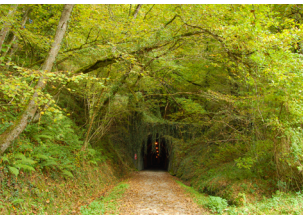
Nature Trails

Plazaola Nature Trail









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

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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Title:
Plazaola Nature Trail.

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

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

Design and layout:
Tragsatec. Grupo Tragsa

NIPO: 003-26-112-2

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

e-mail:
centropublicaciones@mapa.es

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

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MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN
SUBSECRETARÍA
SECRETARÍA GENERAL TÉCNICA
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Guide to the
NATURE TRAILS
of Spain

Nature Trails

Plazaola Nature Trail

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACIÓN

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INTRODUCTION

The Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail is one of the most spectacular hikes in Spain. This route, spread over four stages, takes in areas of Navarre and Gipuzkoa that combine natural beauty, railway heritage and rural traditions. From the woods and hamlets around Leitzaran, in Andoain, to Pamplona, a green and welcoming city, this route goes through villages steeped in history and landscapes that change with the route.

The dense, shady forests of beech, chestnut and oak trees feature prominently along much of the route, particularly in its early sections. Further on, the landscape gives way to more open areas, with pastures where Latxa sheep graze and land used for rain-fed farming. Towards the end, the route winds its way through the outskirts of the city until it reaches the capital of Navarre, a city that invites to discover its historical heritage, its green spaces and its cuisine.

The railway's history is evident throughout this route, with old stations such as Lekunberri, which houses the headquarters of the Plazaola Tourism Consortium; viaducts such as those at Auzokalte and Gulina; and, above all, numerous tunnels. Among them, the Uitzi tunnel stands out, with a course of 2.7 km, making it the longest in Spain's Network of Nature Trails.

Plazaola train

This narrow-gauge, steam-powered railway originated as a mining line that transported iron from the mines at Plazaola to Andoain (Gipuzkoa). In 1914, the Plazaola underwent a transformation and entered a new phase, expanding its services as a passenger train and connecting Pamplona with Donostia/San Sebastián along its 84 km route. During its nearly forty years of operation, it became a key hub for communication and commercial and cultural exchange between Navarre and Gipuzkoa.

Although its economic significance was limited, the train enjoyed great popularity along its entire route, where it was commonly known as "the Plazaola", "the Plazaola train", "the Plazaola railway" and also affectionately as the "tren txiki". This latter name, meaning "mini-train" in Basque, was also used to refer to other railways in the area, such as the one linking Irun and Elizondo.

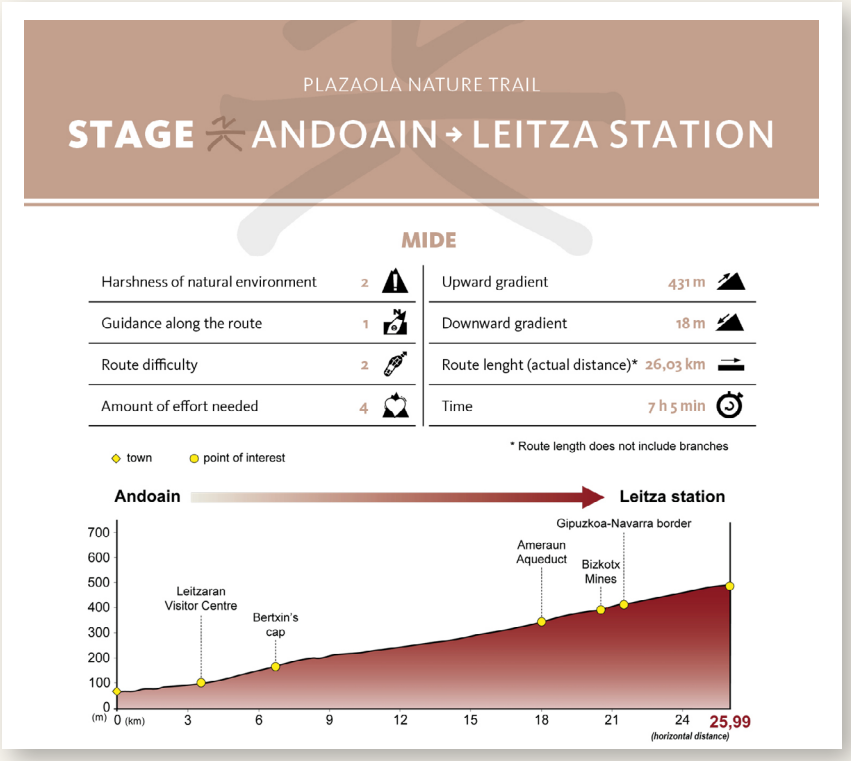
The floods of October 1953 swept away several bridges and sections of track, rendering the railway line unusable at various points. Added to this was fierce competition from bus companies, which led to the closure of the passenger transport service that same year. However, the railway line continued to operate some freight services on the section of the Leitzaran Valley in Gipuzkoa. In 1958, the line was closed down for good, the track was subsequently removed, and the facilities were dismantled.

