydroelectric

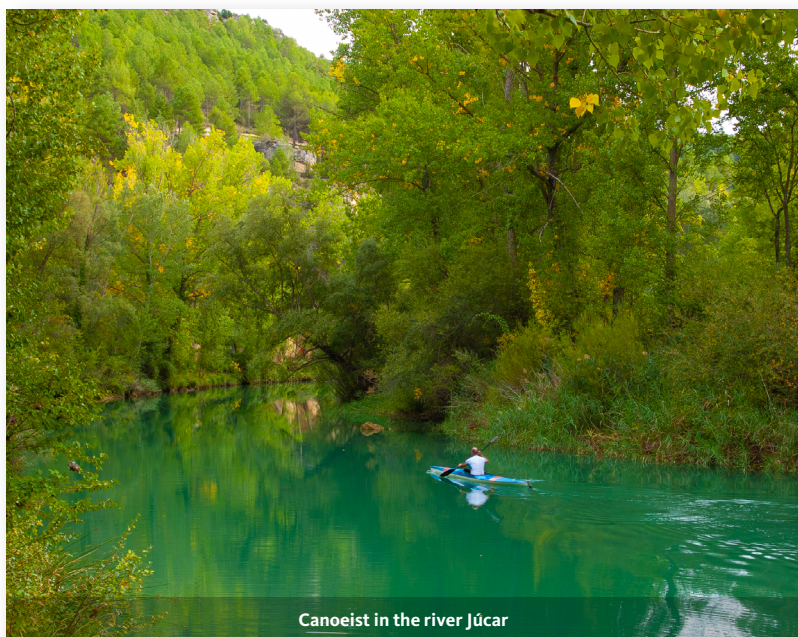
power station. This is one of the many hydraulic engineering works built on the upper reaches of the River Júcar and part of its tributaries. These include flour mills, light factories, fulling mills, blacksmiths and paper mills that took advantage of the power of water for their productive activities.

The kilometres continue to add up, as we share our route with the course of the river Júcar. Shortly the route and riverbed turn right to reach kilometre 12 of the stage. Once over the bridge, there is an interpretative panel narrating the history of the El Chantre bridge, located next to it. This bridge, which owes its name to Nuño Álvarez Osorio, is an obligatory stop. The developer of the original construction in the 15th century, one of his many occupations he held over the course of his life was choirmaster of Cuenca Cathedral for some 30 years, a position known as Chantre. The bridge been rebuilt twice, the first time in 1882 by Cuenca City Council when it was found sunk according to written documents of the time, and the second, in 2010, by the Provincial Council of Cuenca, due to a partial collapse suffered in 2013 due to heavy rains. Today, together with the recreational area of the same name, it is an ideal place to enjoy the river environment provided by the river Júcar.

The route continues again in a predominantly southerly direction. The landscape mosaic formed by masses of multi-species pine forests where several species of native pine trees coexist, masses of holm oak and gall oak groves with Mediterranean scrub undergrowth and gallery forests developed on both sides of the riverbed. All of this is dotted with dry farming land.



El Chantre Bridge



Canoeist in the river Júcar

EL CHANTRE BRIDGE

Built in the 15th century, this is one of the oldest bridges built on the River Júcar thanks to Nuño Álvarez Osorio who, among many of his occupations, was the choirmaster of Cuenca Cathedral for 30 years, a role known as *Chantre*.

It is a structure built from masonry with a single eighteen-metre eye connecting the city of Cuenca with the villages of the Serranía, used mainly for the passage of livestock. The bridge has suffered over the years and there are many stories told by locals and traders. Two stand out from the others, even if there's always a happy ending for the bridge itself.

The first is the state of collapse of the bridge as reflected in writings from the second half of the 19th century, and after unsuccessful attempts, it was rebuilt by the Cuenca City Council in 1882, as recorded in the engraving on the central stone.

The second was caused by its faithful companion, the river Júcar, which, raging in the heavy rains of April 2013, washed part of the bridge away downstream. In 2019 the Provincial Council of Cuenca rebuilt it as it looks today, faithful to its original construction and an emblematic site for the enjoyment of all the people of Cuenca.

Shortly after, we pass kilometre point 14. This marks the beginning of a stretch of just over one kilometre along the CM-2104 road, where hikers and cyclists will have to take precautions and ensure they comply with the rules of the road. The trail continues along the Camino de San Isidro, where a green paved pavement on the left side marks the way for walkers, while cyclists must continue along the left side of this asphalted road.

The emerald waters of the river Júcar continue their course alongside the trail. Shortly before kilometre 17 of the stage, the directional signs invite you to leave the aforementioned Camino de San Isidro, taking the dirt track on the right to continue walking alongside the River Júcar.

The hiker plunges into the Hoz del Júcar, where it is common to find climbers practising their favourite sport on the specially equipped cliffs, and who can refresh themselves in the water of the Fuente Martín Alhaja. Travellers should ignore the right turn at Las Grajas bridge and take the path to the left. The path then narrows at the same time as it gains in beauty, advancing along a stretch of less than 1 kilometre where the route sticks to the rocky outcrop, from uphill ramps at the beginning and predominantly downhill at the end.

The path widens shortly before reaching kilometre 19, opening up to the landscape formed by the Júcar and its gorge, while the shrine of San Isidro and the old hydroelectric power station of El Batán shouldn't go unnoticed by the traveller. Engrossed by this beautiful panoramic view, the route passes kilometre point 20 almost without noticing as the monumental city of Cuenca rises above the cut of the ravine, just as we approach the recreation area known as Recreo Peral. Once again, the end point of the route is marked with an interpretative panel located at the foot of the river Júcar and the city of Cuenca.



Interpretative panel at the end of stage 5 in Cuenca

CUENCA

Capital city of the province of the same name in Castilla-La Mancha. The city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996 and stands between the gorges of the Júcar and Huécar rivers, a setting of spectacular beauty and great environmental importance.

The remains found in the area confirm that it has been inhabited since ancient times by Celtiberians, Romans and Muslims, who each shaped it by adapting it to the terrain. In 1177 it was conquered by the Christian troops of Alfonso VIII, who developed and expanded the city, bringing in a period of great splendour, as in many other places, in the 15th and 16th centuries due to the lucrative livestock sector and the wool trade driven and promoted by the Royal Council of La Mesta. Subsequently, the plague and various wars were the most important events in the subsequent centuries.

Today it is a city buzzing with life and it would be just impossible to list all the architectural heritage here: the Gothic cathedral of Santa María Nuestra Señora de Gracia, the baroque City Hall, the famous Casas Colgadas or Hanging Houses, internationally renowned as a symbol of the city. All great reasons for one to lose oneself in the city's historic streets.



Detail of the hanging houses of Cuenca and the bridge of San Pablo

STAGE 6 ✂ CUENCA → VILLAR DE OLALLA

MIDE

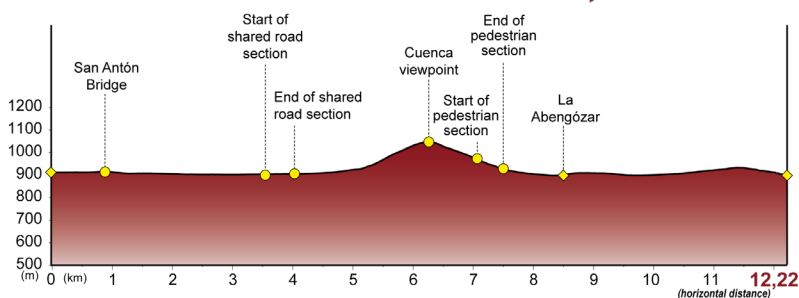
Harshness of natural environment	2	⚠	Upward gradient	198 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	211 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🖋	Route length (actual distance)	12,24 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	3	🍏	Time	3 h 30 min	🕒

◆ town

● point of interest

Cuenca

Villar de Olalla



FROM THE NARROW VALLEY CARVED IN THE ROCK TO THE MEANDERS OF THE JÚCAR

A short stage that takes in the monumental city Cuenca as seen from the banks of the river Júcar, discovering the Bridge of San Antón and El Bosque de Acero, before ascending to the Mirador de Cuenca in the Sierra del Bosque, and finally ambling through farmland to Villar de Olalla.



Nature Trails waymarker with the meanders of the river Júcar in the background.



Wooden bridge over the river Júcar in Cuenca

Stage 6 begins next to the interpretative panel located at the recreation area of Recreo Peral, at the northern end of the city of Cuenca. The route follows an asphalt track, with the river Júcar on the right and the picturesque city of Cuenca, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996, rising on the left over the rocky cliffs.

After climbing some steps and following the Caminos Naturales signs, the road changes, taking a dirt track that goes off to the right and comes even closer, if that's possible, to the river Júcar. Shortly after, we cross a wooden bridge that's the starting point of a spectacular stretch of wooden footbridge anchored in the rock, curving in time with the sound that marks the final part of the Hoz del Júcar.

Without pausing, but taking in the surrounding environment, we reach the Parque de la Trinidad, where a new wooden bridge crosses the Huécar River at the point where it flows into the Júcar River, a point known as *junta de los ríos* or the meeting of the rivers. We ascend a flight of stairs still inside the park, to turn right onto Avenida Virgen de la Luz, which after a few metres leads us to the well-known de San Antón bridge. This infrastructure not only allows you to cross to the other side of the river, but also gives those who arrive here an impressive panoramic view of the church of the Virgen de la Luz.

The church is left behind, and the path turns to the left along the Avenida de los Alfares and before descending another a flight of steps that takes us back to the banks of the Júcar. Once again, we must cross the course of this beautiful river using a wooden bridge, after which we turn right and walk through gallery forests, with the river Júcar our faithful companion to the right.

Almost without realising it, we advance through the city of Cuenca immersed in the tranquillity offered by the river and its pleasant riverside promenade. After passing a gauging station Júcar River Basin Authority and crossing several roads and the old railway bridge, we find ourselves before a curious building known as El Bosque de Acero (The Steel Forest). This futuristic construction was inaugurated in 2010 and designed in the studio of famed architect Rafael Moneo. It serves as a spectacular venue for all manner of socio-cultural events.

