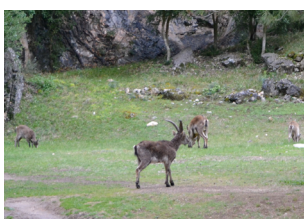


Matarraña - Algars Nature Trail





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Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain



Matarraña - Algars Nature Trail



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA
Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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With a total length of 197 km, the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail passes through an area which is of great historic and natural interest. With a main itinerary divided into 13 stages, some of which if taken together make up a circular route, plus some detours, this trail goes through the counties of Matarraña/Matarranya (Teruel), Bajo Aragón-Caspe/Baix Aragó-Casp (Zaragoza) and Terra Alta (Tarragona). Mountains, river terraces and towns full of history are just some of the attractions of this route that is recommended for those who love nature and history.

The route takes its name from the fact that most of the journey follows the Matarraña River (Matarranya in Catalan), from the El Parrizal gorge in the Tortosa-Beceite mountain passes, until it meets the Ebro River at the Riba Roja reservoir, and the Algars River (or Algás in Spanish), the natural border between Aragón and Catalonia, from its confluence with the Matarraña near Nonaspe, upstream back to the Tortosa-Beceite mountain passes. Due to the calcareous nature of these riverbeds, their passage creates remarkable natural sculptures, both through rock erosion and the precipitation of dissolved materials, as well as numerous pools that local residents use for swimming.

In terms of historic-artistic heritage, the importance of the Iberians in the counties that this nature trail passes through is particularly important. In stages 4.5 and 6, different Iberian settlements can be visited. These make up part of the project “Lower Aragón Iberians”, which is of great relevance and quality; they include the Iberian settlements of Torre Cremada, Tozal Montañés and San Cristóbal and the villages of San Antonio and Tozal Redó in Calaceite. Finally, in Mazaleón, the settlements of the Escudines Altes and Baixes can be visited. During stage 10 other important settlements will also be passed through, with the Tozal Moro de Pinyeres, the Roquizal del Rullo, which is considered as the most important Iron Age settlement in Aragón and Punta de la Gessera. Another of the most unique features of heritage along this trail is the Roman mausoleum of Lucius Amilius Lupus. Located in the municipality of Fabara, this is perhaps the most well preserved monument of its type on the Iberian Peninsula.

On the alternative route from stage 4, which passes through the Iberian settlements, the itinerary connects with the Val de Zafán Nature Trail, which passes through Teruel along the old railway platform that linked Tortosa (Tarragona) with Puebla de Híjar (Teruel) and that stopped working in 1973. From stage 12, specifically from the former train station of Arnes - Lledó, the aforementioned Nature Trail can be accessed, also from there, another section of this dismantled railway that had been conditioned as Terra Alta Natural Trail can be reached. The latter Nature Trail can be accessed also from the branch in stage 12 that leads to Horta de Sant Joan station.

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).

MATARRAÑA - ALGARS NATURE TRAIL

STAGE 10 NONASPE → CASERES

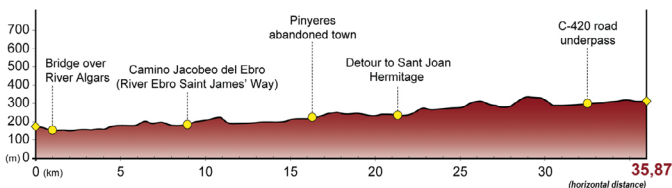
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	371 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	234 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	35,90 km 
Amount of effort needed	4 	Time	7 h 55 min 

◆ town ● point of interest

Nonaspe

Casares



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

MATARRAÑA - ALGARS NATURE TRAIL

STAGE 1  EL PARRIZAL → BECEITE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2		Upward gradient	5 m	
Guidance along the route	1		Downward gradient	115 m	
Route difficulty	2		Route lenght (actual distance)*	7,02 km	
Amount of effort needed	2		Time**	1 h 30 min	

 town

 point of interest

Parrizal

Beceite

Cave paintings

Detour to Masia Sant Miquel

Detour to Masia Sant Miquel

7,01

(horizontal distance)

UPPER COURSE OF MATARRAÑA RIVER

This stage departs from the vicinity of the El Parrizal rest area, within the limits of the Beceite mountain passes, an S.C.I. (Site of Community Importance) and S.P.A. (Special Protection Area) declared area. This first stage of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail follows the upper course of the Matarraña river, running between steep banks, to the town of Beceite. This route holds high landscape and ecological value.



STAGE 1 EL PARRIZAL → BECEITE  17

10  MATARRAÑA - ALGARS NATURE TRAIL

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.

STAGE 8 ✨ FABARA • NONASPE

FABARA

Municipality located in the county of Bajo Aragón-Caspe, on the right bank of the river Matarraña. Despite its name having Berber origins (from the Hawwāra tribe), there is evidence of important Epipalaeolithic settlements, such as Roquizal del Rullo (one of the most important Iron Age settlements in Aragón). In addition, in the area one of the best examples of the Roman Empire's funeral architecture has been conserved; the Mausoleum of Fabara (see previous stage).

The current settlement dates back to the arrival of the Moors, passing into the hands of the Order of Calatrava after the Christian reconquest until 1428.

Out of the historic-artistic heritage of the urban centre, highlights include the Gothic, fortified church of San Juan Bautista (15th century), built on top of a pre-existing Roman church, and the palace of the Princess of Belmonte, which currently houses the town hall of Fabara and the Virgilio Albiac painting museum, a painter from the town. The town's most characteristic traditions include the Jota de Fabara and the Polinario dances.

Fabara is left, circling it on its north-eastern side following the A-241, without entering the town. Although the first hundred metres are still on streets of the town, care must be paid as some 200 m must be walked on the roadside, before heading to the left, following the signs for the nature trail.

After passing the ecological wastewater treatment plant, and once again on the rural trails, the landscape turns back to olive groves, willows and fruit crops, and Mediterranean scrubland on the high areas. Without further ado, the route continues until it meets the river, which becomes wider in this section, although it is not



The fortified church of St John the Baptist in Fabara

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

Main descriptive text of the Nature Trail

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

I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

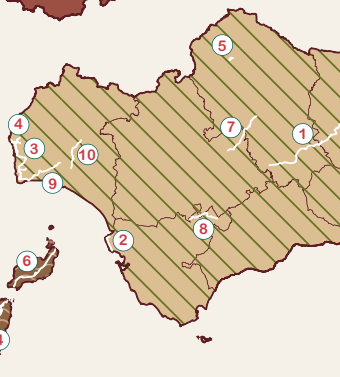
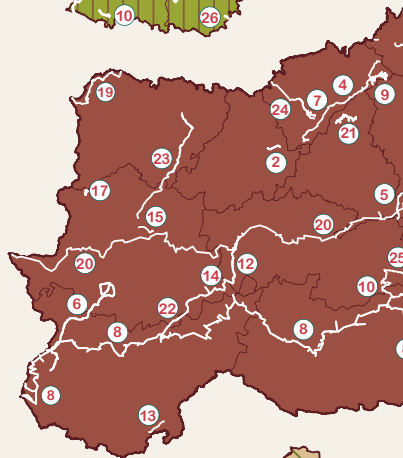
- Cacabelos - Quilós (1)
- Carballada de Avia (2)
- Dos Arrieiros (3)
- Ebro (4)
- Esla (5)
- Laciana. Villablino to Villaseca section (6)
- Mirada Circular: Ancares Leoneses from Guimara to Balboa (7)
- Muñigo - Covadonga (8)
- Pas (9)
- Sayagués Agricultural Landscape (10)
- La Ribeira Sacra (11)
- River Barbantiño (12)
- River Nalón (Fuso to Tuñón) (13)
- Románico palentino (14)
- Ruta de la Conquista (15)

- Cantabrian Sea Route (16)
- The ecological routes of the Catoira River (17)
- San Rosendo (18)
- Santander - Mediterráneo (19)
- Senda del Duero (20)
- Senda del Oso (21)
- Senda del Pastoreo (22)
- Sendas en Abalo (23)
- Sierra de la Demanda Greenway (24)
- Tren Secundario de Castilla (25)
- Eresma Valley Greenway (26)
- Toranzo Valley (27)
- Vía de la Plata (28)
- Via Nova (29)



VI. CENTRAL PENINSULAR SECTOR

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

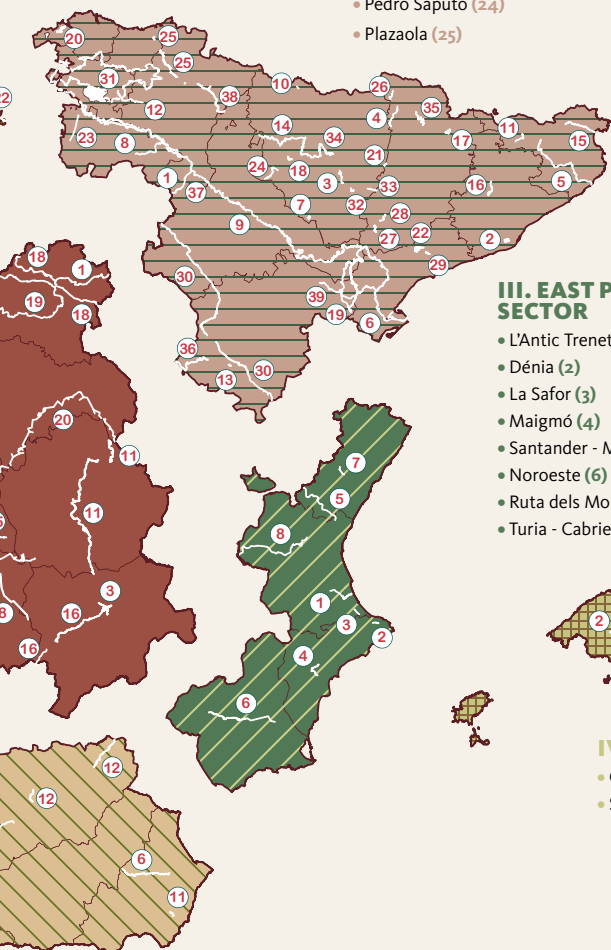


VII. CANARY SECTOR

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



IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

- Camí de Cavalls (1)
- Son Juny (2)

V. SOUTHERN PENINSULAR SECTOR

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

MATARRAÑA - ALGARS NATURE TRAIL



MATARRAÑA - ALGARS NATURE TRAIL

PÁG.

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STAGE 6 • MAZALEÓN → MAELLA	41
STAGE 7 • MAELLA → FABARA	45
STAGE 8 • FABARA → NONASPE	51
STAGE 9 • NONASPE → FAYÓN	55
STAGE 10 • NONASPE → CASERES	61
STAGE 11 • CASERES → ARENS DE LLEDÓ.....	69
STAGE 12 • ARENS DE LLEDÓ → ARNES.....	75
STAGE 13 • ARNES → BECEITE.....	83



Ports of Tortosa-Beceite from the climb to the Masía de Sant Miquel

STAGE 1 EL PARRIZAL → BECEITE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	5 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	115 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route lenght (actual distance)*	7,02 km 
Amount of effort needed	2 	Time**	1 h 30 min 

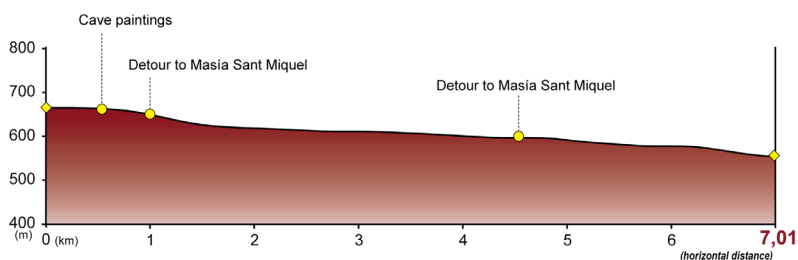
 town  point of interest

* Stage length excluding branches and alternative routes

** Stage duration excluding branches and alternative routes

Parrizal

Beceite



UPPER COURSE OF MATARRAÑA RIVER

This stage departs from the vicinity of the El Parrizal rest area, within the limits of the Beceite mountain passes, an S.C.I. (Site of Community Importance) and S.P.A. (Special Protection Area) declared area. This first stage of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail follows the upper course of the Matarraña river, running between steep banks, to the town of Beceite. This route holds high landscape and ecological value.



This stage begins in the mine terrace, where traces from the coal-extracting period are still visible. This location is one kilometre away from the El Parrizal rest area (the closest point accessible by car, using the parking number 3 of El Parrizal).

From this point on, you can go to the El Parrizal straits and trace back the course of the Matarraña river all the way to the Beceite mountain passes. Despite the existing safety ropes and walkways, this trail can only be covered on favourable weather conditions, as walking on the river course is sometimes necessary.

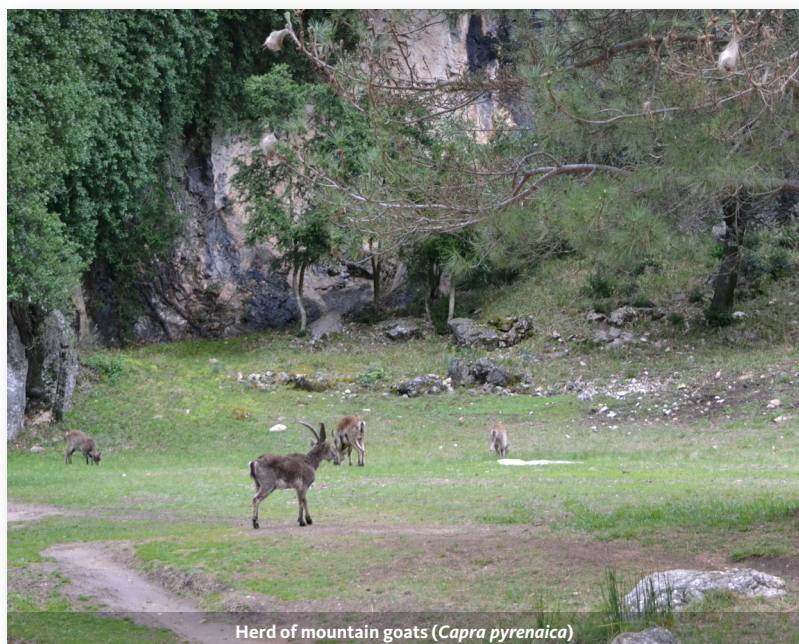
Leaving the mine terrace behind, the trail goes along the course of the Matarraña river past elements of natural and historical interest such as the Cueva de la Dona, the springs of the Fenellosa or, across the river and after through a rock-excavated tunnel, the ledge housing the Fenellosa cave paintings (the protecting fence can be accessed with low water levels). If lucky, the traveller might get to see herds of Spanish ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*) grazing in a nearby meadow.