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

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

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

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



Example of MIDE application

Environment
Severity of the natural environment



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

Route
Orientation on the route



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

Terrain
Difficulty of terrain



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

Efforts
Degree of effort required



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

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

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

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

MIDE

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

Colour indicative of the Geographical Sector in which it is located

Name of the Nature Trail

Name of the stage of the Nature Trail

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

Introductory text

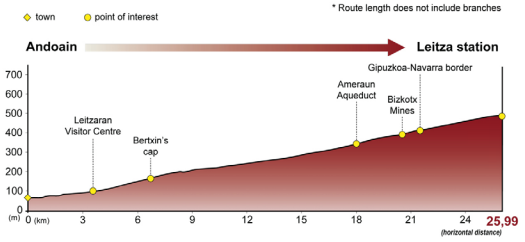
PLAZAOLA NATURE TRAIL

STAGE ANDOAIN → LEITZA STATION

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	2	Upward gradient	431 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	18 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	26,03 km
Amount of effort needed	4	Time	7 h 5 min

* Route length does not include branches



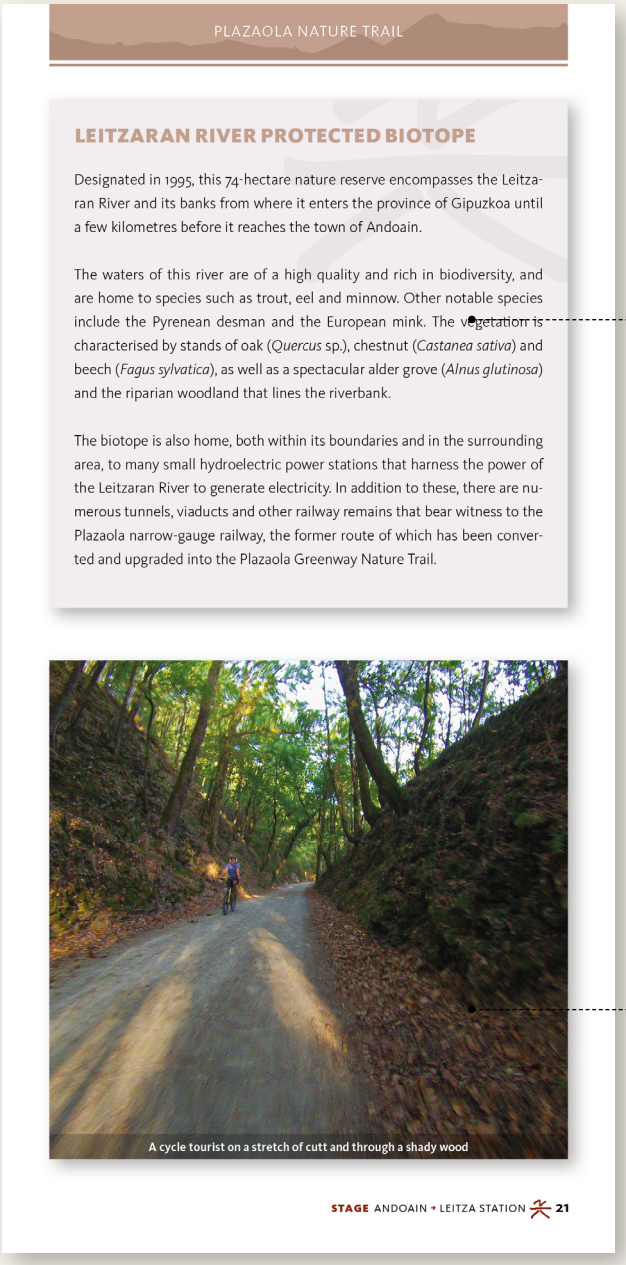
FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE OLD RAILWAY THROUGH THE SPECTACULAR LEITZARAN VALLEY

This stage begins in the town of Andoain and, after passing through part of the town centre, the train journey takes us into the Leitzaran Protected Biotope, where we can marvel at the rich flora and the beautiful scenery, whilst also discovering the numerous tunnels and other remnants of the railway's past. The route reaches the boundary between Gipuzkoa and Navarre, where the Basque Giant Chair stands, and ends in the picturesque Navarrese town of Leitza, which offers a range of facilities.