At this point we pass kilometre point 2, and leave our travel companion the river Júcar behind. Turning left, we rise a few meters after a short section of steps along the Moscas river. Taking another left, we emerge back onto the Ronda Oeste, to continue along the pavement or cycle lane. Cross the aforementioned Ronda Oeste at the purpose-installed traffic lights, where, in addition, an interpretative panel indicates we are leaving the city of Cuenca.

After a right turn, a short stretch shared with traffic begins, requiring the necessary precautions. This section ends at kilometre marker 3 to continue along the pavement or cycle lane at Pasaje de Abengózar, where the route momentarily returns to the course of the river Júcar.

On reaching a roundabout we continue along the dirt road on the left. We won't lose the trail, however, as the areas has several Caminos Naturales signposts guiding us towards the Hospital Universitario de Cuenca, thus completing the fourth kilometre of the stage.



El Bosque de Acero



Following the signs, we zigzag right and left, crossing the N-320 road via an underpass. On returning to the surface, the route climbs for 1 kilometre through ramps that do require some degree of effort, rewarded by the presence of Mediterranean scrubland, mainly holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), with an undergrowth of scrub and aromatic plants of great interest. And at the top, a bench and a lectern-type panel offer a well-deserved rest to enjoy the views of the city from this viewpoint behind the Mirador de Cuenca.

When it's time to begin the descent, this time on a dirt track that soon turns into a path, we must follow the Caminos Naturales markers to complete this fast-paced stretch through vegetation and substrates rich in gypsum.

At the end of the path, you continue along a wide dirt track, while the landscape that flanks the traveller changes radically, as the Mediterranean scrubland gives way to farmland. In addition, small streams with their gallery forest and pockets of shrub and tree vegetation dot the landscape, forming a mosaic of special beauty.

The route reaches an uninhabited village known as La Abengózar, turning left at this point, and from then on, the kilometres continue along a wide, gently sloping path, moving away from the Sierra del Bosque and approaching the town that marks the end of the stage.



Shortly after passing kilometre point 10, the traveller enters Villar de Olalla via Calle Abengózar. Strolling through this beautiful Cuenca village following the Caminos Naturales urban marker plaques, until we reach a zebra crossing on the N-420 road and, passing that, we reach the interpretative panel marking the end of stage 6 of the Júcar Nature Trail.



Looking back from the Júcar Nature Trail

VILLAR DE OLALLA

Villar de Olalla is a small municipality located in the county of Serranía de Cuenca, in the province of Cuenca. Its mountainous setting, characterised by hills and forests, is about 10 km south-east of the provincial capital.

Archaeological discoveries in the area suggest the history of this village dates back to the Bronze Age, as attested by the Los Escalones site, located on the hill of the same name, and a concentration of tombs in a nearby valley.

There are also traces that indicate that there was some Roman presence in the El Bosque mountain range, the natural border between Villar de Olalla and the Cuenca city limits.

There is possible evidence of villas and mills near the rivers San Martín and Júcar. Added to this is the presence of the Roman bridge of Villar de Olalla. The Visigoth presence is associated with the creation of the settlement on the hill of San Lorenzo, also used as a necropolis. After the Christian conquest, the population persisted on the same hill, but later, due to the outbreak of plagues, it moved to the other bank of the river San Martín, where it settled definitively.

Villar de Olalla preserves traditional architectural elements, including houses in the typical rural style of the region. The Parish Church, built in the 16th century and dedicated to the Nativity of Our Lady, is a highlight. It is a Latin cross church with a barrel-vaulted choir. There is also a small shrine dedicated to the Virgen del Villar. A construction of simple appearance where the image of the patron saint resides.



Church of Villar de Olalla

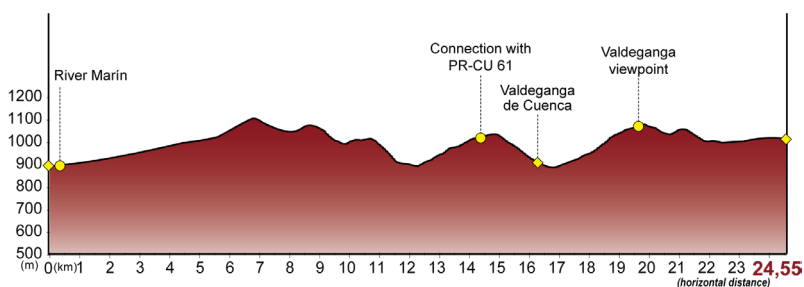
STAGE 7 ✂ VILLAR DE OLALLA → LA PARRA DE LAS VEGAS

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	664 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	544 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	24,62 km 
Amount of effort needed	4 	Time	6 h 30 min 

◆ town ● point of interest

Villar de Olalla  La Parra de las Vegas



THE TRAIL LEAVES THE RIVER JÚCAR TO CONTINUE BETWEEN WOODED MOUNTAINS AND CULTIVATED VALLEYS

The second longest stage of the Júcar Nature Trail moves completely away from the river and enters a landscape that alternates between the cultivated meadows of the watercourses where the towns of Villar de Olalla, Valdeganga de Cuenca and La Parra de las Vegas are located and hills covered with mixed Mediterranean forest.



After a steady climb, the road takes a wide forest track towards Valdeganga de Cuenca



Creek Hocino floodplain

This stage starts in Villar de Olalla, next to the N-420 road, and heads south, soon reaching a bridge over the river Marín. This watercourse, together with its numerous tributary streams, is responsible for the fertile plain where the crops of Villar de Olalla grow.

Just before crossing the bridge there is a signpost that leads to the Arcas lagoon complex, 5 km away, a set of lagoons formed by more than 35 dolines or uvalas developed on gypsum, which makes them unique in both Spain and Europe.

The route continues southwards, gently but steadily uphill, along a wide track with a firm surface amidst a landscape of crops and accompanied by the Hocino stream at first and then by one of its tributaries.

After some 5 km through this area, passing by an agricultural warehouse, the route continues along a path that starts on the right. This path, narrower and with a more uneven surface, enters a mixed forest composed mainly of pines, accompanied by holm oaks, kermes oaks, junipers and herbs like rosemary and thyme.

1.2 km further on, the ascent that began in Villar de Olalla ends, and the route begins the descent towards the bed of the Fuente Grande stream along an uneven, narrow track surface except for a short stretch of barely 700 m where we return to a wide, well-surfaced path. Although this section is generally downhill, the route alternates with some climbs to cross other streams.

Walk about 600 m along the bottom of the valley through a flatter area that has been ploughed for crops, and then turn off onto a path on the left that goes back into the forest. Here begins a demanding climb as far as a wide forest track that connects Valdeganga de Cuenca with Olmedilla de Arcas and the Arcas Lagoon Complex, coinciding with the PR-CU 61 trail.

ARCAS LAGOON COMPLEX

This area, included in the Natura 2000 Network as a Special Protection Area (SPA), is a lagoon complex made up of more than 35 dolines and uvalas, with permanent and temporary waters. They originated when the Paleocene chalky loams were dissolved by the action of the groundwater. The dolines are circular in shape, the largest with a diameter of about 70 m, and the uvalas are formed by the union of several dolines, the largest with a diameter of about 190 m.

The fact that these formations develop on gypsum makes them, together with the lagoon complex of the Moscas river in Fuentes, unique examples at a national level and almost unique at a European level.

Apart from the hydrogeological value, the hygrophilous and aquatic plant communities are also important, including the calcareous peat bogs of masiega, the communities of large caraceae and the Mediterranean halophyte meadows, which, due to the fact that they are found on gypsophilous materials, tend to be scarcely represented in the area.

Take the track to the right, towards Valdeganga, which we reach after 1.7 km of descent, at times rather steep. Just before reaching the top of the descent to Valdeganga, a wide bend offers a good view of the valley of the Vega stream, a much narrower valley than that of Villar de Olalla, but also extensively cultivated.

The route barely enters the town, the capital of the municipality of Valdetórtola, passing only along its westernmost street before crossing the CUV-7122 road and leaving the town.



Interpretive panel next to one of the flooded sinkholes of the Arcas lagoon complex



Valdeganga viewpoint

Then, along a curious tree-lined walkway with millstones, we come to a bridge over the Vega stream. Although at this point the stream is in a wide fertile plain, upstream it is embedded in a beautiful spot called the Tórtola gorge.

Having crossed the stream, the path runs for 1 km through the crops of Valdetórtola, alternating herbaceous crops and cereals with fruit and olive groves. Right next to an olive grove, the route turns off onto a track on the left. This track has a more uneven surface than the previous one, although it maintains the same width.

Once again uphill, we continue alongside the olive grove for a few metres before the track once again enters the dominant landscape of this stage, a mixed pine forest accompanied by other trees and Mediterranean scrubland. This new uphill section last 2 km, ending next to the turn-off to the Valdeganga viewpoint. Although it is 100 m from the route, a visit to this viewpoint is almost obligatory. It sits just below a forestry watchtower and a bench and an interpretative panel have been installed to show the magnificent views from this point.

The path descends with little change in the landscape, just the odd peculiarity of passing by the remains of the tinada de los Quemadillos (tinada being the name given in the area to a type of agricultural construction).

The descent ends after just over 2 km, at the plain on which La Parra de las Vegas sits. Before entering the landscape of crops and pastures that surround the village, the route runs for a kilometre alongside a repopulated pine forest.

The route then turns 90 degrees, heading definitively towards La Parra de las Vegas. Before the end of the stage on the outskirts of the town, lies the simple shrine to San Roque.

VALDEGANGA DE CUENCA

The village of Valdeganga de Cuenca is located in the region of the Serranía Media and forms part of the municipality of Valdetórtola, together with the village of Tórtola and the uninhabited village of Olmedilla de Arcas. The placenames of the two localities, as well as many other places in the area, refer to the existence of large populations of birds, such as turtle doves and sand pipers. The municipal district is traversed by the river Júcar, which serves as a boundary to the west, and the streams of La Vega and Tórtola, forming the “hoz de Tórtola” valley.