Through another tunnel, the trail gets to the El Parrizal rest area. You can then choose between taking the branch that goes up to the Masía de Sant Miquel or continuing along the river following the paved track to Beceite (shared with vehicles, so caution is required).

If you choose the latter option, the trail continues among the steep banks of the river canyon, the Matarraña river always on your left. Do not lose sight of the river for the peculiar rock formations sculpted by it. Yet, while the pools of its



Panoramic view of Beceite from the end of Stage 1



Herd of mountain goats (*Capra pyrenaica*)

backwaters might be tempting, the river is a drinking water source and swimming is explicitly forbidden.

Four kilometres into this paved track you will reach the turn-off where the Sant Miquel alternative route rejoins the main trail. One kilometre later, the aqueduct





Ruins of the Masía de Sant Miquel

of Beceite main irrigation canal announces your arrival to town. Wander around its picturesque streets, past the hermitage of Santa Ana and across a couple of bridges that will bring you to the left side of the Matarraña river. Only then does the trail reach its endpoint, not too far off from the tourist information office.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE THROUGH THE MASÍA DE SANT MIQUEL

This alternative route departs from El Parrizal rest area and is roughly 4 km in length. You will get to visit the Masía de Sant Miquel, a set of buildings used as a hermitage and housing facility back in the day, and subsequently destroyed during the Carlist Wars.

Climbing up through the dense pine forest can be hard, as the slope is steep until you are halfway through. However, as you go up the view over the Matarraña canyon makes the effort pay off.

Scattered among the pines you will see olive trees on the terraced mountainsides preannouncing the nearby Masía. This is the highest point of this alternative route and of this whole stretch of the nature trail. It is well worth pausing at this spot to contemplate not only the panoramic views of the recently covered valley, but also those of a large part of the mountain range of Puertos de Tortosa-Beceite. The trail then starts to go down (again among pines) towards the gully of the Racó de Guera. You will have to wade across this gully to continue up the mountainside to the next valley, that of the Les Marrades gully.

PUERTOS DE TORTOSA - BECEITE

This mountain range is located among the provinces of Teruel (Aragon), Tarragona (Catalonia) and Castellón (Valencian Community), formerly known as the Crown of Aragon. This range connects the Iberian System and the Catalan Pre-Coastal Range, a union embodied by the Tozal del Rey (tossal dels Tres Reis) peak, convergence point of the three communities.

The vegetation in the area consists mainly of pine trees (*Pinus nigra*, *P. sylvestris* y *P. halepensis*) with boxwood understory (*Buxus sempervirens*) or groups of oaks (*Quercus ilex*, *Q. coccifera* and *Q. faginea*). Its fauna includes the largest colony of Spanish ibex (*Capra pirenaica*) in the peninsula, not to mention a large population of Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*), griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrines*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*). As for invertebrates, the white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and the Spanish moon moth (*Graellsia Isabelae*) stand out. It has been declared a nature reserve both in its Catalan (Parc Natural dels Ports) and its Valencian side (La Tinença de Benifassà Nature Reserve).

Topping the slope opposite the one you are descending is the pillbox of Cabrera. It was named after general Cabrera, who ordered the pillbox be built during the First Carlist War. It can be accessed by a track that departs from the main route. The small path the traveller has been following joins a wide track, only leaving it next to a ruined building to meet the gully bed. The traveller will cross it several times before this alternative route meets the main route, four kilometres from departure.



Fortín de la Cabrera

MATARRAÑA RIVER

This tributary of the Ebro River has been considered by the Ebro River Basin Authority as one of the best preserved Mediterranean river ecosystems, boasting a great diversity of fish species and other aquatic organisms, and being one of the few Spanish rivers where the native crayfish is still preserved.

In the upper reaches of the river, near the town of Beceite in Teruel where it originates, it flows through a steep and rugged terrain with a complex topography, where gorges and ravines create a unique landscape.

In this enclave, which encompasses the towns of Beceite and Valderrobres, the river flows through an area that is around 700 m high and is surrounded by the imposing mountain peaks that make up the Puertos de Beceite area, where the highest points reach around 1,400 m in height.

The complex terrain of the upper Matarraña River has meant that the surrounding lands have not been used for agriculture, as the ground is too difficult to cultivate. Even so, this river has been a vital resource for the inhabitants of the Matarraña region, from which it takes its name. Its towns and villages sprang up along its banks, relied on its waters for sustenance, and established numerous factories nearby, harnessing the river's power.



Upper course of the Matarraña River

STAGE 2 ✂ BECEITE → VALDERROBRES

MIDE

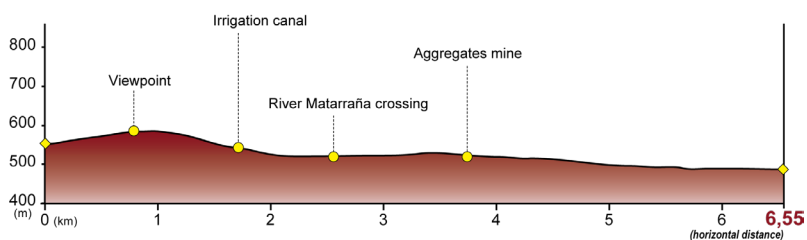
Harshness of natural environment	2	⚠	Upward gradient	40 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	105 m	⬇
Route difficulty	2	🏃	Route lenght (actual distance)	6,59 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🍏	Time	1 h 35 min	🕒

◆ town

● point of interest

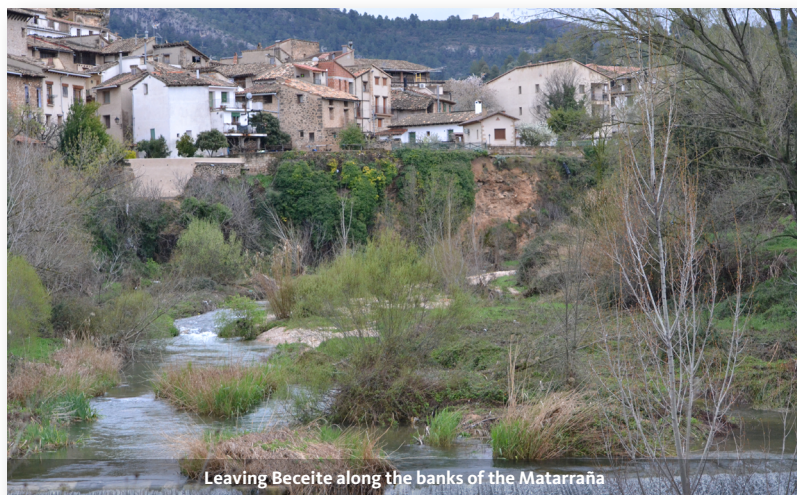
Beceite

Valderrobres



FROM BECEITE TO VALDERROBRES WALKING DOWN THE REMAINS OF ANCIENT IRRIGATION CANAL

The second stage of this trail links the towns of Beceite and Valderrobres, both of which are closely linked to the Matarraña river. Beceite is linked to the river because, back in the day, the paper factories were its main industry. Valderrobres has taken the two river banks due to its growth. If travellers follow the trail, they will have the opportunity to go by the old irrigation canal of the small hydroelectric power station of Bonet, with stunning views of the Matarraña, almost over the river.





The trail departs where the previous stage ended, next to a bridge at the exit of Beceite. It goes down to almost reaching the riverbed and then goes away from it again a few metres ahead, after passing an old paper factory that is a charming hotel today, until it reaches the road exiting the town.

After crossing the road, the trail goes through a dirt track and then climbs the mountain side, where there is an informative display panel about the stunning panoramic views of Beceite from this point and its mountain passes. Among other things, the traveller will be able to identify the canyon seen in the previous stage of the trail.

Having bordered the former campsite (now abandoned), the trail goes down among pines through an old road that continues over an impressive stone arch, which can be admired when the path goes under it.

After going past the pine forest, there is a metal fence that protects the traveller from falling into the river, until the trail reaches the irrigation canal of Bonet. Although it has been reformed to allow travellers to go through it, they might need to duck to go under some rocks and be careful during the rainy season because sometimes the water tries to go back to its original course. Almost hanging over the river, the irrigation canal allows the traveller to enjoy the most interesting views of this part of the Matarraña river.

BECEITE AND THE PAPER FACTORIES

Beceite (Beseit, in Catalan) is the first town the Matarra-Algars Nature Trail goes through. Its historical centre was declared an Historic-Artistic Grouping and Site of Cultural Interest in 2007 because of its great monumental attractions, such as the church of San Bartolomé, of medieval origin and reformed into Baroque style; the bridge over the Matarraña, from the 15th century; the Renaissance city council and its market; the hermitage of Santa Ana, from the 17th century; the Chapel of San Roque; and the Palau, which is the cultural centre today ([more information about Beceite in stage 13](#)).

Due to the constant flow of the Matarraña, which ensured the availability of hydropower, and to its carbonated waters, which gave consistency to paper, paper factories were the industrial drive of this town between the 17th and 20th centuries. During the busiest times, there were 9 paper factories operating. This activity ended due to the distance to the large consumption centres, the cost of a semi-artisanal production and the non-conversion of the sector in the mid-twentieth century. Today, some of these buildings have been restored for tourism and cultural uses.

Once the trail crosses the irrigation canal, it goes through a dirt track again, changing direction at an intersection and going down until it reaches the river. The traveller has to ford the river, which might be difficult during seasons where it carries a lot of water. On the other side of the river, the trail ascends among olive trees and crops, leaving a sand and gravel extraction area aside. The traveller must be especially cautious at this point due to heavy vehicle traffic.



Old irrigation ditch refurbished for pedestrian use

As the trail goes near the riverbed again, crops become more frequent, olive trees disappear and the track changes into a narrow riverside path among reeds until it reaches the A-231 road, a few metres from the town of Valderrobres. The trail goes along the road to the iron bridge over the Matarraña. This bridge links the historical centre with the modern part of the town, together with the historical stone bridge that can be found ahead.

Although this stage ends near the bridge, the historical streets of this town are really worth walking through, not to mention its city council or the Castle-Episcopal Palace.

VALDERROBRES

The capital of the Matarraña lies on both sides of the river, with two bridges, the Pont de Ferro and the Pont de Pedra linking the two parts of the town. The old walled town can be accessed through Puerta de San Roque. At the historical centre, north of the river, the Castle-Episcopal Palace, the church of Santa María la Mayor (both Gothic) and the city council (Renaissance) stand out. This monumental group was declared of historical-artistic interest in 1983.

The Castle-Palace and church is a national monument since 1931 and one of the most characteristic tourist landmarks in Valderrobres. Its origins are unclear (the first references date back to the 12th century) and, although it initially had a defensive nature, it ended up becoming a dwelling.



Panoramic view of Valderrobres, highlighting the monumental complex

STAGE 3 ✂ VALDERROBRES → TORRE DEL COMPTE

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	55 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	65 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🔪	Route lenght (actual distance)	10,43 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🍏	Time	2 h 30 min	🕒

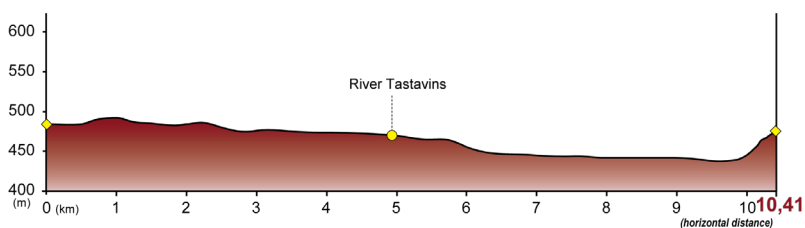
◆ town

● point of interest

Valderrobres



Torre del Compte



BETWEEN TWO CHARMING TOWNS AMONG PINEFORESTS, OLIVE GROVES AND FARMLANDS

This third stage goes entirely along the right bank of the Matarraña river. The river widens, giving way to riverbank formations dominated by bitter and purple willows (*Salix eleagnos* and *Salix purpurea*) and its fertile meadows are dominated by fruit crops. Almost halfway along this stage, the Tastavins river, one of its major tributaries, joins the Matarraña river.



The Matarraña River as it passes through Valderrobres, with the stone bridge in the background



The Nature Trail in the area surrounding the confluence of the Matarraña and Tastavins rivers

Departing from the Iron Bridge (Pont de Ferro), but always on the right bank of the river, the trail continues crossing the historical centre of Valderrobres, going through the Plaza Mayor and near the city council, from where the traveller can cross the Puerta de San Roque and go over the stone bridge (Pont de Pedra) to enjoy a magnificent view over the Matarraña. Leaving the last houses in the outskirts of Valderrobres behind, the paved track the trail follows becomes a dirt path.

On the left of the trail, the landscape is dominated by willows (a bank formation with different subspecies of *Salix* sp.) near the river and fruit crops in the meadows. On the right, where the land is steeper, the pines are the dominant species, sometimes replaced by olive trees. This landscape is interrupted by a sand and gravel extraction plant which the traveller goes past after crossing a bridge over the Segarra gully.

About 5 km into this stage, near a country house in ruins, the trail reaches the confluence of the Tastavins and the Matarraña rivers. This is an area of high ecological value and the traveller can learn more about it thanks to the information display panel there. After 5 more kilometres through similar landscapes, the trail reaches the TE-V-3001 road, linking Torre del Compte with La Fresneda.

Leaving the bridge over the Matarraña (crossed by the next stage of this trail) on the left, the trail crosses the road to reach the town through a steep, but not very long path. This stage ends in the outskirts of Torre del Compte, next to one of the arches that used to give access to it when it was walled. However, its narrow Medieval streets are worth walking through, enjoying the spectacular view from the promontory where the town is located.

TORRE DEL COMPTE

Its high location, on the right bank of the Matarraña valley, gives this town a privileged landscape where the Ports of Beceite can be seen at the bottom of the valley.

This small town is characterized by its unique architecture, where the use of wood is common in the eaves and balconies of the buildings. Among its religious heritage, the Church of San Pedro Mártir stands out, built in the 14th century and renovated in the 18th century following Baroque principles. Also resulting from the church's expansion during the 18th century was the construction of the slender tower that rises above the rest of the church and has become one of the town's most iconic landmarks.