Decorative plaque marking the route in Andoain

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.



LEITZARAN RIVER PROTECTED BIOTOPE

Designated in 1995, this 74-hectare nature reserve encompasses the Leitzaran River and its banks from where it enters the province of Gipuzkoa until a few kilometres before it reaches the town of Andoain.

The waters of this river are of a high quality and rich in biodiversity, and are home to species such as trout, eel and minnow. Other notable species include the Pyrenean desman and the European mink. The vegetation is characterised by stands of oak (*Quercus* sp.), chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), as well as a spectacular alder grove (*Alnus glutinosa*) and the riparian woodland that lines the riverbank.

The biotope is also home, both within its boundaries and in the surrounding area, to many small hydroelectric power stations that harness the power of the Leitzaran River to generate electricity. In addition to these, there are numerous tunnels, viaducts and other railway remains that bear witness to the Plazaola narrow-gauge railway, the former route of which has been converted and upgraded into the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail.

A cycle tourist on a stretch of cutt and through a shady wood

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

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

NATURE TRAILS

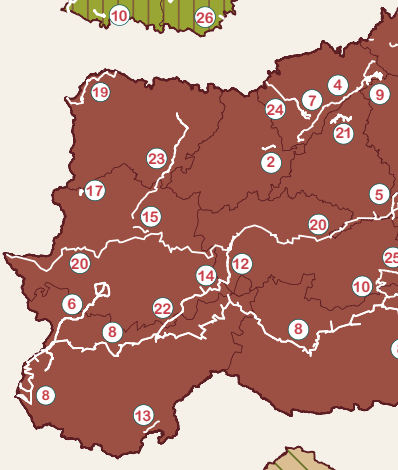
I. NORTHWEST PENINSULAR SECTOR

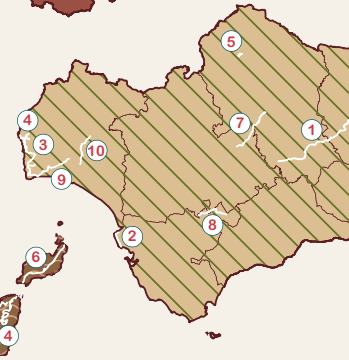
- Cacabelos - Quilós (1)
- Carballeda de Avia (2)
- Dos Arrieiros (3)
- Ebro (4)
- Esla (5)
- Laciana. Villablino to Villaseca section (6)
- Mirada Circular: Ancares Leoneses from Guímara to Balboa (7)
- Muñigo - Covadonga (8)
- Pas (9)
- Sayagués Agricultural Landscape (10)
- La Ribeira Sacra (11)
-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