The parish church of Valdeganga, dedicated to Santo Domingo de Silos, is the most striking heritage element in the town centre. It consists of a single industrial unit covered with a flat roof made of beams and wooden planks. A triumphal arch leads to the chancel, which is flat and covered with a wooden coffered ceiling. The main doorway, built with ashlar masonry and the keystone feature the laureate coat of arms of Cardinal Gil Carrillo de Albornoz, and the double belfry decorated with pinnacles of balls.

One of the most unique heritage elements of the municipality is the Valdeganga spa, now in ruins. It was very popular with the upper echelons of society in the 19th and 20th centuries until it was abandoned in the late 1960s. Carlos Saura used the spa as a location in his film *Peppermint Frappé*.



Ruins of the Valdeganga spa

LA PARRA DE LAS VEGAS

La Parra de las Vegas is a small municipality in Cuenca, located in the county of Serranía Media, just 36 kilometres from the capital. According to the pre-Roman settlement found on the Castillejo hill, its origins date back to the Bronze Age.

A visit to the Plaza Mayor is a must, with buildings built between the 16th and 17th centuries, including the church of La Asunción. This large church was built in the mid-16th century and is one of only four in the whole province of Cuenca whose ground plan is divided into two units separated by semicircular arches supported by Doric columns.

Other architectural monuments of interest include the ruins of the Palace of the Counts of Cervera, former owners of the town, and the Town Hall itself, a two-storey 17th century building with its porticoed gallery and upper balcony.

In addition to the church, this municipality has the peculiarity of being surrounded by four shrines. The Shrines of San Roque, the Shrine of Cristo de la Salud, the Shrine of Santa Ana and the Shrine of San Cristóbal. Of the latter two, however, only a few traces remain.

As for the fiestas, the most famous are those held between 13 and 16 August in honour of the patron saint of the village, the Santísimo Cristo de la Salud. Festivities in which the town's iconic fountain goes from supplying water to providing its inhabitants with refreshing wine.



Views on arrival at La Parra de las Vegas from the shrine of San Roque

STAGE 8 ✂ LA PARRA DE LAS VEGAS → VILLAVERDE Y PASACONSOL

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	249 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	413 m	⬆
Route difficulty	1	🪜	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,44 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	3	🍏	Time	4 h 45 min	🕒

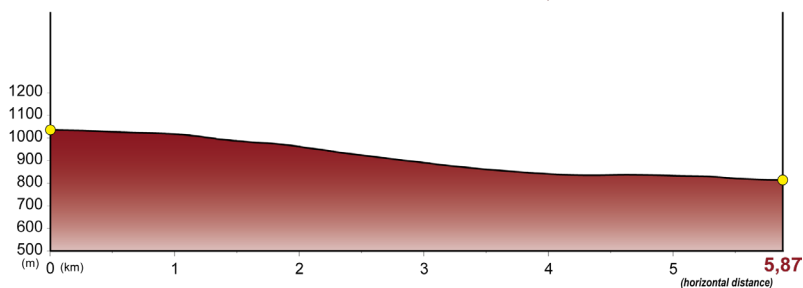
◆ town

● point of interest

Branch Connection to Stage 8



El Castellar Bridge



BETWEEN PINE FORESTS AND CROPS RETURNING TO THE BANKS OF THE JÚCAR BY THE ALARCÓN RESERVOIR

This stage is a good example of the marked difference in landscape between the flatter areas, almost completely covered by crops, and the pine-covered slopes of the more rugged areas. The nature trail returns to the river that gives it its name after having left the company of the riverbed during the previous stage.



The road enters a mixed forest dominated by pine trees



The road passes through the center of La Parra de las Vegas, going by the Church of the Assumption

The eighth stage of the Júcar Nature Trail begins just at the entrance to La Parra de las Vegas, with its back to the San Roque shrine, next to the one we passed in the previous stage. You pass through this small village, passing the church of La Asunción, the town hall and the ruins of the palace of the Counts of Cervera, and leave the town centre on one of its outer streets, where you come out onto the CUV-7131 road. The next half kilometre runs along this road, and caution should be exercised during transit.

The route begins with a gentle but continuous ascent, passing the Cristo de la Salud shrine. Leave the road along a dirt track on the right and then the path enters a bushy area of genista and labiata where the ascent practically ends at a crossroads. The path on the right leads to the bridge of El Castellar (see the stage 8 branch), although the route continues along the path on the left.

The path begins to descend and, as it continues to advance, the vegetation becomes more and more abundant, with a stratum of pine trees appearing in the company of some holm oaks. In terms of shrubs, it is now possible to find kermes oak (*Quercus coccifera*), heather (*Erica* spp.) and juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*).

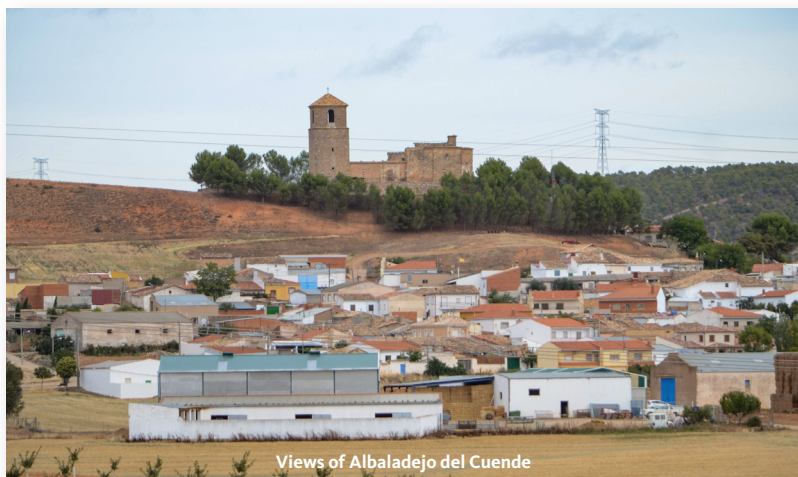
After about 2 km, the trail comes to a rural construction typical of the agricultural holdings in this area called tinadas, and after another kilometre, the mixed pine forest is interrupted more and more frequently by ploughed or cultivated land. After a steeper descent on a narrowing path, the road turns ninety degrees. The presence of the River Júcar is evident in the gallery forest that can be seen when looking southwards.

ALBALADEJO DEL CUENDE

The municipality of Albaladejo del Cuende takes its name from the Arabic word *al-balant* meaning “road” and the sobriquet *del conde* meaning “of the count”. The history of this village is closely linked to the period of Christian reconquest and repopulation, which reached the present-day province of Cuenca during the reign of Alfonso VII (12th-13th centuries). In 1080, these territories were ceded to the Cistercian monks of the monastery of Santa María de Huerta, in Soria. A transfer that demonstrates the importance of this urban centre at the time.

The urban plan of this municipality is articulated around an ancient church, the Church of Santa María de la Asunción, located on the top of a hill and which is currently being restored in an attempt to preserve the walls and the tower that are still standing. This building dates from the 16th century and was erected on the remains of an old Romanesque church designed after the conquest of Alfonso VIII. Today, only the tower and some of the walls that once formed part of the main building remain of the church.

Albaladejo del Cuende is a mainly agricultural and livestock farming village where you can't miss the shrine of las Nieves, built in the 17th century, with its beautiful carved stone façade and its hall shape, the aforementioned Church of Santa María de la Asunción, the shrine San Isidro and the ruins of the shrine of Santiago. The town celebrates local festivals on 5 August, paying homage to the patron, the Virgen de Las Nieves. These festivals bring together neighbours, families and visitors for bullfighting festivals, several open-air parties and the procession and mass in honour of the aforementioned virgin.



Views of Albaladejo del Cuende



Landscape of crops and Mediterranean scrubland at the exit of Albaladejo del Cuende

There is an almost negligible presence of trees for the next 7 km, the path enters a rolling landscape covered with cereal crops, fodder and some trees (almond, olive and pistachio trees). In one of these fields of crops you can see the remains of the shrine of Santiago. These ruins are the only surviving witness to a small village that belonged to Albaladejo del Cuende.

Albaladejo is accessed from the northwest, leaving a small hill to the south on which a shrine sits and the old church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, which overlooks the village from its elevated position, in front of it. Of this church, whose oldest origins lie in the construction of churches after the Christian conquest, only the tower and some of its walls remain standing.

Without entering Albaladejo del Cuende, the route heads south along a concrete road which, after leaving the last warehouses of the village behind, turns into a dirt track. The almost exclusively agricultural landscape is recovered, interrupted only by a patch of Mediterranean scrubland accompanied by holm oaks just a kilometre before reaching Villaverde y Pasaconsol. After passing by the cemetery, this village is accessed from the northeast, leaving the washhouse and watering place to one side.

It crosses Villaverde y Pasaconsol passing through the Plaza Mayor, where the church of Nuestra Señora de la Purificación is located, and the stage ends almost at the exit of the village, at the junction of the Calle Fuente del Caño and Calle Boleo.

VILLAVERDE Y PASACONSOL

Villaverde y Pasaconsol is a municipality in Cuenca, some 50 kilometres from the capital. For centuries it belonged to the cathedral chapter of Cuenca, until the confiscation of Madoz (19th-20th century). The village was formerly two independent localities, until the 19th century, when Villaverde absorbed the then small hamlet of Pasaconsol.

The latter gets its name from a popular legend passed down from generation to generation about the dangers of crossing the river Júcar at night, the legend of the Ninfa of the Júcar. A traditional story in which the phrase *pasa con sol* or “go with sun” is repeated several times, which will end up giving its name to this municipality.

As for the meaning of Villaverde, its name comes from “Villar Verde”, *Villar*, because the village is located on the site of an ancient late Roman villa, and *verde* meaning green because of the fertility of the surrounding land. For this reason, Villaverde y Pasaconsol is a mainly agricultural village, focused on the cultivation of olive trees, vines, sunflowers and almond trees.

Within its architecture, the most outstanding feature is the landscaped main square where the Parish Church of Nuestra Señora de la Purificación is located. With its rectangular-shaped hall floor plan, inside which you can still see a Baroque altarpiece with a niche and the Crucifixion Tablet, dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, which belongs to the Castilian school. It is also interesting to visit two of the hydraulic constructions that supply water to the municipality, the Villaverde y Pasaconsol, an old washhouse and the Huerta Vieja reservoir, both fully functional structures.