Regarding its civil architecture, the town hall stands out, erected in the 16th century and considered one of the most impressive municipal buildings in the area. Inside, visitors can also explore the Post-War Interpretation Centre, which offers a glimpse into daily life in this town in the years following the Spanish Civil War and during the early years of the Francoist dictatorship.

Another point of interest is the San Roque gate, built as part of the town's walled complex in the 16th century. It is the only one of the six gates that once formed the Torre del Compte wall that remains standing today. A simple stroll through the town's narrow streets also offers the opportunity to discover important elements of its heritage, such as the Bergós house or the Ferrer house.



Torre del Compte, in its privileged location overlooking the Matarraña valley

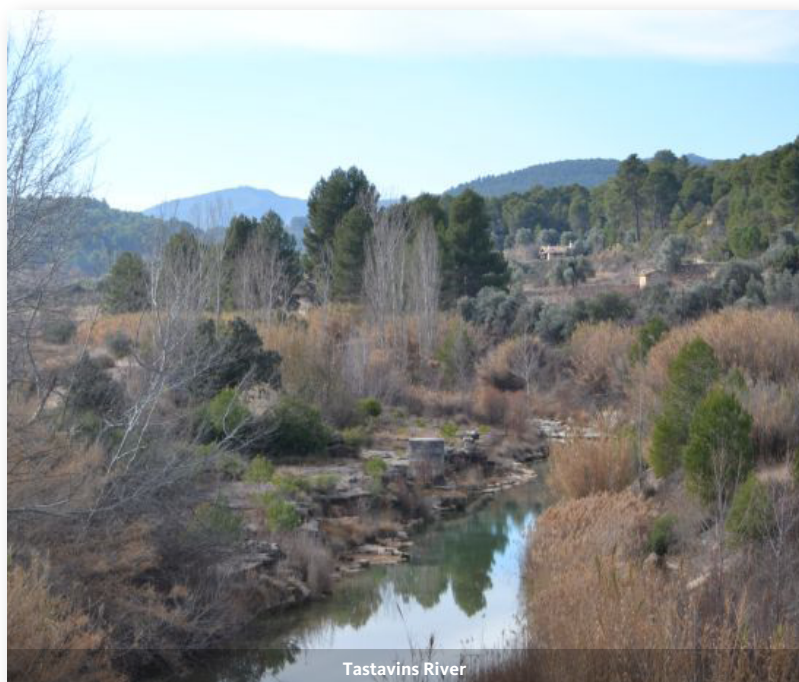
TASTAVINS RIVER

The Tastavins is one of the most important tributaries of the Matarraña River. It rises in the Beceite mountain passes and the Tinença de Benifassà region and flows into the Matarraña between Valderrobres and Torre del Compte.

As it passes through the town of La Portellada, the Tastavins River forms one of the most outstanding natural features of this region; it is a waterfall about 20 meters high that is known as the Salt de La Portellada waterfall.

Along the 35 km course of the Tastavins River, one can observe the rich biodiversity that characterizes this waterway. In the upper reaches of the river, the flora is dominated by extensive pine forests interspersed with mixed woodlands. Further downstream, where the flow is more consistent, riparian vegetation such as elms (*Ulmus* spp.) and willows (*Salix* spp.) can be found.

Regarding the fauna, the otter (*Lutra lutra*) is the dominant species along the entire course of the river. Occasionally, it is accompanied in this area by the kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), which flies over the riverbed at high speed displaying its characteristic blue plumage. Another common bird in the vicinity of the Tastavins is the chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*).



Tastavins River

STAGE 4 ✂ TORRE DEL COMPTE

→ VALDELTORMO

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	⚠	Upward gradient	35 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	65 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🚶	Route lenght (actual distance)*	11,46 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	3	🏆	Time**	3 h 5 min	🕒

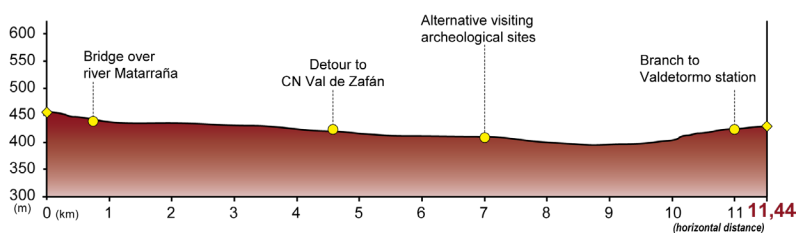
◆ town ● point of interest

* Stage length excluding branches and alternative routes

** Stage duration excluding branches and alternative routes

Torre del Compte

Valdeltormo



DISCOVERING THE IBERIAN LEGACY OF THE REGION IN THE COMPANY OF THE NATURAL WAY OF VAL DE ZAFÁN

This stage allows travellers to reach Valdeltormo following two different paths: they can either take the main route near the Matarraña river or the alternative route showing them part of the Iberian heritage of the region. Along this stage, travellers will have the opportunity to take the Val de Zafán Nature Trail, another of the trails crossing this area.



Wandering through Torre del Compte



In order to start this stage, the traveller must go back to the last stretch of the previous one, to the bridge over the Matarraña river. The trail crosses the river through the bridge of the TE-V-3001 road (the traveller must be cautious, due to the narrow pavement) and takes a branch through a dirt track on the right.

Going back to the nature trail, the route goes through a track where the landscape is similar to that of the previous stage, only the crops of the Matarraña fertile meadows are now on the right side and the pines covering the high areas are on the left side. In this stage, pines are also replaced by olive trees where the land conditions are favourable.

Two kilometres into this stage, there is an information display panel marking the branch leading to the town of La Fresneda through a track. The trail does not go through this town, but its important monumental heritage is worth visiting.

From this point on, the traveller will be able to see the next milestone on the route, the stunning viaduct over the Matarraña, through which another trail, the Val de Zafán Nature Trail, goes. Just before the trail goes under this viaduct, the traveller can take this alternative nature trail thanks to a branch marked by an information display panel.

A few kilometres later, the alternative route towards Valdeeltormo, the end of this stage, starts. This alternative route will allow the travellers to visit the Iberian sites of Torre Cremada and of the Tozal Montañés. The main trail goes among fruit crops until it reaches the rock of the Tormo the peculiar rock formation after which the last town of this stage is named. Right here, a stretch begins which is shared with the following stage, taking the traveller among

a pine forest with the N-420 road to Valdeltormo on the right. Barely half a kilometre before reaching the town, there is an intersection where the alternative route through the Iberian sites links with the main trail again. From this intersection, the traveller can take the branch going to the old train station of Valdeltormo, belonging to the railway that used to link Puebla de Híjar with Tortosa, going through Alcañiz.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE THROUGH THE IBERIAN SITES

The traveller can get to the Iberian site of Torre Cremada going up a steep slope with a cement track among pines and olive trees. It is worth to have a walk through this defensive construction and see its fortified tower and, especially, the amazing views of the valley that it offers.

Almost a kilometre ahead, there is a well-indicated branch allowing the traveller to visit another Iberian archaeological site at the heart of a pine forest.

This Iberian archaeological site, the Tozal Montañés, is worth leaving the trail for a while, since it is a small settlement with a circular tower-house. As the traveller will see later, the trail passes by several sites showing the historical importance of this area. At the end of this stage, in Valdeltormo, there is an interpretation centre about the Iberian peoples, where the traveller can find out more about this culture.



Torre Cremada Archaeological Site

IBERIAN LEGACY

The highest concentration of Iberian archaeological sites (of the Ausetan people of the Ebro) in Aragon is located in the Lower Aragon region. The importance and quality of these sites led to the creation of the “Iberian Heritage of Aragon” Consortium, which manages the “Iberian Route of Lower Aragon” cultural and archaeological tourism project. Eleven municipalities from five districts in eastern Aragon are participating in this project. The Route includes nineteen excavated archaeological sites and eleven visitor centers with diverse themes, which together will provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of Iberian culture.

Specifically, the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail passes right by the Iberian archaeological sites of Torre Cremada and Tozal Montañés. Although located off the main route, a visit to this Nature Trail offers the opportunity to discover other sites within the region: San Antonio and Tossal Redó in Calaceite, Escudines Altes and Baixes, San Cristóbal and Piuró del Barranc Fondo in Mazaleón, or the Iberian burial mound route and Els Castellans near Cretas. Interpretation centers can also be visited in Calaceite, Cretas, Mazaleón, and Valdel tormo.

In addition to these sites in Teruel, the Natural Trail allows you to continue discovering this Iberian legacy, passing by other sites, such as the Roquizal del Ruyo in the municipality of Fabara (in Zaragoza), the Tossal del Moro de Pinyeres (Batea) or the Punta de la Gessera (Caseres), the latter two in Tarragona.



Tozal Montañés Archaeological Site



A branch line allows access from Valdeltormo to the old railway station

The trail then changes direction, going northeast, and the traveller can see a cutting appear among olive trees on the right, a part of the old Val de Zafán railway works. The trail crosses this cutting over a bridge and then goes alongside it. Then, an intersection is reached where the traveller can choose between following this trail or taking the Val de Zafán Nature Trail. The route leaves this intersection aside and goes north, descending among olive trees until it meets the main trail again, half a kilometre from Valdeltormo.

VALDELTORMO STATION BRANCH

This route, more than 2 km long if the traveller begins the journey in Valdeltormo, goes through a paved secondary road among olive trees to Valdeltormo old train station. This station belonged to the Val de Zafán railway line, which used to link Tortosa (Tarragona) and Puebla de Híjar (Teruel). Although it stopped operating in 1973, the Val del Zafán Nature Trail goes through its railway platform today. This spot, with a rest area and an information display panel, is the third intersection where these two nature trails meet along this stage.

VAL DE ZAFÁN NATURE TRAIL

Up to three times during this stage you can access this Natural Path, which takes advantage of the platform of the old railway that linked La Puebla de Híjar (Teruel) with Tortosa (Tarragona) and which operated for 31 years, until its closure in 1973.

The Val de Zafán Nature Trail is divided into three sections. The third section, accessed from this stage of the Matarraña - Algars Nature Trail, has a total length of 35.9 km between the old train stops of Valdealgofa and Arnés-Lledó, where it connects with the Terra Alta section (22.6 km), which, in turn, continues to Tortosa via the Baix Ebre section (25.3 km).



Viaduct over the Matarraña River, through which the Val de Zafán Nature Trail currently runs

STAGE 5 ✂ VALDELTORMO → MAZALEÓN

MIDE

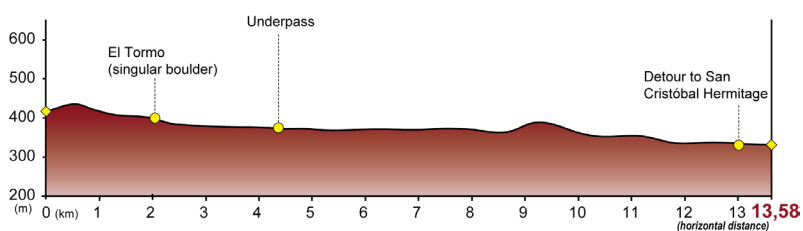
Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	60 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	145 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	13,60 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	3 h 20 min 

◆ town

● point of interest

Valdeltormo

Mazaleón



BACK TO THE RIGHT BANK OF MATARRAÑA RIVER TOWARDS MAZALEÓN

The fifth stage of this trail takes the traveller back to the right bank of the Matarraña river, following its course towards the town of Mazaleón among crops, pines and olive trees. Before reaching this town, there is a branch allowing the traveller to go up to the hermitage of San Cristóbal, where stunning views over the region can be admired.





The Nature Trail runs between olive groves and patches of pine forest

During the first kilometres of this stage, the traveller must go back to the fourth stage, to the Tormo rock. From there, the traveller must take a path on the left that crosses the Matarraña river using a platform and a ford, both of them of concrete. When the river carries a lot of water, it is more difficult for travellers to cross the latter.

After crossing the river, the traveller must take the path on the left, going between the river (on the left) and fruit crops (on the right), until the TE-V-3001 road is rea-

VALDELTORMO

This town is named after the Tormo rock, a particular rock formation sculpted by the Matarraña river. The most remarkable building in this town is the old City Council. Its market, still preserved today, is a witness to the most important decisions made in the town over the centuries. Opposite this building, the traveller can see the parochial church of La Asunción de Nuestra Señora, from the 17th century. It is a Baroque building with a rectangular floor plan, and its main façade stands out due to its tower and its simple portal. In this town, the traveller can also visit the “Route of the Iberians in Lower Aragon” Visitor Centre, about the Iberian architecture and aristocracy.

ched. The trail then turns left before reaching the road, going under two bridges over the river, with footbridges linking their pillars helping travellers to cross. On the other side of the bridges, there is an irrigation canal that accompanies the trail for some metres and will keep reappearing along the stage from time to time.

Having passed by a pine stand on the left, the trail runs quite high over the course of the river for a stretch, so the traveller must be cautious (walking close to the right side of the path should be enough). The landscape is the same as in previous stages: crops in the meadows, and pine and olive tree forests on the right. Along this stretch, the traveller goes through paths giving access to private properties. Intersections are well-indicated, but the travellers must still pay attention. One of these intersections is used to get to the town of Calaceite, which has a relevant historical heritage, such as the Iberian archaeological sites in the village of San Antonio and the one in Tossal Redó.

The trail goes near the river again, as the olive trees replace the pine forests. This announces the proximity of the town of Mazaleón, which is the next stop in this natural trail. In order to enter this town, the traveller must leave the bridge over the Matarraña aside and take the footbridge located a few hundred metres ahead, where a stretch shared with the following stage leads to the entrance to Mazaleón.

Before crossing the river, there is a branch allowing the traveller to go up to the hermitage of San Cristóbal through a steep slope that turns sharply to the left and continues through a Way of the Cross leading to the hermitage door. Besides enjoying the amazing views from this promontory, the traveller can visit the Iberian archaeological site of San Cristóbal and the “Route of the Iberians” Visitor Centre about the origins of the Iberian culture. The centre is located near the hermitage.



Mazaleón from the hermitage of San Cristóbal

CALACEITE

From this stage of the nature trail, the traveller can take the branch leading to the town of Calaceite, about 5,5 km away.