VI. CENTRAL PENINSULAR SECTOR

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





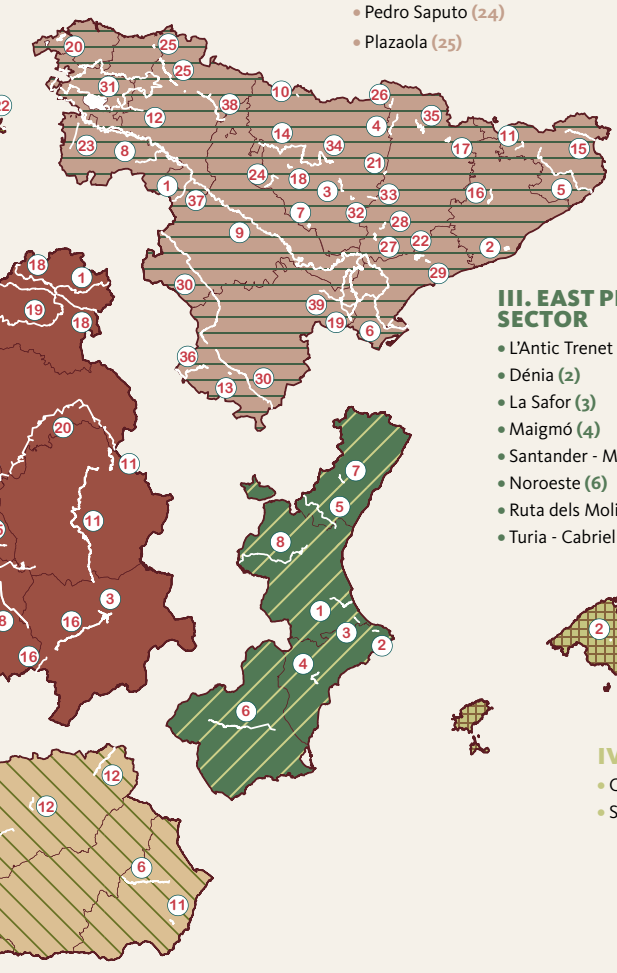


VII. CANARY SECTOR

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

II. NORTHEAST PENINSULAR SECTOR

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



III. EAST PENINSULAR SECTOR

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



IV. BALEARIC SECTOR

- Camí de Cavalls (1)
- Son Juny (2)

V. SOUTHERN PENINSULAR SECTOR

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

PLAZAOLA NATURE TRAIL



PLAZAOLA NATURE TRAIL	PAG.
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STAGE • LEKUNBERRI STATION ➔ IRURTZUN	31
STAGE • IRURTZUN ➔ PAMPLONA/IRUÑA	39



Giant chair from the Basque Country

STAGE ANDOAIN → LEITZA STATION

MIDE

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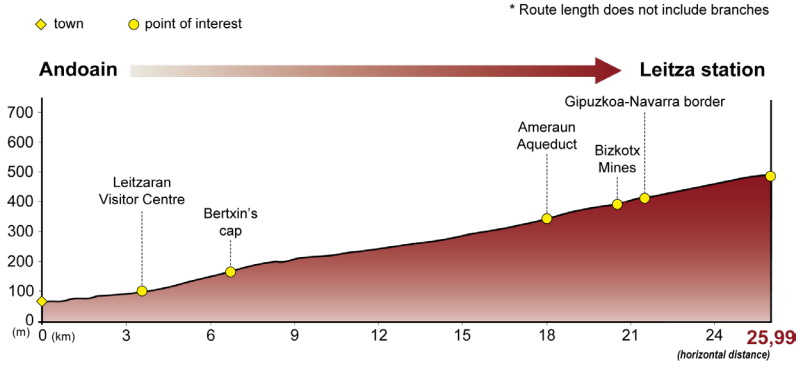

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Decorative plaque marking the route in Andoain

The Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail begins next to an industrial building, at the northern entrance to Andoain. The route follows the old railway line, as it is obvious from the very first few metres, as it passes through the first tunnel shortly after setting off. Once past this point, the route continues south-west, gradually entering the town.

The route continues in a straight line along Arantzibia Street, where it climbs a slight incline and passes close to the church of San Martín de Tous and the town hall, both built in the 18th century. The road returns to the old railway line and, after crossing La Salle Avenue, reaches the old palace now known as *Urigain Etxea*. This multidisciplinary cultural centre, run by Andoain Town Council, also houses the Tourist Information Office.

At this point there is an information panel detailing the adventure that has just begun along the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail. The route continues between stone walls until it reaches a street again. After crossing it at the pedestrian crossing provided for this purpose, the route turns left onto a red-cobbled path that leads out of the town.

The route winds its way through a wooded area consisting mainly of oak trees (*Quercus* sp.) and chestnut trees (*Castanea sativa*) until it reaches the Antzizar tunnel, which is almost 100 metres long. The tunnel is well-lit and well-maintained, and leads us to an area somewhat apart from the town centre.



Auzokalte Viaduct



Urigain Etxea in Andoain

The route continues halfway up the hillside through woods and grassland until it reaches a turn-off to the right which, after a short descent of less than half a kilometre, leads to the Olazar Park leisure area. After the visit, it is necessary to retrace your steps until to rejoin the main route.