Villaverde y Pasaconsol washhouse

ROMAN CITY OF VALERIA

About 7 km east of Albaladejo del Cuende lies the Roman city of Valeria. Founded in 90 BC by Gaius Valerius Flaccus, Valeria is nestled between the gorges of the rivers Gritos and Zahorra, which form a spectacular landscape and endow the city with imposing natural walls.

The city has preserved the forum and the public square, next to which buildings such as the basilica and the curia were erected. Underneath the square are four water cisterns that supplied the town and a monumental nymphaeum of almost 100 metres in length. The site is completed by the remains of the medieval walls and the shrine of Santa Catalina in the upper part. The latest excavations have uncovered the city's thermal baths.

The church of La Sey was built in the present-day centre of Valeria. It was the Episcopal See during the Visigoth period and was erected over a pre-Roman sanctuary dedicated to the pre-Roman god of Hispania, Airón. Materials from the Roman city, such as columns and inscriptions, were reused in its constructions.



Roman site of Valeria

STAGE 8 BRANCH CONNECTION STAGE 8

→ PUENTE DEL CASTELLAR

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	2 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	225 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route lenght (actual distance)	5,88 km 
Amount of effort needed	2 	Time	1 h 30 min 

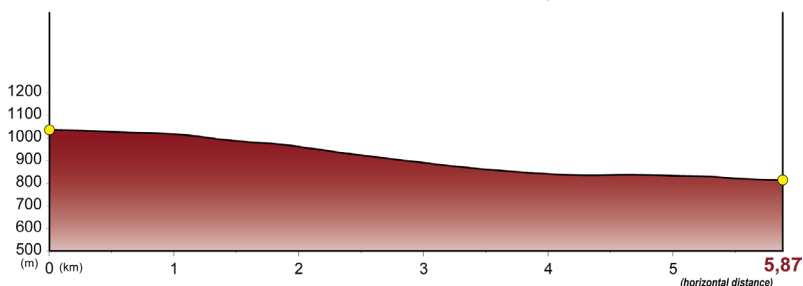
 town

 point of interest

Branch Connection to Stage 8



El Castellar Bridge



TOWARDS THE BRIDGE OF EL CASTELLAR

This branch, less than 6 km, brings the traveller back to the river Júcar along a comfortable route that runs along wide forest tracks, surrounded by mixed Mediterranean scrubland, leading to the vicinity of the El Castellar bridge, a monumental infrastructure dating from the 15th century.





The branch line starts from stage 8, at a junction between forest tracks

This branch starts 2.8 km from the start of stage 8, taking a track on the right-hand side, heading north-west. For almost a kilometre, the accompanying landscape is a pasture on the left and a mixed Mediterranean scrubland (pines and holm oaks in terms of tree vegetation, kermes oak, juniper, rosemary, thyme, etc. among the bushes) of low density on the right, although the altitude of the terrain at this point means that, but for a few taller specimens, almost all the vegetation is bushy. The low altitude of the vegetation provides magnificent panoramic views of the surrounding mountains.

CASTELLAR BRIDGE

The Castellar Bridge stands over the River Júcar, between the municipalities of La Parra de las Vegas and Fresneda de Altarejos, with the river serving as the boundary between the two villages. It is located in an area of great environmental wealth and protected under the River Júcar over Alarcón SAC, which covers 38 km of the course of the River Júcar and its closest strip, with dense riverside copses and gallery forests with aspens, poplars and white willows.

Erroneously called the “Roman Bridge”, the bridge is of low-medieval date, built between 1420 and 1495, according to the carbon-14 analysis carried out on its lime during restoration. It may have been built by the Council of Cuenca to connect the city with the area of Mancha, and a toll was charged for crossing the bridge, as it was the only one for several kilometres that could be used to cross the river. Today, with the new route of the national road, it remains somewhat hidden and is only used as a landmark for hiking routes, local roads and livestock trails.

The structure is made up of two semicircular arches over the River Júcar, one larger, with a diameter of 19.10 m and another smaller, with a diameter of 8.30 m, to level the passage to the immediate terrain, resulting in a raised platform with access ramps on opposing slopes. It features four buttresses or abutments on both sides to reinforce the main arch due to its large span.

It is a masonry construction, leaving the use of ashlar for the thread of the arches, the base and the corners of the abutments. The abutments are directly supported by three large boulders, whose rocky surroundings also served as a quarry for the construction of the bridge. The simulation of a plinth of stepped ashlar carved into the bedrock on which the abutment on the left bank rests is striking. The construction of the arches was supported by wooden falsework that rested on mechinales, which are the holes for inserting the beams. There are up to three lines of mechinales in the foundation rock on the right bank, in addition to another line in the ashlar already built for the horizontal braces.

The pass, which is 2.8 m wide, has two sidings on the abutments used to allow carriages that could not pay the toll to turn around. The bridge retains its original cobblestones and drainage system which, although it has been covered for better preservation, a sample can still be seen in the sidings.

In the past there was a mill with seven millstones and two fulling ponds next to the bridge. Both constructions belonged to the Cabildo of Cuenca, which was responsible for leasing them.

After a recent restoration promoted by the Provincial Council of Cuenca, it is now back in all its splendour.

After passing under a high-voltage power line, the trail leaves the pastureland behind and enters a forest that gains in height and density. This stretch of thicker forest serves as a refuge for different species of wild ungulates (deer, roe deer, wild boar) whose presence, if they do not appear directly in front of the traveller, is evident from the numerous footprints and droppings found on the forest track.

The path, although downhill from the start, now begins a steeper descent, zigzagging for the next 3 km. When the path returns to a gentler slope, it returns to pastureland.

After a crossroads where you have to take the path that heads north, the landscape on the left changes again, as the land between the river Júcar and the forest track has been used as a quarry for aggregate extraction. It runs alongside the quarry, passing by some abandoned buildings, for another kilometre.

The route then reaches the vicinity of the river Júcar, and the path continues parallel to it, heading upstream, between the gallery forest of the watercourse and the scrubland that has accompanied the entire itinerary.

The branch of Stage 8 of the Júcar Nature Trail ends at the foot of the monumental bridge of El Castellar. This magnificent stone bridge, although it has sometimes been called a Roman bridge, is in fact of late medieval construction (15th century), built to connect Cuenca with the La Mancha area and to connect the possessions of the Cathedral Chapter.

The surroundings of the bridge are equally impressive, with magnificent cuttings on the left bank of a river that forms small waterfalls. On the other side of the river is a hydroelectric power station dating from 1922.



The branch line ends at the El Castellar bridge

STAGE 9 ✂ VILLAVERDE Y PASACONSOL

→ VALVERDE DE JÚCAR

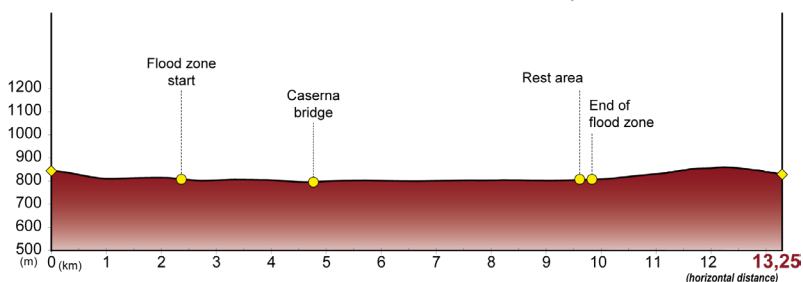
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	78 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	90 m	⬆
Route difficulty	1	🖋	Route lenght (actual distance)	13,26 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🏆	Time	2 h 55 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest

Villaverde y Pasaconsol

Valverde de Júcar



ARRIVAL AT THE ALARCÓN RESERVOIR

This stage marks the meeting of the Júcar Nature Trail with an element of the landscape that will be a constant feature for much of the route: the Alarcón reservoir. Apart from its use for irrigation supply and energy generation, this body of water has become the habitat of numerous species of aquatic birds and a tourist destination for its beaches and water sports.

WARNING: MUCH OF THIS STAGE MAY BE FLOODED DEPENDING ON THE WATER LEVEL OF THE ALARCÓN RESERVOIR. IT IS ADVISABLE TO CHECK THE CONDITIONS OF THE ROAD BEFORE SETTING OFF.



Much of the stage runs along the banks of the Alarcón reservoir



Flamingos flying over the Alarcón reservoir

This stage begins on the outskirts of Villaverde y Pasaconsol, at the junction of Calle Fuente del Caño and Calle Boleo. It is via the latter we leave the town in a westerly direction. This street, which soon becomes a road, is one of the entrances to Villaverde y Pasaconsol from the CM-2103, so it is important to take care, especially in the 500 m where the pavements end, and trail follows the hard shoulder. The route then turns left next to an olive grove and, after about 200 m, reaches the CM-2103, which must be crossed with due caution.

On the other side of the road, the route enters a landscape of cereal crops and pastures, with some trees such as almond and olive trees. The main protagonist of this stage (and of a good part of the next two), the Alarcón reservoir, also comes into view on the right-hand side. Throughout the route along the reservoir, it is not unusual to find numerous aquatic birds on the banks or in the water: flamingos, coots, perch, avocets, egrets and various ducks.

Once you reach the reservoir, the path heads south along the water's edge, between the flood zone on the right and the fields on the left. In just over 2 km, the dirt track that we had been driving on crosses a tarmac road, as it is an old road that used to connect Valverde de Júcar with Olivares de Júcar, which was flooded when the reservoir was filled. When the waters are low, it is still possible to see the bridge of La Caserna, which was used to cross over the river Júcar when the road was in full use.

The asphalt is soon abandoned to return to the dirt track. To the right of the path there are different beaches, some with jetties, such as the beach of El Árbol or Mauri, while to the left there is a patch of pine forest that breaks the monotony of the cultivated fields. In just one of pine groves, one kilometre before reaching one of the most popular beaches in the area, that of Manchamar, the path changes direction towards the northeast, in search of Valverde de Júcar. The shade provided by this pine forest has been used to install a rest area.