Its old town was declared Site of Historical-Artistic Interest in 1973. This town was built around its Plaza Mayor, from where the three main streets depart, linking with the gates-chapels of the Virgen del Pilar, San Antonio and the Virgen del Rosario. The City Council, also located at the Plaza Mayor, stands out due to its mannerist façade and its beautiful market. The traveller can also visit the church of La Asunción, which has a Baroque façade and a bell tower. The Juan Cabré Museum, about this archaeologist who was born in this town, is also worth visiting. It has an important collection of Iberian votive offerings, as well as temporary art exhibitions.

There are several remains of the Iberian era in this town. One of the most relevant is the village of San Antonio, next to the namesake hermitage. Also in the town, but further from the town centre, lays the archaeological site of Tossal Redó.



Calaceite

STAGE 6 MAZALEÓN → MAELLA

MIDE

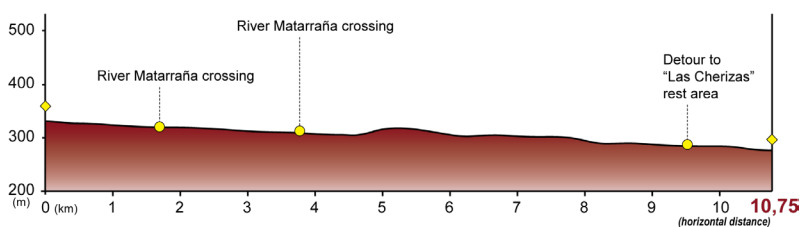
Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	20 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	75 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	10,76 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	3 h 15 min 

 town

 point of interest

Mazaléon

Maella



FROM TERUEL TO ZARAGOZA BY THE MID COURSE OF THE MATARRAÑA RIVER

Along the sixth stage of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail, the traveller will cross the province border, leaving Teruel behind and entering Zaragoza. The closeness to the Matarraña river during this stage allows the traveller to enjoy the middle course of the Matarraña, which is very different compared to previous stages.



Typical view of the Matarraña River in its middle course

MAZALEÓN

This is the most northern town in the Matarraña region. Although it has a lot of interesting buildings, the Gothic church of Santa María la Mayor, attached to the old wall enclosing the town and still boasting one of its towers, stands out. The City Council is also worth visiting. It is divided into three buildings and it has a market with access to its two façades. In the centre of the main façade, there is a relief with the town shield, a lion with a mace. Inside the building, there is the former prison, which has interesting graffiti made by the prisoners.

In the mountain pass, on the other side of the Matarraña river, lays the Iberian village of San Cristóbal. The hermitage of San Cristóbal and the Route of the Iberians Visitor Centre are next to the village. There are two more Iberian archaeological sites, Escudines Altes and Escudines Baixes, not far from the town centre.

The traveller can continue discovering the Iberian legacy of this area before beginning the last stage of this phase of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail. There is a path leading to the Iberian archaeological sites of Escudines Altes and Baixes. This path is located 1.3 km before the end of the fifth stage in Mazaleón and it goes south through the A-1412 road.



Hermitage of San Cristóbal, in Mazaleón



The Matarraña River is crossed twice during this stage

The traveller begins the sixth stage of the trail going through the last stretch of the previous one, leaving the town of Mazaleón behind and crossing the Matarraña river over a footbridge. Then, the route takes a branch on the left and the trail runs near the river, leaving crops on the right up to the point it arrives at a concrete ford where the traveller must cross to the other bank (as usual, if the river carries a lot of water, it can be difficult to cross it).

After walking over three kilometres along the left bank of the Matarraña river, the traveller will cross the river again thanks to another ford. If travellers look at the canyon walls in the background, on the right side of the river, they will see the overflow channels of the Val Comuna reservoir.

On the other side of the Matarraña river, the trail continues near the river and then bends 90 degrees to follow a dirt track. Along this stretch, the traveller will cross the province border, from Teruel to Zaragoza. This stretch of the trail, where the traveller goes through the river meadows, is usually done through a path covered with thick gravel and river stones that will make it difficult for those who want to go by bicycle.

Although the trail goes back to the crop landscape, there are no pine forests on the right canyon walls, but Mediterranean scrub and olive trees. Although there are still paths leading to private properties, there are fewer intersections than in the previous stage. The trail continues until it reaches a branch allowing the travellers to access the pine forest where Las Cherizas rest area is located. This branch is located 9,5 km into the route and the traveller will reach the rest area after crossing the river by means of a ford.

Less than 3,5 km before the end of this stage, the castle and the clock tower of Maella can be seen on the other side of the river, provided that the riverbank vegetation and the fruit trees make it possible. This stage ends next to the long bridge over the Matarraña river allowing the traveller to enter Maella, a monumental which is worth visiting.

MAELLA

This is a town with a distinctly historical character. The castle, perched at the highest point, stands out, and although in ruins, it retains its imposing presence. It passed through various hands and owners, and suffered its worst defeat during the Carlist Wars when it burned down. Today, its recently restored cellars can be visited.

Besides the castle, other notable heritage sites in this municipality include the well-known clock tower, which currently houses the town hall and stands 48 meters tall. Several religious buildings are also worth mentioning, such as the medieval church of San Esteban and the 18th-century church of Santa María, as well as the Baroque hermitage of Santa Bárbara and the Trappist monastery of Santa Susana. Before leaving the town, a visit to the Pablo Gargallo House-Museum is also recommended. It houses an exhibition of the works of this artist from Maella in his birthplace.



Views of Maella, where the Clock Tower stands out

STAGE 7 ✂ MAELLA → FABARA

MIDE

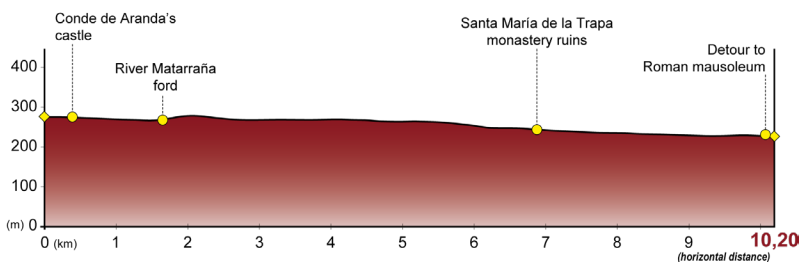
Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	19 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	67 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route length (actual distance)	10,20 km 
Amount of effort needed	2 	Time	2 h 5 min 

◆ town

● point of interest

Maella

Fabara



HISTORICAL HERITAGE ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER MATARRAÑA

The seventh stage of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail is the first (of three) which unfolds entirely in the province of Zaragoza. Without leaving the riverside, this stage links Maella and Fabara, two towns with a rich historic and artistic heritage, which can be attested by the monumental churches, ruins of castles and monasteries and even a Roman mausoleum.



Maella from the start of the stage



This stage of the Matarraña-Algars Nature Trail gets started on the right of the river, just after the bridge which can be crossed in order to get to Maella.

Although the nature trail does not actually go into Maella, turning right after the bridge takes you to the town which is well deserving of a visit. Moving up to the Conde de Aranda castle, with a stop at the walls and the San Esteban Protomártir church, as well as admiring the ruins of this fortress, there are also spectacular panoramic views of the valley. Another must-see is the Torre del Reloj tower. This has a Roman and Mudejar style and is located on the old entrance to the villa and makes up part of the palace, which these days houses the Maella town hall.

The trail leaves the town under the view of the castle and the church, between the hill on which they sit and the left bank of the River Matarraña. Until the river is crossed via a concrete crossing (take care if the river is high), the accompanying vegetation is made up of fruit crops, with some olive trees and riverside vegetation such as tamarix, poplars, reeds and canes next to the river. On the other side of the river, after separating slightly from it, the olive trees and vineyards start to cover the flattest land, whilst the highest ground is covered in Mediterranean scrubland.

SANTA MARÍA DE LA TRAPA DE SANTA SUSANA MONASTERY

The ruins of the Santa María de la Trapa de Santa Susana Monastery are located on the edge of the A-1411, some 5.4 km from the town of Maella.

The Santa María de la Trapa de Santa Susana Monastery was founded in the 6th century by Benedictine monks, and it was rebuilt by the Order of Calatrava at the beginning of the 13th century. Afterwards, it was ceded to the Cistercian Order and at the end of the 18th century it ended up in the hands of a community of French Trappist monks.

In the 14th century the Santa Susana church was raised, this is a Gothic construction with ashlar covered by three ribbed vaults, with a lily, which is the emblem of the Order of Calatrava, in the central vault. The tower, which has a square design, has three bodies and is topped by a bulbous steeple.

The monastery was raided by French troops during the Peninsular War, although the Trappist monks remained in the monastery until their expulsion in 1835, due to the Mendizábal Disentailment. Since then it has progressively turned to ruins.



Ruins of the Monastery of Santa María de la Trapa

Circulating parallel to the Cataluñañs canal, after some five kilometres ignoring any detours, the trail turns to the left, surrounded by tree crops, and leads once again to the River Matarraña. A detour can be taken from this section, to the Santa María de la Trapa de Santa Susana monastery on the other side of the river. This is in ruins, but is still impressive (it can be arrived by crossing the river at a nearby crossing, or on the road from Maella and Fabara).

The next section of the trail passes through dense reeds which barely allow for the river to be seen. Here there are other riverside trees such as willows and poplars, and even some pine trees as the trail nears Fabara.

This town is entered via Avenida de la Jota, which carries on next to Rabinat park until reaching the A-2411. This stage comes to an end after turning to the right and following this road for around a hundred metres. Fabara has a lot to offer, and can be visited before having a rest.



Panoramic view of Fabara

After the crossing, continuing along the bridge that crosses the River Matarraña, and by following the signs, the Roman mausoleum of Fabara can be reached in less than a kilometre. This is possibly one of the most well preserved Roman sepulchres on the Iberian peninsula. By retracing the trail a few meters and taking a street next to some sports pitches, you can arrive just below the San Juan Bautista church, which has a surprising waterfall (coming from the Rabinat canal). In the past this was used to move a grain mill and generate electricity.

The church itself is quite particular as it is a fortified church. Other buildings that are worth visiting include the Town Hall, which is located in part of the palace of the Princess of Belmonte, and the Virgilio Albiac painting museum; a painter from this village in Zaragoza. As well as the monuments, the Jacobeo del Ebro Trail passes through the municipality.



THE ROMAN MAUSOLEUM OF LUCIUS AEMI- LIUS LUPUS

The Roman Mausoleum of Fabara, or more correctly the Mausoleum of Lucius Aemilius Lupus is found less than two kilometres from the town's urban centre, by taking a detour which is well signed from the A-2411.

This is a Roman sepulchre/temple which dates back to the 2nd century A.D. and is located on the banks of the River Matarraña. It has a rectangular base facing the east, built with large stone blocks connected with iron hooks. The three blank walls are decorated with Tuscan pilasters, two in the centre and two in the corners of the back wall. The fourth side, facing east, has a portico style with four columns from the Tuscan Order, upon which lies an Ionian entablature which covers the entire Mausoleum. It is topped off with a triangular gable, both on the front façade and on the rear one.

The inside consists of an upper area covered with a barrel vault, where libations and sacrifices in honour of the dead would take place. Below this there is an underground conditorium (sepulchre) covered with a barrel vault. Although it still has part of the stairs to access the ossuary, the underground vault is blocked off.

Despite this possibly being one of the most well preserved monuments of this type on the Iberian peninsula, it was practically unnoticed until 1874 when the Royal Spanish Academy of History was informed of its existence. The building was privately owned until 1942, when it was acquired by the State, although it was not named as a historic-artistic monument until nearly a decade later.

In order to access the exhibition space, the town council of Fabara must be contacted previously.



Roman mausoleum of Lucius Aemilius Lupus, in Fabara

STAGE 8 ✂ FABARA → NONASPE

MIDE

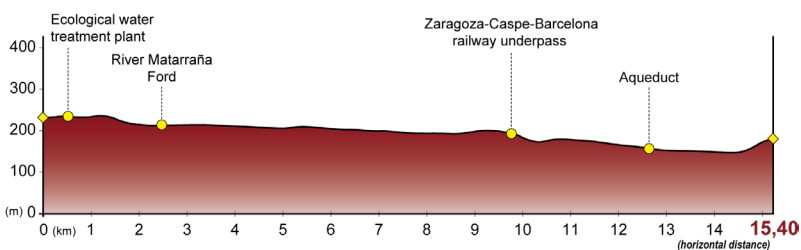
Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	61 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	112 m 
Route difficulty	1 	Route length (actual distance)	15,41 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	3 h 10 min 

◆ town

● point of interest

Fabara

Nonaspe



THE MOST AGRICULTURAL RIVER MATARRAÑA : CROPS, IRRIGATION DITCHES AND IRRIGATION POOLS

Travel through an essentially agricultural environment, thanks to the great floodplain of the river Matarraña throughout this stage in Zaragoza. The trail goes from the town of Fabara to Nonaspe, a town which was built just where the Matarraña merges with another river which lends its name to this Nature Trail: the river Algars.



The wide floodplain of the River Matarraña, which is extensively used for agriculture

FABARA

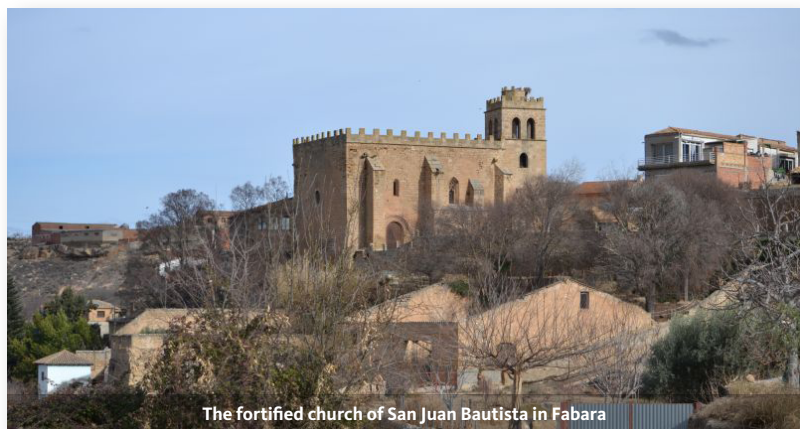
Municipality located in the county of Bajo Aragón-Caspe, on the right bank of the river Matarraña. Despite its name having Berber origins (from the Hawwàra tribe), there is evidence of important Epipalaeolithic settlements, such as Roquizal del Rullo (one of the most important Iron Age settlements in Aragón). In addition, in the area one of the best examples of the Roman Empire's funeral architecture has been conserved; the Mausoleum of Fabara (see previous stage).