A user taking part in sport in the Leitzaran Valley

Back on the old railway line, the route continues in the pleasant shade of the trees until it reaches the impressive Auzokalte viaduct. Its central area is a good place to stop and enjoy the views and the tranquillity of the surroundings. After crossing this area, a few metres further on, the path finds the Otieta tunnel, which is 280 metres long and has artificial lighting. However, it is always advisable to carry a torch, headlamp or bike light, as not all the tunnels on this stage are lit.

At the tunnel exit, the trail comes to the car park for the Leitzaran Protected Biotope. From there, a few metres down to the right, the trail comes to the Leitzaran Visitor Centre, which features a wide range of interpretation material, a bicycle repair station, a rest area and toilets. All this is located beside the Leitzaran River and the Unanibia Bridge – popularly known as the Witches' Bridge – so there are plenty of reasons to enjoy this spot before continuing the adventure.

The route then heads into the Leitzaran Valley, following the old narrow-gauge railway line, which is now popular with both visitors and locals. This natural area offers a range of leisure and recreational activities, such as climbing and fishing – subject to the relevant permits and authorisations – as well as walking and cycle touring through this beautiful protected area along the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail.

LEITZARAN RIVER PROTECTED BIOTOPE

Designated in 1995, this 74-hectare nature reserve encompasses the Leitzaran River and its banks from where it enters the province of Gipuzkoa until a few kilometres before it reaches the town of Andoain.

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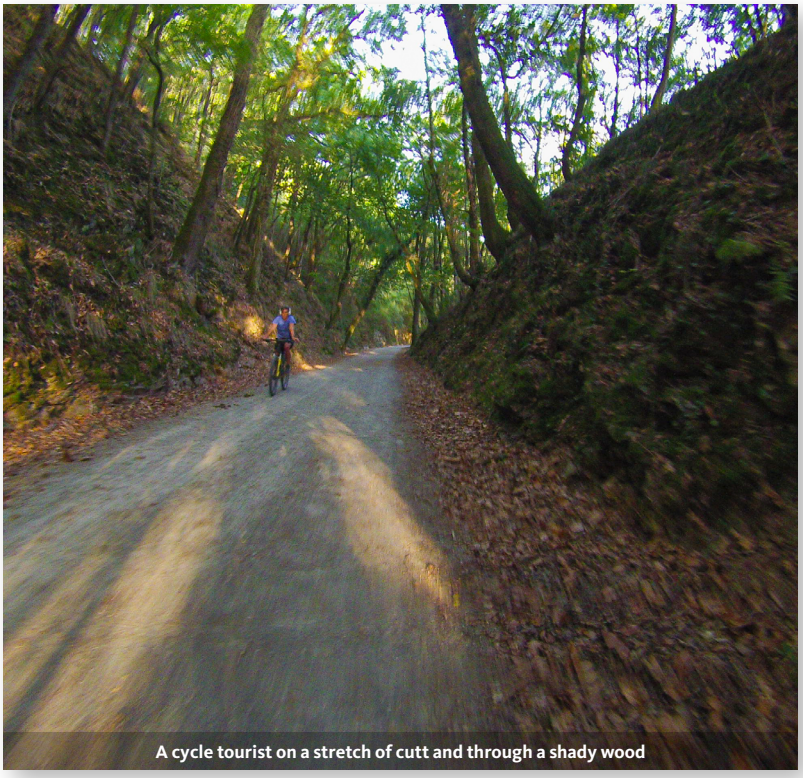
The biotope is also home, both within its boundaries and in the surrounding area, to many small hydroelectric power stations that harness the power of the Leitzaran River to generate electricity. In addition to these, there are numerous tunnels, viaducts and other railway remains that bear witness to the Plazaola narrow-gauge railway, the former route of which has been converted and upgraded into the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail.



A cycle tourist on a stretch of cutt and through a shady wood

With the Leitzaran River as a faithful travelling companion, the route winds its way through chestnut, beech and oak trees. To the right of the route lies the Olaberri weir and hydroelectric power station, an example of how environmental protection can coexist with certain compatible uses. A few metres further on, there is another weir and the Leitzaran hydroelectric power station, which precedes a curved tunnel with no artificial lighting. On this occasion, carrying a torchlight is essential.

The railway line winds its way alongside the Leitzaran River, curving in unison as if they were two dancers moving in perfect step. A new, unlit tunnel leads up to a point of particular interest known as the Txapela de Bertxin, a beret-shaped rock formation which was created during the construction of the old railway line to allow the train to pass through.