ALARCÓN RESERVOIR

This infrastructure covers an area of 6,840 hectares and has a capacity of 1,112 hm³. In the early 1930s, at the request of Valencian irrigators, the project began to be considered with the aim of regulating the waters of the River Júcar and facilitating the use of the waters for irrigation. It was in 1931 when the engineer Fausto Elio drew up the first preliminary project.

Construction began with the Second Republic, around 1937, but was halted with the outbreak of the Civil War, not officially restarting until 1942, when a joint initiative made up of more than 50,000 Valencian irrigators founded the Unidad Sindical de Usuarios del Júcar (USUJ), a union representing users of the river, which was responsible for financing the project.

The inauguration of the dam took place in 1955, but it was not until 1970 that the works were completed. This required a modification of the landscape, ecosystems and communication routes, conditioning the development and life of the riverside villages, whose economy, based on agriculture, evolved to other activities oriented towards tourism.

One of the consequences of the construction of the reservoir was the disappearance, in the 1950s, of the village of Gascas de Alarcón under its waters. A town now submerged, which was founded during the period of repopulation of the province of Cuenca, during the reign of Henry VIII, and whose ruins, walls and streets can be seen in times of drought, when the water level drops. Mention information on another current function of the reservoir in the Tagus-Segura aqueduct: In the Alarcón reservoir, the water from the aqueduct joins the water from the Júcar, acting as a regulator of water transfers in the middle section.

Nowadays, the reservoir also serves as a tourist attraction for the nearby towns, especially in the summer season, thanks to the creation and accommodation of various inland beaches, including Playa del Árbol, Playa Olivares, Playa Mauri-Alarcón, Playa Emocio-Alarcón and Playa de Manchamar.

It has also become a perfect spot for sport fishing. There are endemic Iberian species in the waters, such as the barbel (*Luciobarbus bocagei*), and other species much sought after by fishers, although catalogued as invasive exotic species, such as carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), pike (*Esox lucius*), pikeperch (*Sander lucioperca*), black bass or American perch (*Micropterus salmoides*). The area's ecosystem is ideal for wintering birds fleeing the cold of northern and central Europe. These include lapwings, herons and cranes.

The route heads slightly uphill towards Valverde, through an agricultural environment in which there are still some pine trees and small patches of Mediterranean scrubland. The proximity of the population is beginning to be felt with the increase in the number of olive groves. Before reaching Valverde de Júcar you can see, on a hill on the right hand side, an optical telegraph tower that belonged to the same line that will be found in stage 11 and a detour next to the first houses of the village allows you to follow the PR-CU-70 path. The stage ends shortly after entering Valverde de Júcar, on Avenida Madrid Valencia.

OPTICAL TELEGRAPHY

Optical telegraphy is a rudimentary technology that began in 1684, when the British scientist Robert Hooke presented the first telegraph to the Royal Society. However, this system of long-distance communication was not consolidated until the 18th century, with France being the first country to develop a network of telegraph towers. A project that began in 1792 and which transmitted the first message or telegram two years later.

The standardised model of the optical telegraph during the 18th and 19th centuries was that developed by the Chappe brothers. This consisted of a mobile mechanism, generally made of wood or metal, located at the top of a tower visible from a great distance (minimum 6 kilometres) and through which messages were transmitted using a code system that provided for 98 combinations.

The optical telegraph arrived in Spain in 1799, when the installation of the first towers began. This one, in particular, belongs to the Cuenca section of the Madrid-La Junquera telegraph line, which crossed Valencia, and was built in 1848.



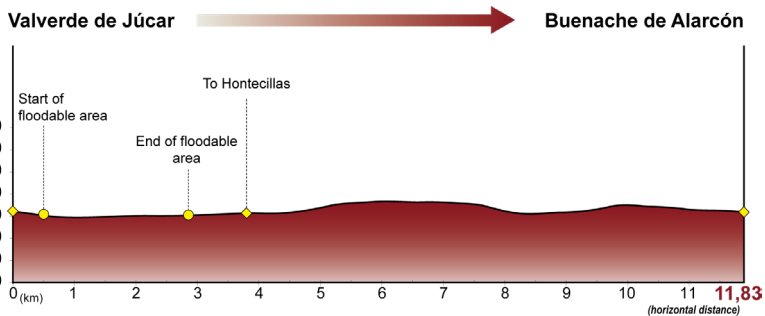
Old optical telegraph of Valverde de Júcar

STAGE 10 ✂ VALVERDE DE JÚCAR → BUENACHE DE ALARCÓN

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	116 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	119 m	⬆
Route difficulty	1	🖋	Route length (actual distance)	11,84 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🍏	Time	2 h 45 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest



ENTERING THE MANCHUELA REGION OF CUENCA

After crossing one of the branches of the Alarcón reservoir, this short stage of the Júcar Nature Trail runs almost exclusively along rural roads between fields of crops, approaching the reservoir again, but without returning to its banks. This stage is the gateway to the Júcar Nature Trail in the region of La Mancha Conquense.

WARNING: PART OF THIS STAGE MAY BE FLOODED DEPENDING ON THE LEVEL OF THE ALARCÓN RESERVOIR. IT IS ADVISABLE TO CHECK THE CONDITIONS OF THE ROAD BEFORE SETTING OFF.



Much of the stage runs along the banks of the Alarcón reservoir



Views of Valverde de Júcar, on the other side of the reservoir

The tenth stage of the Nature Trail begins in Valverde de Júcar, on Avenida de Madrid Valencia. Continue down this avenue (be careful at the crossroads), which winds around several bends until you reach, one of the tails of the Alarcón reservoir after passing a school. Specifically, the one formed by the mouth of the rivers Albaladejo and Gritos.

The path continues, when the waters of the reservoir allow it, and after crossing an old bridge, begins a long asphalted straight road of almost 3,5 km that leads directly, between crop fields and the flood zone of the reservoir, to the outskirts of Hontecillas. The crossing of this river marks the passage from the region of La Mancha de Cuenca to La Manchuela Conquense.

When the waters of the reservoir reach a certain level, part of this section may be impassable, requiring a detour around the tail of the reservoir to get back on the road to Hontecillas via rural tracks.

The village of Hontecillas is only briefly skirted, as the road turns ninety degrees just as it reaches the justice roll that is preserved on the outskirts of the village. The asphalt track turns into a dirt track just past a shed, heading south-west. The landscape of dry crops is only interrupted by the occasional tree crop or the accompanying vegetation when crossing a stream.

Ignoring all the crossroads and continuing straight ahead, the track turns southeast after 3 km. After 4 km of walking through the same environment as in the previous section (we can find the crossing of a stream or the pass next to a water reservoir) we reach the CM-2100 road.

VALVERDE DE JÚCAR

The municipality of Valverde de Júcar in Cuenca is located in a border enclave between the regions of Manchuela, Serranía Media and La Mancha Alta. A number of different vestiges of Celtiberian settlements and funerary constructions have also been found in the area. There are also later remains of various Hispano-Roman civil works such as the hill of San Marcos, the possible location of an ancient Roman fort with a watchtower, and the Cano Bridge.

But Valverde de Júcar's golden age dates back to the Middle Ages, with the repopulation and the capture of Alarcón by Christian troops in 1184. The town belonged to the Council of Alarcón until 1325, when the territory was granted to Fernán Martínez de Cevallos as a reward for his military merits, becoming the first Lord of Valverde.

It is worth highlighting the great heritage value of the municipality. An example of this is the Church of Santa María Magdalena, located in the Plaza Mayor. A Gothic-style church dating from the 15th century, in which important Baroque elements can be seen, such as one of its chapels or its altarpiece. The church is composed of three naves supported by barrel vaults, housing the funeral crypt of the Ruiz de Alarcón family, located to the right of the High Altar, which despite its deteriorated state still preserves its characteristic frescoes with grotesque forms and allegories of death. Another remarkable monument is the house-palace built in the 17th century by the Ruiz de Alarcón family as a family residence. Rectangular in plan and two storeys high, it is decorated with corbels on the cornices and under the balconies and has a gate on masonry columns.

The oldest building in the village is the Madre de Dios shrine, in the popular Romanesque style, rebuilt in the 17th century. It has a rectangular floor plan and still has a wooden coffered ceiling and a plaster altar inside, although it is currently used as a carpentry warehouse. The Plaza Mayor, with its polygonal ground plan, and the Plaza de la Verdura, named after the old weekly vegetable market, are not to be missed.

On the outskirts of the town centre, the municipal cemetery stands out, dating from the 18th century, with a neoclassical entrance gate, built in ashlar masonry with a pediment topped by a cross. Inside, the chapel-mausoleum dedicated to the Ladies of Urionagoena stands out, as well as the great variety of sculptures in the tombs and pantheons. Another must-visit is the Cano Bridge, a Hispano-Roman viaduct that joins the two banks of the river Gritos, as well as the shrine of San Cristóbal, from the 1970s, or the monument to the Man of the Sea.

Crossing the road with extreme caution, as there is a stretch between two bends, you reach Buenache de Alarcón along a path that soon becomes one of the streets of the village. This stage ends at the junction of Calle San Miguel, Calle Agua and Calle Isabel I de Castilla, although it is worth walking a few more metres and visiting the unique church of San Pedro Apostol, declare Heritage of Cultural Interest in 2011, or the Town Hall square.

HONTECILLAS

Hontecillas is a municipality in the region of La Manchuela, on the banks of the river Júcar, 51 kilometres from the provincial capital. The town of Hontecillas, formerly known as Fuentecillas, due to the large number of fountains in the municipality, has its origins in prehistoric times, as can be seen from the remains of various prehistoric sites and settlements found in the area. But it was not until the repopulation of the province of Cuenca by Christian troops, and the conquest of Alarcón in 1184 under Alfonso VIII that the site was established. Later, in the 14th century, Hontecillas would become part of the Lordship of Alarcón, the municipality being represented by Don Juan Manuel, nephew of Alfonso X.