The current settlement dates back to the arrival of the Moors, passing into the hands of the Order of Calatrava after the Christian reconquest until 1428.

Out of the historic-artistic heritage of the urban centre, highlights include the Gothic, fortified church of San Juan Bautista (15th century), built on top of a pre-existing Roman church, and the palace of the Princess of Belmonte, which currently houses the town hall of Fabara and the Virgilio Albiac painting museum, a painter from the town. The town's most characteristic traditions include the Jota de Fabara and the Polinario dances.

Fabara is left, circling it on its north-eastern side following the A-2411, without entering the town. Although the first hundred metres are still on streets of the town, care must be paid as some 200 m must be walked on the roadside, before heading to the left, following the signs for the nature trail.

After passing the ecological wastewater treatment plant, and once again on the rural trails, the landscape turns back to olive groves, willows and fruit crops, and Mediterranean scrubland on the high areas. Without further ado, the route continues until it meets the river, which becomes wider in this section, although it is not



The fortified church of San Juan Bautista in Fabara



Zaragoza-Caspe-Barcelona railway viaduct

always very full. After a few metres running parallel to the river, this can be crossed by a concrete crossing in an area with an abundance of vegetation (reeds, brambles, willows and swamplands are covered in aquatic plants).

On the other side of the river, after turning right, the trail carries on for nearly a kilometre completely surrounded by tree crops, until it reaches the foot of the mountain. Here the trail starts to follow a series of meanders of the river Matarraña, with its plains being widely used for agriculture, as is evidenced by the numerous water supplies and the company of the Fabara canal in the first section, and the Menfalla canal afterwards.

When there is a gap in the vegetation, on the other side of the river you can see the rocky walls which the river Matarraña's floodplains spread between. After going past a large irrigation pond, the trail enters a crop land full of fruit trees, with a distant view of the viaduct built for the Zaragoza-Caspe-Barcelona railway which crosses the river to head towards the mountain. The trail reaches this railway, but takes a path below it. On the other side, at a crossing, take the right hand trail, which heads down to the river again. From there, there is a clearer view of the viaduct.

The trail reaches this railway, but takes a path below it. On the other side, at a crossing, take the right hand trail, which heads down to the river again. From there, there is a clearer view of the viaduct.

This last section passes between the mountain and the river, which has whimsical shapes in its water bed. With the Sot canal on the right hand side, an aqueduct can be seen which takes the canal over a ravine. New fields of crops welcome you to Nonaspe, which is reached after a gentle incline among pine trees and holm oaks. Here, stage 8 comes to an end in the high point of the town, where the streets Calle de Maella and Avenida de Cataluña merge together. From here it is possible to head towards Fayón (stage 9), or to Caseres, continuing along the long stage 10.

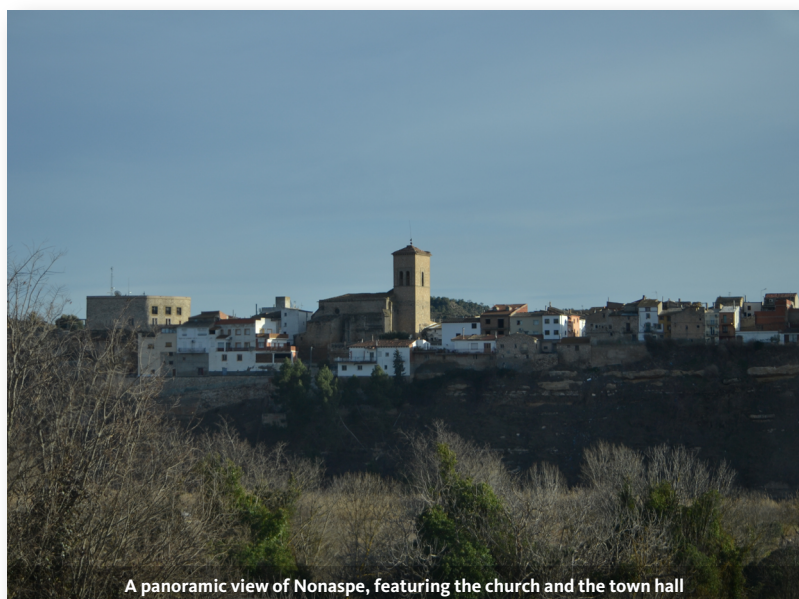
The town hall of Nonaspe particularly stands out, located in the reformed castle of Encomienda. This is a 14th-15th century building with modifications from the 18th century, although some elements from the 12th century may still be preserved. The parish church of San Bartolomé is also worth a visit. This is a 12th century Gothic building which is probably one of the oldest in the county. Due to where in the town these two buildings are located, they also act as a wonderful viewpoint over the valley of Matarraña.

NONASPE

The municipality of Nonaspe, in the Zaragozan county of Bajo Aragón-Caspe, is located in a privileged landscape in which the Rivers of Algars and Matarraña come together. That is how the 17th century temple, the Virgen de Dos Aguas [Virgin of the Two Waters] shrine took its name.

Elements that stand out in the heritage of Nonaspe also include: the San Bartolomé church, a 13th century Gothic church built on top of a pre-existing Roman temple; the Castellet de Faió, a watch tower from the Carlist Wars; and the town hall, located in a 15th century palace that took the place of an old medieval castle.

Nonaspe has been inhabited since ancient times, which can be evidenced by the numerous Neolithic settlements in the municipality. There are also cave paintings at Les Tres Roquetes, possibly from the Bronze Age, and a couple of Iberian settlements.



A panoramic view of Nonaspe, featuring the church and the town hall

STAGE 9 NONASPE → FAYÓN

MIDE

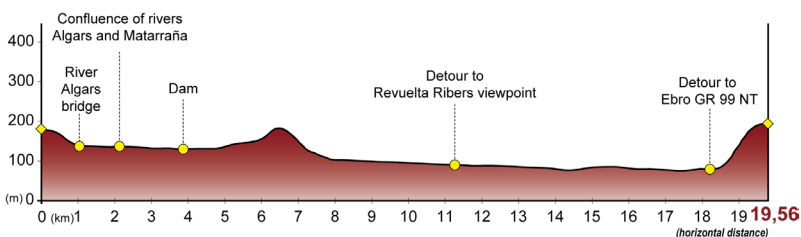
Harshness of natural environment	1 	Upward gradient	185 m 
Guidance along the route	1 	Downward gradient	169 m 
Route difficulty	1 	Route lenght (actual distance)	19,58 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	4 h 20 min 

 town

 point of interest

Nonaspe

Fayón



THE RIVER MATARRAÑA SEEKS THE RIVER EBRO

This is the last stage that is entirely within the province of Zaragoza. The River Matarraña accompanies this section until it flows into the River Ebro, in the Riba-Roja reservoir. Walking between the walls that line the River Matarraña, this stage finishes in Fayón, a municipality that was witness to one of the most well-known battles in the Spanish Civil War: the Battle of the Ebro.



Hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Dos Aguas, on the outskirts of Nonaspe

Starting from where stage 8 finishes in Nonaspe, to head towards Fayón you continue along Calle de Maella until arriving at San Bartolomé square. From the square, take Avenida de Millán, which leads downhill leaving the town behind it, passing below Avenida Orbe Cano.

After arriving at the banks of the River Algars, the left trail must be taken which immediately arrives at a bridge. Before crossing and continuing the route, it is possible to carry straight on which takes you to the recreation area of the Nuestra Señora de Dos Aguas shrine. The name in Spanish for this 18th century Baroque shrine refers to “two waters”, making reference to the fact it is located right where the River Matarraña merges with its tributary, the Algars. In addition to the religious building, this recreation area has benches and barbecues, a camping area and a reconstruction of an old oil mill: the *Molí de la Plana*.

Getting back on the trail, cross the River Algars via a narrow concrete bridge which gives way to a gravel track that turns to the left and, just some hundred metres later, a crossing is reached. On the right a trail starts to head towards the castellet de Faió (castle of Fayón), a watch tower built during the third Carlist war. This looks over the track for the next four kilometres. The Nature Trail, however, continues straight along a track which switches between stretches of gravel and stretches of earth, with vineyards and fruit trees on the right, and the banks of the River Algars on the left.

Less than a kilometre away from said crossing is the merger of the Matarraña and Algars rivers, and the Nuestra Señora de Dos Aguas shrine can be seen on the other side of the river. From here, the Trail leaves the River Algars behind and continues along the River Matarraña for nearly all of the remainder of the stage. From this point, the Zaragoza-Caspe-Barcelona railway is also visible; this is another constant element until the end of the trail.



Castellet de Faió, observation tower during the Carlist Wars



The Matarraña valley from the Revuelta de Ribers viewpoint

The trail hugs the vertical walls of the left riverbank, in this section hillside crops lay on the floodplains on the other side of the river. The accumulation of water in this part of the river (due to the “Pla Embatalle” weir) acts as a rest area for different aquatic birds such as cattle egrets, coot and ducks.

After passing underneath a railway viaduct, and next to said weir, the crops return to this side of the river. Afterwards the trail commences upon a demanding, although not too long (barely two kilometres), incline among Aleppo pines. After reaching the top of the mountain pass, and before setting off on the descent down the other side, it is worth taking a momentary detour to enjoy the views from the Revuelta de Ribers viewpoint. This does not just have spectacular views of both sides of the outcrop over the River Matarraña, but it is also easy to spot the griffon vultures that nest in this area and which fly very close by.

From here until its mouth, the river is narrower, but even so each centimetre of its floodplain is made use of for agricultural purposes. And so, after crossing banks once again over a concrete crossing, the trail starts to be accompanied by crops, although when nearing the river it is possible to see the strange shapes in the bedrock. On the opposite side of the valley the railway will also momentarily appear again. The river is crossed once again by means of another crossing to overcome a new bend in the Matarraña, which is so boxed in over the next two kilometres that there is barely any space for crops. There are just pine trees, holm oaks and scrubland, although the crop land soon comes back after crossing the river via another concrete channel.

The river channel starts to increase significantly from here, which is an unmistakable sign that it is nearing its merger. To start with, when the river is close, the trail is



Remains of the viaduct and tunnel of the old railway to Fayón

accompanied by reed beds, and when there is a few metres distance from the river, by pine trees. Further along there are olive groves until reaching the CV-103.

Barely 100 m is spent on this asphalt road, but care should be taken all the same. The road is left by means of a bridge via which the Fayón-La Pobla de Massaluca railway station can be reached, this is the end one of the stages of the Ebro Nature Trail GR-99; in fact, until the end of this stage, both trails share the same route heading towards Fayón.

Leaving the bridge behind, the trail sets out on an incline between the ravine walls in order to reach Fayón, although there is still a surprise on the banks of the Mata-rraña. To the right, under one of the vertical walls which are characteristic of this final stretch of the river, the remains of the viaduct and tunnel that went through the mountain to get to the Viejo Fayón station jut out. The viaduct was knocked down and rebuilt many times, until it was eventually dismantled when Viejo Fayón was submerged under the waters of the Riba-Roja reservoir.

From here, there is only slightly over a kilometre until the end of the nature trail. The incline towards the town is a little steep, passing among the high walls of a ravine, but in just 800 m after passing through an olive grove, the Amanecer roundabout is reached, and when followed all the way around, the panel that marks the end of this stage can be found. The Ebro Nature Trail GR-99 continues its route from here, heading towards Mequinenza.

The town, which was founded fairly recently (in 1967), was built in order to house residents from the old town of Fayón (Viejo Fayón) which was submerged by the water from the Riba-Roja reservoir. It also has a museum dedicated to the Battle of the Ebro. The town's surroundings have places of interest which should not be mis-

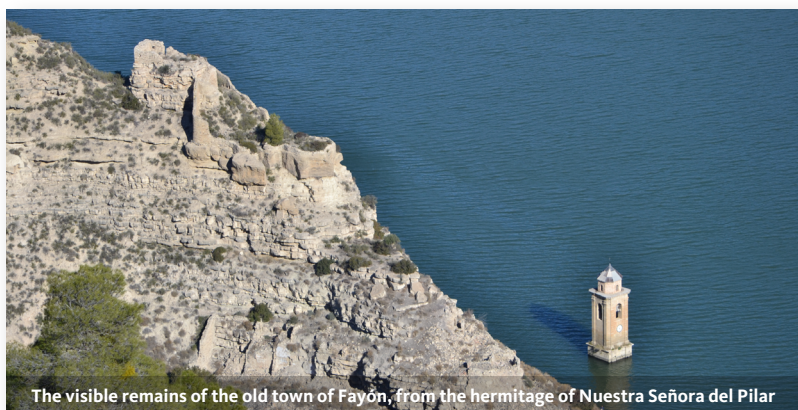
THE OLD TOWN OF FAYÓN

Fayón, the village in which this stage of the trail comes to an end, is in fact the heir of another town with the same name that was submerged with the waters of the Riba-Roja reservoir.

Located on the banks of the river Ebro, this was a prosperous village with an abundance of lignite mining. Here, commercial products on their way to the Mediterranean used to pass through on the Zaragoza-Barcelona railway via Caspe.

When the Riba-Roja reservoir was built in the River Ebro between 1958 and 1967, the current town was built in order to house the residents, as the old town of Fayón was flooded by the reservoir's waters. Despite negotiations to reach an agreement with the National Hydroelectricity Company of Ribagorçana (ENHER) for the relocation of the residents, not all of the inhabitants of old town of Fayón moved to the newly built town.

The best way of viewing the remains of the old town of Fayón is from the viewpoint of the Ebro, next to the Nuestra Señora del Pilar shrine. Towards the south east the railway houses still stand, and the ruins of the cemetery can be seen. Towards the north, the castle of Badón stands on a rock. This is a 14th century fortress which was built on top of a Muslim fort, of which barely a few scraps of its walls have been conserved (which were reformed during the Carlist wars), as well as the remains of the tower. Right at the foot of the castle, one of the area's most characteristic elements can be seen: the parish church tower which juts out of the reservoir's waters. This was built on top of a chapel at the end of the Renaissance, it was dedicated to John the Evangelist and on its main façade it had a couple of polished stone columns topped with a border.



The visible remains of the old town of Fayón, from the hermitage of Nuestra Señora del Pilar

sed. At the top of the hill next to the cemetery, elements which attest the Spanish Civil War can be found, specifically the Nationalist faction's "Fayón position". Some two kilometres away, at the top of a hill surrounded by the Matarraña and Ebro waters, stands the Nuestra Señora del Pilar shrine. Here there is a wonderful viewpoint over the Riba-Roja reservoir, from which the ruins of the old town of Fayón can be seen, as can the ruins of the castle and church tower, the only building which was not demolished after the reservoir was filled.