The municipality boasts some interesting architecture, including the Parish Church of Nuestra Señora la Virgen del Romeral. This is a church of Romanesque origin that has undergone various modifications, including Renaissance additions and enlargements. Made of masonry, the only surviving remains are the central nave, the apse and the wall of the Romanesque belfry, which was later modified by adding a Renaissance look, so that it now consists of two sections crowned with a triangular top, balls and pinnacles.

You can visit the shrine of La Concepción, a small temple located on Calle de San Pedro, which has recently been restored; the Parque del Lavadero, where you can find the Roman Fountain of Hontecillas, the Fuente del Pilar and the Rollo Jurisdiccional located at the entrance to the town and the Plaza del Ayuntamiento (Town Hall Square).



Hontecillas Justice Roll

STAGE 11 ➤ BUENACHE DE ALARCÓN ➔ ALARCÓN

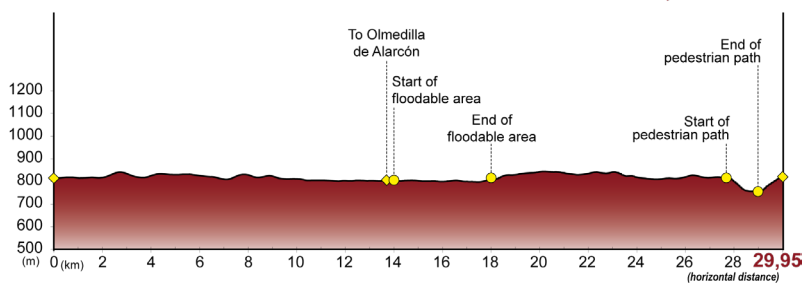
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	270 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	2	🗺	Downward gradient	259 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🖋	Route length (actual distance)	30,14 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	4	🍏	Time	6 h 45 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest

Buenache de Alarcón

Alarcón



SKIRTING THE ALARCÓN RESERVOIR

On returning to the banks of the Alarcón reservoir, the Nature Trail runs along the banks of the reservoir through an essentially agricultural environment dotted with patches of Mediterranean scrub, holm oak and pine forests.



After reaching the river, the path continues along the Júcar gorge for a stretch



Views of the Alarcón reservoir from the Nature Trail

Starting from the centre of Buenache, the route starts off along Calle Isabel I de Castilla, heading west until it reaches the shrine of San Isidro, a simple church in the centre of the town. The route then turns south, reaching the CM-2100 road. You have to walk alongside the road for about 100 m and, although it is not particularly dangerous as it is a stretch of urban road with good verges and a zebra crossing, caution should be exercised.

Leave the road along a dirt track on the right, heading south. The trail then enters an agricultural landscape of cereal crops, with some farms planted with fruit trees, for the next 2 km. When you reach a crossroads, continue along the path to the right towards the south, which, after passing by a small pine forest, returns to the cultivated landscape, although this time the trees, together with some vineyards, outnumber the cereals in terms of surface area.

The route approaches the reservoir, without reaching the shore, although the sheet of water will almost always be visible when looking to the right of the path. You leave behind you various junctions with other minor tracks that should be avoided, until, after a little over 3 km, the path changes direction, heading north-east. In the distance, on one of the hills in the background, you can make out the tower of an optical telegraph that belonged to the same line as the one at Valverde de Júcar (Stage 9-10).

The trail reaches the CM-2100 road and runs parallel to it, on the left-hand side, for some 200 m, so remember the rules of the road! It then leaves the asphalt when it reaches the Cañada fountain. The route now heads in a southerly direction, following the banks of the reservoir. A sign warns us that this area may be flooded, so it is important to check the water levels before you start walking through it.

OLMEDILLA DE ALARCÓN

The La Mancha municipality of Olmedilla de Alarcón is located in the province of Cuenca, more specifically in the La Manchuela county, on the banks of the river Júcar, a few short kilometres from the Alarcón reservoir. It takes its name from the characteristic vegetation of the area, the elm (*ulmus*), and its nickname was used to indicate that the village belonged to the jurisdiction of Alarcón. The remains of an Iberian necropolis have been found a few kilometres from the town centre. Artefacts like pottery and fibulae indicate the pre-Romanesque origin of the locality. However, it was not until the repopulation of the province of Cuenca, under the troops of King Alfonso VIII, and the conquest of Alarcón in 1184 that this town was consolidated, becoming part of the lordship of Alarcón.

The parish church of San Pedro and San Pablo, built at the beginning of the 18th century, stands out. It consists of a single nave and its interior features several frescoes with allegories of the Battle of Lepanto (1571). The old Romanesque baptismal font is on display in the Archaeological Museum of Cuenca. On the outside, there is a semicircular portico and a two-part belfry made of ashlar masonry. In the town you can also visit the municipal park, which has an imposing entrance with several arches and the coat of arms of the town printed on the cobblestones, the fountain located in the street of the same name, the Plaza Mayor, where the Town Hall stands (a modern building with two floors and a balcony supported by stone columns) or the stone bridge over the Arroyo de la Hoz.

As a curiosity, this small Cuenca village is home to 3 photovoltaic parks, which together cover a surface area of 320 hectares and generate a power of more than 65 mw, equivalent to the amount of energy consumed by 35,000 people in a year. The first solar farm in the town was installed in 2015 and at that time was the largest in Europe but is today dwarfed by the other two parks in the municipality.



Olmedilla de Alarcón council



The Nature Trail through scrub and tree crops

The path runs alongside the reservoir, with the water on our right-hand side and vegetation with pines and Mediterranean scrubland on our left. After approximately 3.5 km you reach a turn-off leading to Olmedilla de Alarcón, but the path continues alongside the reservoir. With the same type of landscape as in the previous section, after almost 4 km you reach, a very particular structure, a small stone semicircle with a column in the centre that was built in 2010 in memory of Gascas, a town that was flooded by the waters of the Alarcón reservoir.

The route leads away from the reservoir and returns to an almost exclusively agricultural landscape of surrounding farms. Leaving other different paths behind us, it finally leads to another dirt track. Olmedilla can be reached again on the left, although the path continues on the right. After passing by a solar farm, the path climbs slightly and enters a wooded area. This landscape will last no longer than a kilometre and a half or so before we see the Alarcón reservoir dam among the trees.

Returning to the agricultural landscape, you walk through farmland, past some rural accommodation buildings and reach a paved walkway through pine trees, leading to the N-III road. Cross the road carefully as despite good visibility, vehicles may speed. On the other side of the N-III, take a dirt track that leads to the road that runs towards Alarcón. Before reaching the road, the path turns off to the right onto a footpath that descends, protected by wooden fences, down a ravine to reach the canyon of the river Júcar. The descent leaves beautiful panoramic views of the monumental Villa de Alarcón and the Torre de los Alarconcillos and when you reach the river you can take advantage of the wooden benches installed to take a break and enjoy the view.

GASCAS MONUMENT

On the banks of the Alarcón reservoir, in the municipality of Olmedilla, there is a monument commemorating the disappeared village of Gasca de Alarcón. The monolith, made of stone, serves as a tribute to the memory of an old town in Cuenca, Gasca de Alarcón, which was buried under the waters of the river Júcar after the construction of the Alarcón reservoir dam.

The village of Gasca was founded during the period of the reconquest and repopulation of the province of Cuenca, under the reign of Alfonso VIII. A territory that was ceded to soldiers from Gascony, a county in the south-west of France in the hands of Alfonso VIII's wife, Eleanor of Plantagenet (daughter of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine). These settlers named Gasca in memory of their origin. They settled on the peninsula from the end of the 12th century, mainly dedicated to agriculture and irrigated farming, thanks to the waters of both the river Júcar and the Arroyo de Gasca, which is also currently submerged under the reservoir.

The construction of the reservoir meant that the village had to be abandoned before 1951, and today, in the summer months, when the water level of the reservoir falls, part of the walls and ruins become visible.

Every year, since the inauguration of the monument in 2010, a tribute is held in the municipality of Olmedilla de Alarcón in Cuenca, with the subsequent mass on the banks of the reservoir.



Gasca Monument

The path continues along the river's edge and reaches the Henchidero dam and the old installations of its hydroelectric power station. The dirt track becomes an asphalt path (and is once again has shared with traffic) as the route begins the ascent towards Alarcón. This path follows the meander on which Alarcón is situated. Passing the Tébar bridge (originally a medieval infrastructure but modified in later centuries), which offers access to the tower of Alarconcillos or the tower of Cañavete, we enter a pine forest and pass under one of the old entrance gates to the walled complex, the so-called Puerta del río or River Gate.

The stage ends as we complete the climb, next to a car park and the street leading down to the cemetery, but we recommend travellers take a stroll through the streets of Alarcón and discover the historical heritage of this town that still retains a medieval air.



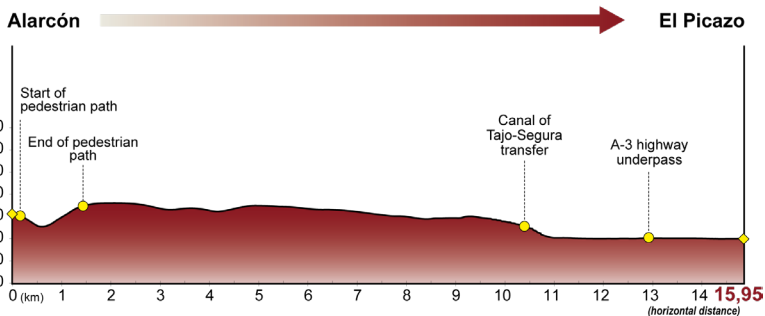
Descent towards the Júcar gorge near Alarcón

STAGE 12 ✂ ALARCÓN → EL PICAZO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	!	Upward gradient	159 m	▲
Guidance along the route	2	🗺️	Downward gradient	274 m	▼
Route difficulty	1	🖋️	Route length (actual distance)	16,37 km	➡️
Amount of effort needed	3	🍏	Time	4 h 40 min	🕒

◆ town ● point of interest



THE MOORS OF LA MANCHUELA CONQUENSE

This section runs up the gorge of the Júcar in Alarcón through moorlands covered with Mediterranean forest alternating with tree and cereal crops. The route returns to the area around the Júcar after passing over the Tajo-Segura water transfer canal, following the river until almost the end of the route at El Picazo.