THE BATTLE OF THE EBRO MUSEUM

In an initiative from the Fayón association Memoria Histórica Militar Ebro 1938 [Ebro Military Historic Memory 1938], after a successful temporary exhibition a municipal vessel was granted, and thanks to the Tourism Development Plans, it has been possible to gain the means in order to finish preparing a museum space dedicated to this decisive battle in the Spanish Civil War. Its 1000 m2 of exhibition space displays artillery elements, armoury and uniforms, plus it also explains how the battle was developed through the use of an abundance of audiovisual resources (panels, videos, photos, etc.). The museum is in Fayón, located at Bajada de la Fábrica, S.N. (Calle B), and it is open Tuesday to Thursday 18:00 to 20:00 and weekends and bank holidays from 11:00 to 14:00 and 18:00 to 20:00.



Fayón, heir to the village covered by the Riba-roja reservoir

STAGE 10 ✂ NONASPE → CASERES

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	⚠	Upward gradient	371 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	234 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🔪	Route lenght (actual distance)	35,90 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	4	🍏	Time	7 h 55 min	🕒

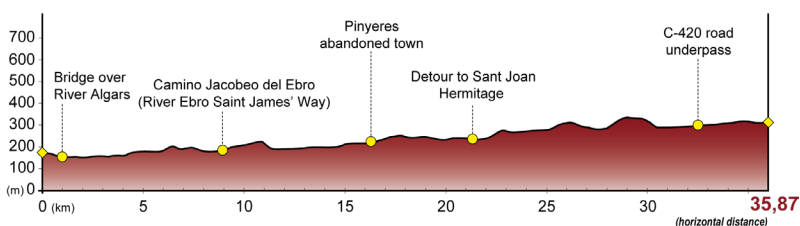
◆ town

● point of interest

Nonaspe

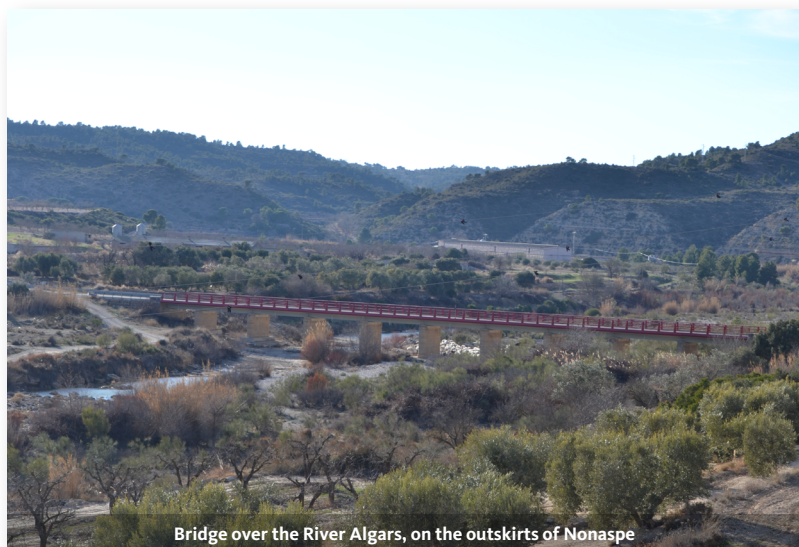


Casares



TRACING THE LOWER COURSE OF THE RIVER ALGARS, THE BORDER BETWEEN AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES

At nearly 36 km, this stage is the longest in the Nature Trail. It leaves behind the banks of the River Matarraña to follow the course of the River Algars, which serves as the boundary between Catalunya and Aragón. We shall follow the river for practically the entire route, which allows us to see the curious shapes made by the water on limestone and sandstone.



Bridge over the River Algars, on the outskirts of Nonaspe



In some sections of the Nature Trail, the farmland gives way to pine forest

Starting from the end point of stage 8 in Nonaspe, to head towards Caseres, said town must be left via Avenida de Catalu a. During the next 700 m the trail follows the A-2411, in order to cross the River Algars via a bridge.

After crossing the river, take the first exit on the right, swapping the asphalt for the gravel or soil of the rural trails which will be followed until the end of the stage. Among the fruit crops and some livestock stables, the River Algars is reached again. It is crossed via a concrete crossing, and the left track is taken at the junction on the other side.

This trail continues once again through tree crops; avoid all the detours until crossing the Algars once again via another crossing. An immediate right turn must be taken, leaving some buildings in front, and continuing until reaching the Roca del Saladar; a rocky esplanade next to where the river has excavated a pool which locals uses as a bathing area.

Although the landscape does not vary much, with the River Algars on the right and a few olive groves on the left, this is occasionally interrupted by a few patches of pine trees. This intensifies in the next section of the trail, in which the route leaves the river and takes a detour to the left, and then straight to the right after a small incline. The pine trees line the left hand slope, with just scrubland on the highest land, whilst on the right the anthropomorphised landscape continues.

After passing by irrigation pools and taking a detour on the right to circle an agricultural/livestock facility, the trail now passes through scrubland and pastures. Lots of other paths cross this trail, and although this is the core one, it is recommendable to pay attention to the signs.

After circling around another area with tree crops, the trail turns to the right in search of the riverbanks to once again travel alongside it. Immediately one of the weirs which control the flow of the river Algars is reached, this has a prominent Mediterranean character. A few metres later, a crossing allows you to cross over the river.

This ford coincides with Stage 5 of the Jacobeo del Ebro Trail, which links Batea and Fabara. It crosses the River Algars, and although there are elements of great historic importance on the other side, such as the Roquízal del Rullo settlement (considered to be the most important Iron Age settlement in the Autonomous Community of Aragón, with items exhibited in the National Archaeological Museum), the route continues along the right side of the river. For nearly two kilometres it shares the route with the Jacobeo del Ebro Trail, after which it veers to the right to descend through pine trees and Mediterranean scrubland to once again reach the river. Here, the water has made whimsical images on the rock.

For the next 5 km, the trail goes past two meanders in the river, among crops, olive groves, scrubland and a few pine trees, passing next to newly excavated wells between rocks and the Les Cadolletes weir. Here, the trail has left the province of Zaragoza to now change Autonomous Communities and enter Tarragona. Moving away gradually from the river, the relative monotony in this section of the stage is interrupted by the abandoned town of Pinyeres (see additional information). Many of its buildings are still standing, especially the church which was built on the top of the hill that the town stands on.



The River Algars carves through the limestone bedrock

PINYERES

This hamlet, in the municipality of Batea, which is unpopulated these days, is located on the banks of the River Algars. It is an area that was inhabited since ancient times, as proven by the nearby Iberian village of Tossal del Moro.

Pinyeres started to have its own inhabitants in the 13th century, with two buildings which stood out among the others: the castle, which was destroyed and reused to make buildings for the locals; and the Transfiguración del Señor church, a beautiful example of a church from the Christian reconquest, transformed into a Gothic one. This is still standing and can be visited.

Its proximity to the river was a great advantage, as it had well irrigated land; however it was also a disadvantage as the location made it susceptible to epidemics. As such, in the period of illnesses and high temperatures, the town used to empty and the locals would split up among the nearby villages such as Batea, Fabara and Nonaspe.

Due to the fact that it is very close to nearby towns and villages with basic services, the population gradually decreased until the last inhabitants moved to Batea in the 1970s.



The abandoned village of Pinyeres



The chapel and the ruins of Sant Joan Castle, perched on a hill

Crossing Pinyeres and leaving the old cemetery behind, the trail continues along not-so-different surroundings. Another Iberian settlement lies on a hill to the right of the trail. It can be reached by taking a detour on the right hand side.

Although the trail has been somewhat away from the river for a while now, it has been passing through a protected area, the PEIN (Protected Space of Natural Interest) Ribera de Algars. Continuing the route and ignoring any tracks which lead off the main one, we come to an asphalt track which was once part of the old highway.

It carries on for a few meters towards the right, and then takes a detour which is again a dirt road. It descends until passing under a bridge which is part of the C-221 highway (from Batea to Maella). We then retake the trail until the edge of the highway. We then immediately take the dirt path on the left.

From this point, the town of Batea is less than 8 km away by the C-221 highway, although for greater security, the hiker can choose to continue along the nature trail and take a detour somewhat later and arrive at the town by using country trails. After a couple of kilometres between the river on one side and fields and

PEIN (PLAN DE ESPACIOS DE INTERÉS NATURAL-SPACES OF NATURAL INTEREST PLAN) RIBERA DE L'ALGARS

In Catalonia, the Spaces of Natural Interest Plan (PEIN), approved in 1992, is a high level planning instrument which structures the system of protected areas in Catalonia and integrates this system throughout the entire territory.

Ribera de l'Algars is a riverside area located on the south western edge of the Central basin, which borders the province of Teruel. The River Algars, together with the River Montsant, is one of the most interesting and best conserved Mediterranean - Catalan rivers; plus it has a wide diversity of fauna, which includes populations of Iberian fish and otters. The landscapes are a stark contrast with the surrounding land, which is profusely dedicated to rainfed crops. As with all Mediterranean river systems, it is very sensitive to alternations.

Besides being within the PEIN, the Ribera de l'Algars is also a SCI and SPAB area.



The Algars Valley as seen from the ruins of Sant Joan Castle



Views of La Gessera from the Nature Trail

scrubland on the other, we come to the detour that ascends to the shrine of Sant Joan d'Algars. Despite being somewhat demanding, this ascent through pine trees and on a gravel track is worthwhile for the spectacular views of the Algars valley. These are even more impressive if you have the energy to climb up to the ruins of the Sant Joan castle.

After passing by another weir, the trail momentarily moves away from the river that meanders significantly at this point, crossing olive groves and vineyards, to meet up again after a kilometre. The nature trail continues to run by the Algars for another 4 km, when it begins to ascend a hill that also causes another meander in the river. To the left, the Punta de la Gessera hill (at a height greater than 400 m, it is one of the most elevated points in this stage and there is an Iberian settlement at its peak) will be a constant landmark until we reach the end of this stage.

The height of the trail offers us good views of the valley of Algars before descending once again towards the river, which is crossed by a concrete ford with pedestrian sections. Changing the river bank once again implies changing the province, this time entering Teruel. Traversing the river's floodplain through farmland for more than a kilometre, the trail then runs along one of the valley walls before coming to the N-420 highway.

The trail changes to a pedestrian path that descends next to the pillars of the two bridges that cross the river at this point (that of the aforementioned N-420 and the old highway that it replaced), to then ascend until it reaches the bridge of the ravine of Vall Robira.

Retaking the wide forest track, the trail enters a pine grove with Mediterranean undergrowth until it practically reaches the end of the route. Close to the river valley, the forest is replaced by rushes and reeds and the road takes a turn to the left and passes by some houses (Venta de Vidiella), crossing the river by a concrete ford. Once again in the province of Tarragona, this long stage ends at the outskirts of Caseres, next to the municipal swimming pool.



Nature Trail has been converted into a footpath for walking under the bridges

STAGE 11 ✂ CASERES → ARENS DE LLEDÓ

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	⚠	Upward gradient	83 m	⬆
Guidance along the route	1	🗺	Downward gradient	35 m	⬆
Route difficulty	2	🔪	Route length (actual distance)	9,81 km	➡
Amount of effort needed	2	🍏	Time	2 h 30 min	🕒

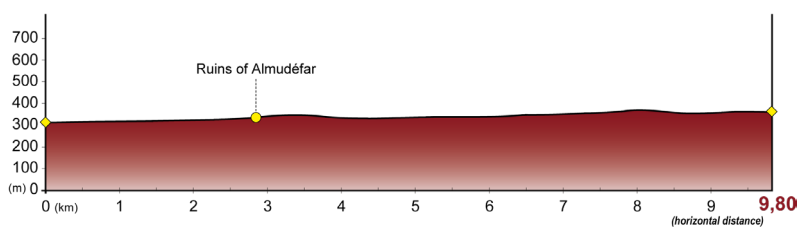
◆ town

● point of interest

Casares



Arens de Lledó



THE RIVER ALGARS RUNS BETWEEN SMALL HILLS WITH PINE FORESTS

This short stage of just under 10 km runs with the continuous company of the Aleppo pine forest (*Pinus halepensis*), which in this area forms some of the densest forests of this tree in the regions of Matarraña (Teruel, on the left bank of the river) and Terra Alta (Tarragona, on the opposite bank).



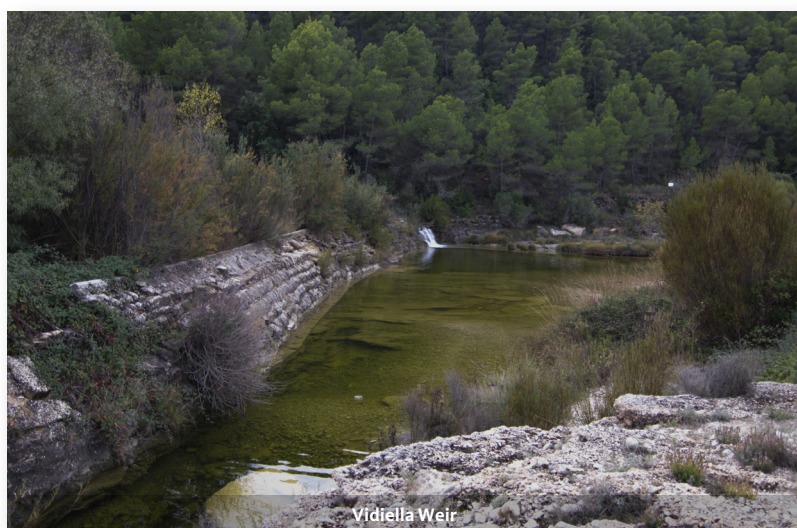
CASERES

Although the centre of the town dates back to the 12th century, the municipality has been inhabited from the 7th century BCE at least, as proved by the Iberian settlements (the Ilercavones) of La Gessera, Los Corralets, Sierra Media, Coll del Moro of Mudefer and El Puig. Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, Cathars, as well as Templar and Hospitaller Knights have passed through this border area. In the modern era, it was a witness to the Reapers' War, and the War of Succession, and later on, it was a victim of the bloody battle of Ebro during the Spanish Civil War.

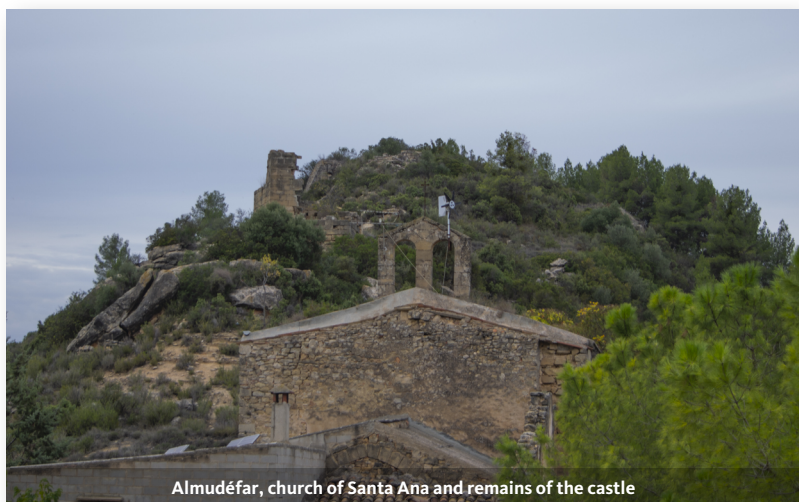
The parish church dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene is a particular archaeological highlight. A Gothic church built in the 16th century, it has since been reformed. On the outskirts of the town is the ancient site of Al mudéfer, which still conserves the remains of the castle and the church of Santa Ana.

The municipality of Caseres is part of the zone of production of three products with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Terra Alta olive oil, Terra Alta wine and Reus hazelnuts.

This stage begins on a wide path that leaves Caseres behind among orchards, farmlands and livestock holdings. To the right, the slowly flowing waters of the Algars form pools and patterns on the rocks in the river bed and on the other bank, the hills are completely covered by pine trees. After a kilometre and half, we pass by a river weir (the weir of Vidiella), where we can take a detour that leads to a recreational area equipped with tables, chairs, and barbecue equipment.



Vidiella Weir



Almudéfar, church of Santa Ana and remains of the castle

The trail turns left and approaches the ruins of Almudéfar, a village in Caseres where the only building still standing is the old parish church of Santa Ana (private property and not used for religious services), and the remains of some stone walls on the top of the hill, that are part of a former castle that was once an important frontier stronghold.

ALMUDÉFAR

The name of this enclave is derived from the Arabic al-muzaffar which means “the victor”. The first mention of Mudéfer dates back to 1280 when the commander of Miravet granted the village to some people of Horta and in 1358 it already had 15 inhabitants. This area was inhabited at least until the mid-20th century.

It was finally incorporated into the municipality of Caseres in 1842 (region of Terra Alta, Tarragona). Today, all that remains of this village are a few ruins, the church of Santa Ana and the vestiges of the Castle of Almudefer at the top of the hill where it once stood.

The castle is known to have existed since 1267. It was part of the Templar grant of Horta de Sant Joan, and was built by the Christians, as no mention of this structure is made in the Miravet grant of 1153. In 1643, during the Reapers’ War, the village was sacked by the troops of the Count-Duke of Olivares.

The parish church of Santa Ana is located at the foot of the fort, with a 14th-century Gothic polygonal apse.



The hillsides appear covered with pine forests

The trail now turns left and passes between a ruined building and a livestock holding to subsequently enter a pine grove. It continues at mid-slope level for a kilometre and half before taking a turn to the right near an orchard and crossing the river by means of a stone bridge. On the other side, and now in the province of Teruel, the route begins a gradual ascent between pine groves and riverside vegetation in the first section, which is later replaced by farmland and orchards when the river valley widens out.

These orchards and farmlands become progressively more common as we approach Arens de Lledó and after somewhat more than 5 km, we come to the crossing with the TE-V3341 highway. At this point, we have two choices: we can continue on the highway (although it passes by the village, precautions must still be taken as there are very small side lanes and no pavements) until the end of this stage within the urban centre; or we can take a detour on the left (50 metres ahead) that descends to the river, crosses it by a bridge and rejoins Stage 12 of the Nature Trail after one kilometre.

The second option is recommended for cyclists in order to make a more comfortable crossing over the river (as we shall see in the next stage, the first option forces the cyclist to cycle over uneven rocks after crossing the river over the concrete ford built for this purpose).

Following the first option, less than 400 m away is the end point of the stage next to «lo Raig» (el chorro, in Spanish), as the small waterfall produced by the canal of Arens is called. A walk through the streets of this town is highly recommended, especially a visit to the Plaza Mayor and the church of La Asunción which stands next to a viewpoint with impressive views of the valley of Algars.

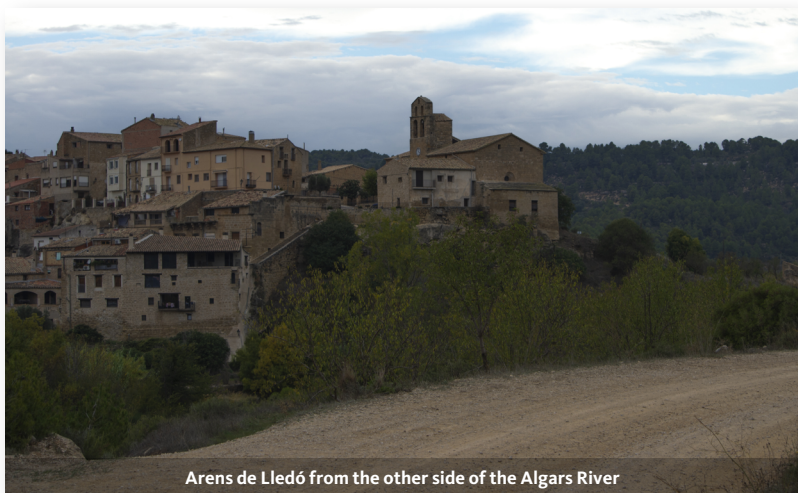
ARENS DE LLEDÓ

This municipality in the region of Matarraña, which was granted the status of Villa in 1785, is located in the easternmost zone of the province of Teruel, and shares a border with Terra Alta in Tarragona (Catalunya).

The zone has been inhabited since the Bronze Age and different Iberian burial mounds have been unearthed in the municipality (in good states of preservation; a route has been made available to visit them). From the Islamic period we have one of the weirs that diverted water from the Algars to canals. There are still some remains of medieval walls. During the modern age, it suffered, as did many other villages in the area, damages incurred in the Spanish Civil War, when the municipal archive was burnt.

A fine example of religious architecture is the church of La Asunción (declared a Site of Cultural Interest in 1983), built in the Gothic style (14th century) in masonry, although it was expanded in the 17th century, and alongside we have the remains of what was once a 16th-century Franciscan convent, now greatly changed from its original structure. 6 kilometres to the west of the urban quarter we have the 18th-century shrine of San Hipólito (or San Pol, built over an earlier medieval structure); located on a high section that dominates the zone and is still an important religious and pilgrimage site.

Some noteworthy civil constructions are the Plaza Mayor and the Town Hall which is built in a 17th-century Renaissance style, the Casa de la tía Soledad, a Modernist building constructed in the early 20th century that, with its five floors, is the tallest building in the village.



Arens de Lledó from the other side of the Algars River



Viaduct over the Algars River, next to the abandoned Arnes - Lledó station

STAGE 12 ARENS DE LLEDÓ → ARNES

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	158 m 
Guidance along the route	2 	Downward gradient	33 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route lenght (actual distance)*	12,82 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time**	4 h 15 min 

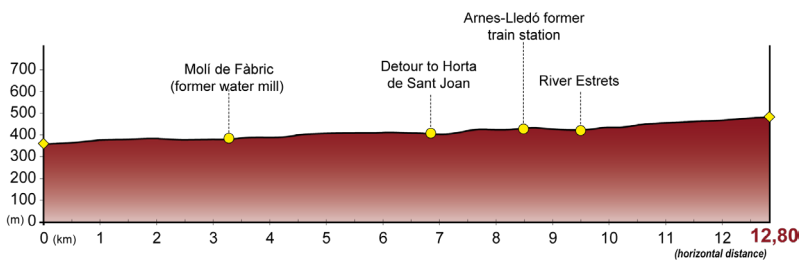
 town  point of interest

* Stage length excluding branches and alternative routes

** Stage duration excluding branches and alternative routes

Arens de Lledó

Arnes



RETURN TO PUERTOS DE TORTOSA BECEITE

Stage 12 takes us back to the presence of the Puertos de Tortosa Beceite mountain range on the horizon, where Stage 1 of the Nature Trail began. The trail runs through extensive fields for cultivation (fruits and olive orchards), especially the large plain that lies between Lledó and Horta de Sant Joan, this latter area being accessible through a detour that leads to its former train station. It is possible to access the Nature Trails of Terra Alta and Val de Zafán from this railway station, as well as from the disused station of Arnes-Lledó.



The Nature Trail at the exit of Arens de Lledó



Goats on the Nature Trail

As mentioned in the previous stage, there are two ways to advance from Stage 11 to Stage 12, the first goes through the urban centre of Arens de Lledó and the second around it. In the first case, the end of Stage 11 which is marked by the information panel located near «lo Raig» (el chorro, in Spanish), is where Stage 12 begins immediately. It initially runs along the canal, following Calle del Río which descends to the River Algars which is crossed by a concrete ford built for this purpose. After reaching the opposite bank and advancing a few metres along the naturally eroded rocky terrain, we come to a country road that connects to the external variant.

The second option (this same external variant, recommended for cyclists as it avoids passing through the aforementioned irregular rocky terrain) can be taken directly without entering the centre of Arens de Lledó (see Stage 11) or if we have decided to enter the urban centre, we can retake it by retreating a few hundred metres along the highway towards Calaceite and on the right-hand side, taking the detour that descends to the river and crossing it via a concrete bridge. Half a kilometre of walking along a dirt road brings us to the trail that ascends from the river as described in the first alternative.

On this side of the river, we find ourselves in the province of Tarragona, with a landscape similar to the final section of the previous stage, consisting of fields for cultivation and some orchards where the river valley widens out, and with pine groves in the rougher areas. The trail soon meets up with the TV-3341 highway and continues on it for more than 200 m (while not very long, it is wise to take all precautions as this section is located between two bends in the highway).

LLEDÓ

Humans have settled in these lands of Lledó since antiquity, as demonstrated by the archaeological remains dating back to the Iberian era in the entire region of Matarraña and bordering areas (Terra Alta, Bajo Aragón-Caspe, etc.)

During the Christian Reconquest, these lands were included in the land grant of Calaceite, and in 1205 the Order of Calatrava handed over Calaceite, Lledó and Arens de Lledó to Rolando de Cambrils and Dalmacio de Canyelles with the goal of resettling the territory. This attempt at repopulation was unsuccessful and in 1209, the King of Aragón, Pedro II made over Lledó to the bishop of Tortosa.

In October 1210, the bishop Gombaldo de Santa Oliva granted a Town Charter to the new inhabitants of Lledó, giving them houses and lands. The town would remain under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Tortosa until the 15th century at least. In 1834, it was granted municipal status and became part of the judicial district of Valderrobres, until it was finally included in Alcañiz in 1965.

A noteworthy example of its architectural heritage is the Parish Church of St James the Apostle, a 14th-century Gothic building in masonry, and the Town Hall, built in 1610. 4 km away from the urban quarter is the shrine of Santa Rosa de Viterbo.

Lledó's economy has traditionally been reliant on agriculture, a sector that continues to be greatly important to the town. Within the agricultural sector, almost 1000 hectares of land have been dedicated to growing olives, almonds and other fruits. With regard to livestock, sheep raising is the only industry of the town. Tourism in this area has greatly increased in recent years, which has made it the only major alternative to agriculture and livestock farming.



Lledó



The River Algars crosses near the “Molí de Fàbrica”

We then exit the highway by a path on the right and walk along a section very near the riverbed where pine groves and Mediterranean undergrowth blend with river vegetation such as reeds and rushes.

The trail turns to the right and comes to a bridge on the Algars which faces a large building, the “Molí de Fàbrica” (currently a private property). After crossing the river and going around the building, the road turns left at a livestock holding to once again cross the river. During these last 800 metres on the left bank of the Algars, the trail has again entered the province of Teruel.

Subsequently, on the right bank (and therefore, in Tarragona), the road ascends gently and passes by another livestock holding and a brick chimney which is all that remains of the old Sulfuro del Cassol de Lledó building. The ascent ends at a viewpoint from where we can see another former mill (molí de Lledó) and the weir that diverted the waters of the river towards the mill.

This ascent also means exiting the river canyon. From here onwards towards the south, a wide esplanade opens up where we see at a distance, the hill on which the town of Horta de Sant Joan is situated, La Magdalena mountain, and the cliffs of Puertos de Tortosa-Beceite.

The trail continues through farmlands until it reaches a small hilltop where it turns right to and goes around the hill by means of a smaller trail than the one that we have followed until now. Between this elevation to the left and the River Algars to the right, the trail enters a pine grove and after approximately an hour and a half, it comes to an intersection. To the left is the road leading to the town of Horta de Sant Joan and its former station, to the right the main trail towards Arnes continues.

On the main trail, the pine grove soon opens up and provides a glimpse of the town of Lledó, to the right and on the other side of the river. Having returned to crop fields, the trail continues until it reaches a wide country road which it follows for a few metres until an intersection. Here, one can take the highway to the right towards Lledó, but the Nature Trail also continues on the right hand side until it crosses the old railway track of La Val de Zafán, now a Nature Trail. The remains of the former railway station of Arnes-Lledó lie less than 200 metres away and although its buildings are in ruins, a rest area has been established there. Two Nature Trails that share the same old railway track begin at this station, the Nature Trail of Terra Alta to the northeast and La Val de Zafán Nature Trail towards the southwest.

Leaving behind the former station, we proceed to the highway that leads to Lledó. After continuing along the highway for 200 metres, we take a trail to the left, under the imposing viaduct of Algás, which is part of the Val de Zafán railway network. Before arriving at Lledó, this highway passes near the parking lot of the bathing area of the River Algars, whose waters have formed pools with the aid of a weir.

The trail again enters a pine grove, with glimpses of the viaduct available among the trees. The pine grove is interrupted by a small livestock holding and the descent to the River Estrets, which is forded by a concrete bridge. The pine grove then continues for another kilometre and half and opens up to a large plain covered with almond trees that extends all the way until the T-333 highway.