Panoramic view of Alarcón and the gorge of the river from kilometre point 1



Sunrise in Alarcón from the Torre de Armas viewpoint

This new stage of the Júcar Nature Trail begins in Alarcón, on the cemetery road, although it soon changes to a pedestrian path descending through pine trees to Chinchilla Gate, which served as the access from the south to the walled enclosure of Alarcón. After passing through the gate, we leave the pine trees behind and continue descending through a rockier area almost devoid of vegetation with the remains of the Alarcón wall on the left-hand side.

The pedestrian path leads to the El Picazo bridge, a masonry bridge of medieval origin that crosses the Júcar gorge. Once on the other side of the river, a continuous ascent begins where the traveller can look back and enjoy the beautiful panoramic views of the village of Alarcón and the gorge of the river. After almost a kilometre of ascent in the company of kermes oaks, holm oaks, junipers and junipers, you leave the river canyon for good.

The footpath leads to a wide dirt track in a westerly direction. From this point on, the route heads away from the river for almost 9 km. After 750 m along this track, you reach a crossroads where you take another track on the left in a south-easterly direction. From the front, you could continue along the PR-CU 71 path, returning to Alarcón, to the north of the town (in fact, this is a circular path that shares the same route as part of this stage of the Nature Trail).

We'll stay on this new track for the rest of the stage, so the orientation is not complicated, needing only to avoid all the junctions. The landscape for the next few kilometres will consist of slightly undulating terrain alternating between a mixed Mediterranean forest dominated by pine and holm oaks, and areas of crops, either cereals or trees such as almond trees.

ALARCÓN

The imposing town, with a medieval aroma, has been declared an Asset of Cultural Interest in the category of Historic-Artistic Site since 1981. It is located at the top of a steep gorge carved by the waters of the river Júcar. The privileged location of Alarcón is ideal for the proliferation of human settlements due to its easy natural defence, close access to water and the fertility of the land in the adjacent plains. Ceramic remains of Ibero origin and a Roman funerary stele, found at the nearby El Capataz hill, are evidence of the occupation of this area thousands of years ago.

During the Muslim domination, the first mentions appear in written sources, as well as the first archaeological evidence from the Almohad period in the Bodegón gate. It was part of the Cora of Santaver within the Caliphate of Córdoba under the rule of the Berber family of Banu-Zannum. The reconquest of Alarcón by Christian troops took place during the reign of Alfonso VIII. Years later, King Alfonso X the Wise granted the town the Charter of Alarcón.

In the 14th century, Don Juan Manuel received this lordship from Fernando IV of Castile, integrating it into the lordship of Villena. Also, the author of works such as *El Conde Lucanor* or *El libro de caza*, some of his phrases have been used to decorate corners of the town. Another illustrious nobleman linked to Alarcón is Juan Pacheco who, in 1445, received the title of Marquis of Villena from the hands of Juan II of Castile, becoming Lord of the Villa de Alarcón and its lands.

The War of the Castilian Succession (second half of the 16th century) took its toll on the territory of Alarcón. The sides of Isabella the Catholic and Juana la Beltraneja, supported by the Pacheco family, clashed. The latter's defeat in the conflict led to the break-up of part of the territory of Alarcón, as those towns that supported the Catholic Queen became dependent on the crown.

Its heritage includes buildings of a defensive nature:

The castle, now a Parador Nacional hotel, is a standout attraction. Possibly of Islamic origin, the current constructions are of purely Christian forms and uses. After the initial phases of construction in the 13th century, it was renovated in the 15th and 16th centuries. It features an irregular ground plan with a double defensive enclosure with a keep that stands out from the rest of the structures.

The town's defensive complex is completed by the walls and fortifications that surround the city. There are several gates in the walls, known as the Chinchilla,

Bodegón, Calabozo, Traición and Río gates. To defend the access roads and the two bridges -del Picazo and Tébar-, fortifications called Torres del Cañavate and Torres del Campo were built along the road or approach. In the 14th century, the castle of Alarconcillo was erected, a knightly tower flanked by four other attached towers and its own enclosure. Its main function was to prevent the enemy from being able to place siege weapons in that area.

In terms of religious heritage, it is worth mentioning:

The shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Orden, a Romanesque shrine built, the church of Santo Domingo de Silos dates back to the 13th century. The church of the Holy Trinity, begun in the 13th century. The parish church of Santa María del Campo, the most important religious building, was designed by Pedro de Albiz (or Alviz) around 1530. The church of San Juan Bautista, built in the 16th century.

Other notable civil buildings:

The Town Hall or Council Palace and the palace of the Castañeda family.

After passing by some farm buildings, the track starts to descend again in search of the river Júcar. After a little more than 1 km, we reach another of the milestones of this stage when we cross over the Tajo-Segura water transfer canal. Despite its name, this immense engineering work also uses part of the course of the river Júcar, from the north of the Alarcón reservoir to this point, where the water is re-channelled.



On the way back to the Júcar valley, the Nature Trail runs through a pine forest, parallel to the river



The Nature Trail crosses over the Tajo-Segura water transfer canal

Once we cross the canal, the slope becomes steeper for a few hundred metres, entering the Júcar valley again, although in this section it is no longer so steep. Almost at the river plain, you reach a hydroelectric power station, and the dirt road becomes asphalted.

The route takes a south-westerly direction, leaving the Júcar on the left and passing through a pine forest through which, due to the proximity of the river, some trees typical of gallery forests, such as poplars and ash trees, can be seen. After passing by the Castillejos weir, the asphalted track passes under the A3 viaduct and the tree-covered vegetation gives way to a largely cultivated area. This will be the landscape until we reach El Picazo.

The village is entered from the north, and the first thing to catch the eye is the chimney of an old oil press. Just before reaching the chimney, take the road a left. The route goes through the streets of El Picazo, passing through the Plaza Mayor (where the palace-house of Ruiz de Monsalve is located) and next to the church (a temple whose construction dates back to the 16th century). The route leaves the old quarter of El Picazo along the Avenida de Juan Carlos I, ending this stage next to the N-310 road.

TAJO-SEGURA TRANSFER

The Tagus-Segura Transfer initially proposed in the National Water Works Plan of 1933, although it was not developed until decades later in the “General Preliminary Plan for Shared Exploitation of Water Resource in Central and South-East Spain. Tajo-Segura Complex” of 1967. This is a complex engineering project designed to connect the Tagus basin with the Segura basin, bringing water from the headwaters of the former to the more fertile lands of the southeast of the peninsula, but with little availability of water for irrigation.

The water transfer consists of a number of reservoirs, canals, aqueducts and tunnels that connect the two basins, crossing the Júcar and Guadiana river basin districts. The route begins at the Bolarque reservoir on the river Tajo (in the province of Guadalajara) and flows into the Talave reservoir on the river Mundo (a tributary of the Segura), located in the town of Liétor in the province of Albacete.

The water regulation of the Tagus and Guadiela rivers is carried out in the Entrepeñas (835 m³) and Buendía (1,639 hm³) reservoirs, which, in addition to regulating the river's headwaters, also serve to regulate floods and to allow the hydroelectric exploitation of the basin.

The water transfer route is divided into four sections:

In the **first**, water is raised from the Bolarque reservoir to the La Bujeda reservoir, in the Altomira mountain range. To bridge the 245 m difference in level between the two, a double penstock with a diameter of three metres was built, running for a distance of 1070 m in length from the Bolarque II reversible power station.

The **second** section carries water from the La Bujeda reservoir to the Alarcón reservoir in the Júcar basin. This section is 93 km long and is divided into four canals, the Villarejo, Belmontejo and Juncosillo canals. To overcome different geographical features, aqueducts have been built, such as the Riansares aqueduct, which is almost 3 km long and 48 m high, and a series of tunnels: Altomira, Carrascosa and Villarejo. In the Alarcón reservoir, the water from the aqueduct joins the water from the Júcar, acting as a regulator of water transfers in the middle section.

The **third** links this Alarcón reservoir with the Talave tunnel. From the exit of the El Picazo tunnel, where we are, the water flows through the El Picazo canals, which include the Santa Quiteria and La Fuensanta aqueducts, until it reaches Los Anguijes.

The **last section** consists of the Talave tunnel, almost 32 m long and 4 m in diameter, which was bored into the ground at a depth of between 150 and 320 m. The tunnel flows into the reservoir of the same name on the Mundo river. The construction, pioneering in its time in terms of length and complexity in Europe, overcame the numerous adversities caused by the depth of the tunnel and the seepage of groundwater from the aquifer.

At the La Bujeda reservoir there is a diversion to the Tablas de Daimiel National Park in the Guadiana basin. Its use is activated as an emergency measure in times of extreme drought in the wetland.

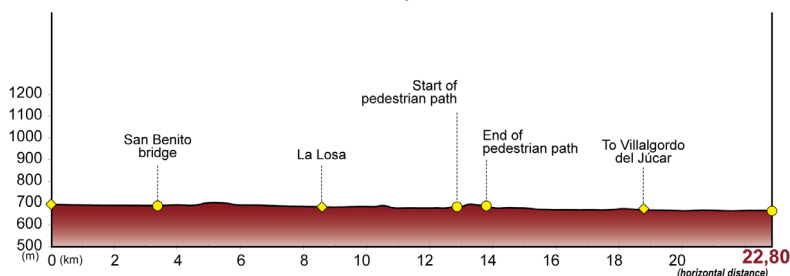
STAGE 12 BRANCH EL PICAZO → PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	64 m 
Guidance along the route	2 	Downward gradient	95 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	22,80 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	6 h 

◆ town ● point of interest

El Picazo  **Cuenca-Albacete provincial border**



TOWARDS THE PROVINCIAL BOUNDARY BETWEEN CULTIVATED FIELDS

With this branch, the Júcar Nature Trail allows you to continue to get to know the banks of the river in a mainly agricultural environment, reaching the provincial boundary between Cuenca and Albacete.