Former Arnes station – Lledó



Arrival in Arnes, on the other side of the T-333 road

After we cross the highway and walk alongside it for a few metres, we turn left to the road leading to Arnes, thus ending this stage at the town entrance, and the crossing with Calle Onze de Setembre. A walk through this town is highly recommended, especially the square that holds the town hall and church, for a look at these two interesting buildings as well as the view of the cliffs of Puertos de Tortosa Beceite.

BRANCH TO HORTA DE SANT JOAN

From the above-mentioned crossing, the trail continues on the left through alternating pine and olive groves, until the latter dominates the terrain. This section passes over the Nature Trail of Terra Alta, by means of an old railway tunnel, and here we can see the trench taken by the other trail.

Two views loom over the horizon in this section, to the northeast we have Horta de Sant Joan (located on a hill) and behind the mountain of Santa Bárbara towards the southeast, we have Puertos de Tortosa-Beceite with its unique Roques de Benet formation; rocky outcrops that consist of conglomerate and limestone rocks with vertical walls up to 300 metres high.

After a distance of nearly 2.5 km, the dirt road converts into an asphalt road as it reaches Horta de Sant Joan. To access the town, enter through Calle Navarra which leads to the Plaza de Catalunya. Before leaving this town for the old railway station, take a walk through the old quarter to discover its rich architectural and historical heritage. You can also have a magnificent view of the mountain of Santa Bárbara and Puertos de Tortosa-Beceite from the viewpoint in the northeast section of the old quarter.

From Plaza de Catalunya, an asphalted road takes you down the hill through vineyards and almond orchards. After 1.5 km on this road, we come to a bridge over the old railway track. This detour of the Nature Trail ends past the bridge and to the left at the site of the former railway station of Horta de Sant Joan, now in ruins. Here we reconnect with the Nature Trail of La Val de Zafán (Terra Alta section).

HORTA DE SANT JOAN

Although not much is known about the origins of this town, the remains of an Iberian settlement have been found in the upper section of the town. In the 8th century, Horta was under Muslim rule, and passed into Christian hands in the 13th century.

Under the Templars, the first local legislation was drafted (1296). In that period, the locality also included Arnes and Prat de Comte. After the dissolution of the Order of the Knights Templar, their assets, including Horta de Sant, were made over to the Knights Hospitaller.

In the modern age, the name of Horta has been linked, above all, to Pablo Ruíz Picasso, who resided in the town on two occasions while painting some of his landscapes.



Horta de Sant Joan from the branch of Stage 12

The old quarter of Horta is worth visiting for its architecture, which still retains the medieval character of its narrow streets that spiral around the highest point of the town, where the now-vanished castle of Orta once stood. Apart from the church (of Gothic style, its construction began intermittently in the 12th and the 14th centuries, but it was completed in the 16th century), and the town hall (Renaissance style, 16th century), other noteworthy constructions are the porticoed square surrounded by Renaissance buildings, or the Casas del Pedido or Diezmo (a 16th or 17th century Renaissance palace).

Overlooking Horta de Sant Joan is the mountain of Santa Bárbara, 751 metres high. Its slopes hold the convent of San Salvador de Horta (while its real name is the convent of Virgen de los Ángeles, its more popular appellation is due to its having been the residence of the Franciscan friar San Salvador)..

The economic activity of Horta de Sant Joan is based on agriculture. Apart from the three basic dryland crops (olives, grapes, cereal), almond trees also occupy a significant part of the arable land. Livestock farming consists mainly of pig farms and to a lesser extent, rabbits, cows or poultry, large-scale farming consists primarily of sheep and goats.

In recent years, the tourism sector has experienced an exponential growth (country homes, restaurants, tourist guides) which, as a more attractive sector when combined with farming, has provided employment initiatives and thus halted depopulation.



The Santa Bárbara mountain, with the Convent of San Salvador on its slope

STAGE 13 ARNES → BECEITE

MIDE

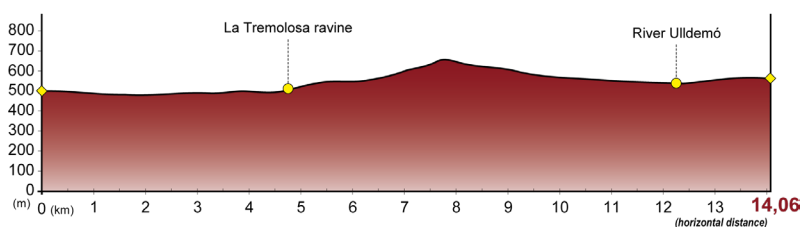
Harshness of natural environment	2 	Upward gradient	221 m 
Guidance along the route	2 	Downward gradient	159 m 
Route difficulty	2 	Route lenght (actual distance)	14,10 km 
Amount of effort needed	3 	Time	4 h 5 min 

 town

 point of interest

Arnes

Beceite



FROM THE RIVER ALGARS TO THE RIVER ULLDEMÓ ALONG THE RAVINE OF LA TREMOLOSA

This stage leaves the River Algars behind to follow the ravine of La Tremolosa in search of the valley of Ulldemó, a small river that flows into the Matarraña in the village of Beceite, the final point of the stage. In this village the route reconnects with Stage 1 of the trail, thus completing the circular formation that has taken the traveller through three provinces in two autonomous communities in the almost perpetual company of either of the two rivers that lend their names to this Nature Trail.





The bedrock carved out by the River Algars

At the intersection of the highway to Arnes with Calle Onze de Setembre, we take the road to the right, passing along a detour towards one of the old snow wells of the village (located at a height of around 400 metres, within an olive grove in the outskirts). The street of Onze de Setembre changes its name to Calle Aragó near the information centre of Arnes, located in a former oil mill.

After 200 metres on this road, we turn left, leaving behind the last houses of the village and walk for a few metres along the road that leads to Toll de Vidre (7 km away), a picturesque section of the Algars canyon where the river has dug a pool with a small waterfall and which is currently equipped as a bathing zone.

After passing by a livestock holding, we come to a fork where we leave the road to Toll de Vidre and take the path to the right which descends to the ravine of La Maria. The road then ascends and the olive groves begin to give way to evergreen oaks and pines, with the River Algars accompanying us all along the route.

The final change of province, so frequent in earlier stages, takes place at more than 2 km into this section, when we cross the Algars for the last time, by means of a concrete bridge along a dike with a stream gauge near the enclave known as Toll de la Verdura.

After a gentle ascent, now on the Teruel side of the river, the trail turns left and continues through a similar landscape of pines and evergreen oaks, with the occasional olive grove on the river bank. We advance until we come to a bridge on the ravine of La Tremolosa, the main highlight of the following section of the trail.

From this point onwards, the Nature Trail bids goodbye to the River Algars, its faithful companion during the last 3 stages, which continues flowing to the southeast while the trail takes the southwest route.

ARNES

A town in Tarragona, its origins are uncertain. It was initially thought to have been a Saracen alquería (agricultural holding) conquered by Alfonso II who included it in the Templar grant of Horta de Sant Joan for resettlement. As was the case with the rest of their assets, when the Templar Order was disbanded, the town was passed on to the Knights Hospitaller and remained church property until the Madoz confiscation (mid-19th century). The village derives its name from the Catalan word arna, or moth, as its coat of arms depicts two of these insects.

Its town hall, one of the first Renaissance buildings in Catalunya which dates back to 1584, its Baroque parish church (dedicated to Saint Magdalene) built in 1693 on the remains of an earlier Gothic church, and its gateways that lead to the old quarter of the city, have significant architectural worth. On the outskirts of the village we can find the shrine of Santa Madrona (15th-16th century, although it was considerably damaged in a fire during the Civil War) and the snow well, a typical rural construction in Catalunya, built to gather and store snow and ice in winter that could be used later.

Although the economy of this town has traditionally focused on livestock and agriculture, the development of the tourism sector in recent years has halted depopulation (a large part of the town is located within the Natural Park of Los Puertos), Arnes has become a frequently visited area. A honey festival has been held since 2003 and it has enjoyed considerable success both within the region and in bordering areas in Catalunya and Aragón.



Arnes Council

After a fork where we take the path on the right, the trail begins to slope upwards, going around an olive grove. The landscape is now densely forested by pines with Mediterranean undergrowth, and the occasional evergreen oak.

The trail descends after crossing another olive grove, in search of the ravine of La Tremolosa. It leaves the forest route to the right and takes a dirt road straight ahead. From now on, the ravine to the right of the trail will be our constant companion and we begin a continuous ascent that only stops at the end of the ravine.

Half a kilometre later, the forest path is exchanged for a pedestrian path (from here onwards, the trail is no longer suitable for bikes) that extends for the next 2 km. This is the hardest section of the entire stage (with the exception of some sections in Stages 1 and 2 of the Nature Trail) both due to the incline (a maximum of 7%) and due to the road surface, its limited width and the loose earth.

For the first 400 metres we continue to pass through the aforementioned pine groves but then we come to a section 300 m long where the land is almost bare and we must be extremely careful as the walls are steep and the fall on the right of the road may be dangerous. On at least two occasions we must walk over rocks (extreme caution is required if they are wet) instead of earth. Even so, the views of the valley created by the ravine are well worth the effort and precautions taken.

For the rest of the pedestrian path we are no longer accompanied by the ravine of La Tremolosa that continues to the southwest, as the path turns to the south, now with views of the Peña Galera peak. After a somewhat demanding final uphill climb due to the fact that the soil may be quite loose, we come to the end of the incline at a wide and firm forest road.



Section of pedestrian path, with the Peña Galera peak in the background



Ulldemó River

We now descend gently but constantly, and the landscape becomes a pine grove similar to that of the earlier section, later substituted by olive groves and subsequently, fruit orchards.

The trail continues along the ravine of Coll d'en Selma for 3 km, which is barely noticeable except for the presence of riverside vegetation. Now firmly in agricultural territory after passing by a poultry farm and some livestock holdings, the trail comes to the River Ulldemó flowing along the right for more than 1 km along a path that is now paved.

We cross the River Ulldemó by a concrete ford with pedestrian sections and proceed through livestock holdings and orchards, ignoring all detours on both sides of the trail. One of these detours (750 m from the river crossing) lets us access the highway to reach the area called La Pesquera, where the enclosed River Ulldemó forms various pools that are suitable for bathing.

The trail finally arrives at the first houses of Beceite, near a parking lot and a fountain, and continues through Calle Llana until it enters one of the picturesque streets of this town. Although the trail continues towards the junction with Calle Diputació, it is worth approaching the square where the town hall and church are located (it is usually a good idea to walk around the narrow streets of the city's old quarter).

We leave the old quarter by Calle Villanueva, underneath an arch that leads to Calle Ronda, where this stage of the Nature Trail of Matarranya-Algars comes to an end, and after 12 stages and more than 150 km, finally reconnects with Stage 1.

BECEITE

The place name derives from the Arabic bayt Zayd, meaning 'house of Zayd', which, like other place names in Aragon with the same root (Calaceite, Zaidin, Binaced...), suggests the presence of the Zaydi Shia minority. As in so many other parts of the region, Iberian remains have been found throughout the municipal area, and the cave paintings at La Fenellosa show that the area has been inhabited since at least the Bronze Age. Some vestiges of its medieval past still remain, such as the five gateways that provided access to the town, notably the San Gregorio gateway. It is also worth visiting the Stone Bridge leading into the town, which was built in the 15th century to prevent the town from being cut off during floods of the Matarraña.

Another of the town's points of interest is its town hall, built in the late 16th century, which has played a key role in various events throughout history. The building was set on fire on several occasions, the last time during the Carlist War, which ended in 1840. Furthermore, in 1933, during the proclamation of the anarcho-syndicalist revolution in the town, the building was seized and the municipal archives were burned. Over the centuries, it has served as the residence of the archbishops of Zaragoza prior to the confiscations, later becoming the headquarters of the Mutual Aid Society, and subsequently serving as a prison, cinema, theatre and bar. Also of note is the church of San Bartolomé, built in the 17th century on the ruins of an earlier 13th-century church.

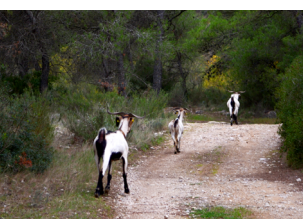
For centuries, the main economic driver of the municipality was the paper industry (see information in section 1). Today, the economy is based on sheep and pig farming, supplemented by olive and almond cultivation; however, the service sector—tourism and hospitality—is seen as having the greatest potential for the future, making Beceite one of the most popular tourist destinations in the province of Teruel.



This stage concludes after one of the access gates to the old town of Beceite

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

• BECEITE COUNCIL www.beceite.es/	978 85 02 25
• VALDERROBRES COUNCIL www.valderrobres.es	978 85 00 01
• TORRE DEL COMPTE COUNCIL www.torredelcompte.es	978 85 41 37
• LA FRESNEDA COUNCIL www.lafresneda.gob.es	978 85 41 69
• VALDELTORMO COUNCIL www.valdeltormo.com	978 85 80 01
• CALACEITE COUNCIL www.calaceite.es	978 85 10 01
• MAZALEÓN COUNCIL www.mazaleon.es	978 89 86 92
• MAELLA COUNCIL www.maella.es	976 63 80 11
• FABARA COUNCIL www.ayuntamiento-fabara.com	976 63 50 01
• NONASPE COUNCIL www.nonaspe.es	976 63 60 01
• FAYÓN COUNCIL www.fayon.es	976 63 59 59
• BATEA COUNCIL www.batea.altanet.org	977 43 00 03
• CASERES COUNCIL www.caseres.altanet.org	977 43 19 09
• ARENS DE LLEDÓ COUNCIL www.arendelledo.es	978 85 31 00
• LLEDÓ COUNCIL www.lledo.es	978 89 19 32
• HORTA DE SANT JOAN COUNCIL www.hortadesantjoan.cat	977 43 50 05
• CRETAS COUNCIL www.cretas.es	978 85 03 00
• ARNES COUNCIL www.arnes.altanet.org	977 43 51 34
• MATARRAÑA REGION www.comarcamatarranya.es	978 89 08 60
• BAJO ARAGÓN - CASPE REGION www.cbac.es	976 63 90 78
• TERRA ALTA REGION www.terra-alta.org/en/	977 42 00 18
• THE IBERIANS IN LOWER ARAGON www.iberosenaragon.net	
• ELS PORTS NATURAL PARK www.catalunya.com/en/continguts/patrimoni-natural/els-ports-natural-park-17-17001-573555	



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.