For half a kilometer, the route is shared with the Cañada Real de Andalucía



The Júcar River next to the mill of the Council of El Picazo

This branch starts on the outskirts of El Picazo, just before crossing the N-310 road. Although this section of the road is considered a crossing with the corresponding speed limit, great caution should be taken when crossing as, on the left-hand side, the curve of the road reduces visibility. Once you have crossed the road, the path enters a wide dirt track that runs through the fields of cereal crops and fruit trees and vineyards of El Picazo. A good example of this agricultural vocation is the presence, right at km. 1, of an irrigation channel that runs towards the river Júcar.

EL PICAZO

The municipality of El Picazo, in the province of Cuenca, sits in a deep valley on the banks of the river Júcar. Its origin is uncertain, as it is not known exactly when the first inhabitants settled here. It was not until the 17th century that the council began to gain a certain relevance, with some documentary mentions appearing. The Boletín de la Provincia de Cuenca mentions this village in 1839 as Picazo de Alarcón, although it was finally separated in the 19th century from the village of Alarcón, of which it had been a hamlet until then.

Despite this, it is believed that the area may have been inhabited since the Ancient times by Celtiberian peoples who, attracted by the fertility of the land, settled on the top of the hill of Santa Quiteria. It was normal at that time to locate settlements in places that were easy to defend, and in this case, the hilltop location gave these first settlers a privileged position in terms of the defence of this settlement, of which numerous remains of buildings have been found.

Later, with the arrival of the Romans and the disappearance of the need for defence, the old site was abandoned and replaced by its current location, much more convenient, on the banks of the river.

The church of La Inmaculada Concepción stands out in the municipality. Built on the site of an earlier church at the beginning of the 16th century, it has a single nave. The town also conserves a number of country homes scattered throughout the village, such as that of Mateo Jerónimo de Villanueva, which today houses the Social Centre, that of Diego Villanueva and that of the Ruiz de Monsalve family.

Today, agriculture, as always, is still the main activity in the area, especially cereals, vines and olives, although rural tourism is becoming more and more important. This is complemented by some livestock farming, mainly sheep.

This track leads to the path along which the Cañada Real de Andalucía runs, which is taken to the left, in the direction of the San Benito bridge. After half a kilometre you reach this bridge (whose origin dates back to the 15th century), which takes its name from the shrine on the other side of the river, on a promontory offering magnificent views of the Júcar valley.

Once on the left bank of the Júcar, the Nature Trail turns south, again passing through crops, but this time with the company of Mediterranean scrub on the slopes to the left of the path and the odd country house. This landscape remains the same for



The Júcar valley and the San Benito bridge from the San Benito de la Contienda hermitage



The footpath offers beautiful views of the Batanejo gorge

the next few kilometres, with the track running close to the river at times. One point at which the Trail approaches the Júcar is next to La Losa, a village belonging to the municipality of Casas de Benítez whose origin is linked to one of the traditional uses of the waters of the Júcar, the flour mills. Today a weir dams the waters of the river and serves a small hydroelectric power station.

Continuing through the same landscape described above, after crossing the Cañada stream, you reach the ruins of Los Nuevos, an uninhabited village belonging to the municipality of Casasimarro. The Los Nuevos Agro-environmental Centre has been created around this village, with rest areas, environmental itineraries that allow visitors to look out over the river, and access has even been provided to see the ruins of another of the flour mills that were built on the banks of the Júcar, in this case at Los Nuevecillos. As is the case at La Losa, near this mill there is another weir for a small power station.

The route continues along the river, passes under the viaduct of the CM-3124 road and, after less than a kilometre, reaches Las Ovejas bridge. This simple structure, which crosses over the riverbed, will take us to the right bank of the river, on which we'll stay until the end of the route.

On the other side of the river, after almost a kilometre, the track becomes a footpath for another kilometre. Cycling can be dangerous here because the path is very narrow and the road surface is very uneven. Along the footpath, amidst the Mediterranean scrubland, the Nature Trail rises in altitude, providing beautiful views of the Batanejo gorge and river Júcar. Looking at the river you can also see the weir that diverts its water through a channel to the hydroelectric power station at El Batanejo.

Half a kilometre after leaving the footpath and returning to the wide track, we reach the Casas del Batanejo, a hamlet of Villalgordo del Júcar that has been converted into a centre for farming and rural tourism, recovering buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries.

After leaving El Batanejo behind, the route continues through fields of crops (vineyards on one side, cereals on the other), crossing some patches of pine forest (*Pinus pinea*) and passing by farm buildings and some rural accommodation. This leads to the crossroads with the CM-3114 road that leads to Villalgordo del Júcar, a town notable for being the second village in Spain to have electricity.

Just after crossing the road, the ruins of the Gosálvez palace stand out on the left-hand side of the road. This Versailles-style palace complex was commissioned in the early 20th century by the Gosálvez family, who were responsible for the industrial development of Villalgordo del Júcar from the mid-19th century. Despite being declared an Asset of Cultural Interest in 1993, it is still in ruins, although its restoration is planned.

The remainder of the route is again completed by passing through crops, farm buildings and some patches of pine forest, although in the last two kilometres the vineyards and cereal crops are replaced by large expanses of irrigated land, especially alfalfa.

The branch line ends after almost 23 km in a small pine forest, on the provincial border between Cuenca and Albacete. Although the route ends at this point, the town of Fuensanta, in the province of Albacete, is just over 3 km away.



The last few kilometers of the branch line run between crops and the occasional small pine forest

PALACE OF THE GOSÁLVEZ FAMILY

On the outskirts of Villalgordo del Júcar, next to the river, are the ruins of a very unique building. It is a French Versailles-style building and, although it belongs to the municipality of Casas de Benítez, it is in fact closer to Villalgordo del Júcar, and closely entwined with its history.

This French Marienist-style palace was commissioned by Enrique Gosálvez, grandson of the Alcoy businessman Santiago Gosálvez y Gosálvez. A textile entrepreneur, he built an industrial complex around what used to be a flour mill that boosted economic activity. Santiago's descendants continued their industrial activity and Enrique, in addition to building the palace, extended the complex by adding a canning factory and a hydroelectric power station. The power station, which remarkably is still in operation today, provided Villalgordo del Júcar with electricity, making it one of the first villages in Spain to have electricity.

The palace is the work of the architect Luis Sainz de los Terreros (who was also responsible for the Madrid residence of the Gosálvez family) and was commissioned in 1902. It consists of a two-storey central body and two one-storey wings on each side, which, forming a U-shaped plan, embrace a central courtyard. In the centre of the courtyard, you can see the base where the "Tsarina" fountain, given to the Gosálvez family by Alejandra, the wife of Tsar Nicholas II, once stood.

The palace was surrounded by gardens with exotic species brought from America. The palm tree walkway leading to the main entrance and the banana trees, more than 150 years old, which decorated the path to a small castle that served as an entrance to the factories in the area, are still preserved today.

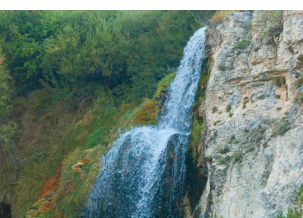
During the civil war, the palace was used as a maternity home and shelter for orphans and displaced children, and was later used again by Modesto, Enrique's son, who lived there until his death in 1964.

The palace fell into a state of neglect, and in recent years there have been several attempts to refurbish and protect the building, which was finally declared a Site of Cultural Interest in the Monuments category in 1994. In 2006, the palace was bought to undergo a major restoration process and to be converted into a country hotel, but to date, work has not yet begun.

• ALARCÓN COUNCIL	969 33 03 54
www.ayuntamientoalarcon.es	
• ALBALADEJO DEL CUENDE COUNCIL	969 20 13 01
www.albaladejodelcuende.com	
• BUENACHE DE ALARCÓN COUNCIL	969 20 90 01
www.buenachedealarcon.com	
• CASAS DE BENÍTEZ COUNCIL	969 38 20 01
www.casasdebenitez.es	
• CASASIMARRO COUNCIL	967 48 70 06
www.casasimarro.es	
• CASTILLO DE GARCIMUÑOZ COUNCIL	969 29 19 12
www.castillodegarcimuñoz.com	
• CUENCA COUNCIL	969 17 61 00/600 11 11 00
www.cuenca.es	
• EL PICAZO COUNCIL	969 38 00 15
www.elpicazo.org	
• HONTECILLAS COUNCIL	969 20 91 51
hontecillas.sedelectronica.es	
• HUÉLAMO COUNCIL	969 28 91 01
www.huelamo.dipucuenca.es	
• LA PARRA DE LAS VEGAS COUNCIL	969 25 12 28
www.ayuntamientolaparradelasvegas.com	
• OLMEDILLA DE ALARCÓN COUNCIL	969 33 92 03
www.olmedilladealarcon.com	
• SISANTE COUNCIL	969 38 70 01
www.sisante.es	
• TRAGACETE COUNCIL	969 28 90 02
www.tragacete.es	
• TÉBAR COUNCIL	969 38 10 76
www.tebar.es	
• VALDETÓRTOLA COUNCIL	969 26 50 02
valdetortola.sedelectronica.es	

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **VALVERDE DE JÚCAR COUNCIL** 969 20 10 01
www.valverdedejucar.net
- **VILLALBA DE LA SIERRA COUNCIL** 969 28 10 01
www.villalbadelasierra.org
- **VILLALGORDO DE JÚCAR COUNCIL** 967 45 50 01
www.villalgordodeljucar.es
- **VILLANUEVA DE LA JARA COUNCIL** 967 49 80 01
www.villanuevadelaajara.es
- **VILLAR DE OLALLA COUNCIL** 969 26 70 01/969 26 15 09
www.villardeolalla.com
- **VILLAVERDE Y PASACONSOL COUNCIL** 969 20 26 010
www.villaverdeypasaconsol.net
- **SERRANÍA DE CUENCA NATURAL PARK**
<https://www.turismocastillalamancha.es/es/naturaleza/parques-naturales/parque-natural-serran-a-de-cuenca.html>
- **CUENCA MUNICIPAL TOURIST OFFICE**
www.visitacuenca.es



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.