After passing through another tunnel with no artificial lighting, the trail reaches the Andoain weir at the Bertxin hydroelectric power station, popularly known as the 'power station with the stairs of the 500 steps' because of the flight of stairs connecting the penstock to the main building.

The deciduous forest, together with the tunnels, is the dominant feature of the Leitzaran Valley. After passing through five more tunnels, the route reaches a viaduct that crosses the Leitzaran River, followed by another tunnel next to the Olloki hydroelectric power station. The kilometres fly by, as the route doesn't require much effort and the rewards it offers to the senses are countless, making it extremely easy to switch off from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.



Ameraun hydroelectric power station



A subjective view of the entrance to the illuminated Gazpillotxiki tunnel

A new small viaduct once again spans the river, and three new tunnels – without artificial lighting – ensure that the old railway line remains close to the river and continues to be surrounded by its lush vegetation. Over a distance of just over 600 metres, there are four small viaducts alternating with three tunnels, built to ease the gradient of the railway line and navigate this rugged terrain, with the carriages laden with iron ore.

There is another tunnel leading up to the weir and the Ameraun hydroelectric power station. Next, four more tunnels and a small viaduct lead to the Ameraun aqueduct, which runs perpendicular to the route. Its eight stone eyes form part of one of the most striking structures along this stretch, which was used to supply water to the hydroelectric power station of the same name.

Three tunnels and three further viaducts dot the route before reaching the Plazaola 1 hydroelectric power station, which, like all the previous ones, is located alongside the bed of the Leitzaran River. The old railway line allows visitors to view these facilities from a vantage point above the riverbed.

Tunnels and viaducts line this endless succession of old railway structures, with the old Bizkotx mines – commonly known as the Plazaola mines – lying to the left of the track. Iron ore was extracted from these deposits, which enabled the construction of the Plazaola narrow-gauge railway.

Shortly afterwards, the trail reaches the Plazaola 2 hydroelectric power station, followed by the border between Gipuzkoa and Navarre. This spot is one of the highlights of the route, as it is home to the Basque Giant Chair, a wooden structure built with the aim of strengthening ties between neighbouring towns in different autonomous communities. There are also various information boards at this point, including, of course, the Nature Trail information board, which provides all the useful information about the route and the attractions of the area through which it passes.

The route continues along a tarmac track, passing a tunnel on the left that forms part of the old railway line; this tunnel is not open to traffic due to its poor condition. Below are the buildings that formed part of the old Plazaola station. The route passes under the A-15 motorway viaducts twice and, after the second one, the surface changes from tarmac to a dirt track.

After travelling just over 2 km from La Muga, the route passes through the Gazpillotxiki tunnel, which is 76 m long and has no artificial lighting. About 1 km further on, there is a patch of Northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*). The landscape now alternates between wooded areas, meadows and hamlets, leading to the 135-metre-long Martikonera tunnel, which is artificially lit.

At this point, the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail approaches Leitza station, where the Nature Trails information panel marks the end of this stage. Both the warehouse building and the old station building have been refurbished and are in excellent condition. There is also a car park here, which makes it easier to access the route, as well as a drinking fountain and a rest area.

Although the route does not go into the town centre, it is well worth visiting Leitza to explore this beautiful Navarre town, with its cobbled streets and stately stone houses, which have also caught the attention of the film industry.

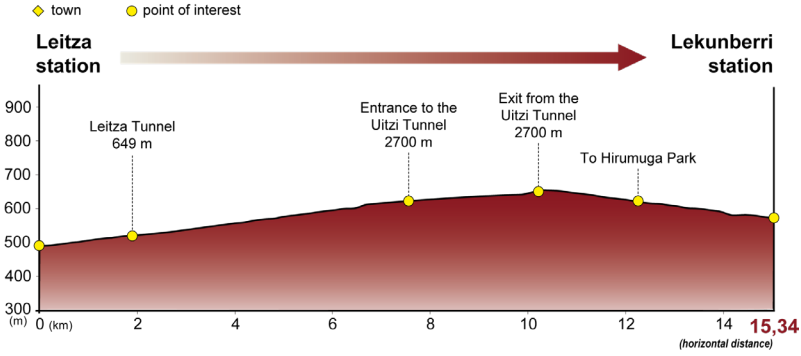


Information board for the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail, next to the old Leitza station

STAGE LEITZA STATION → LEKUNBERRI STATION

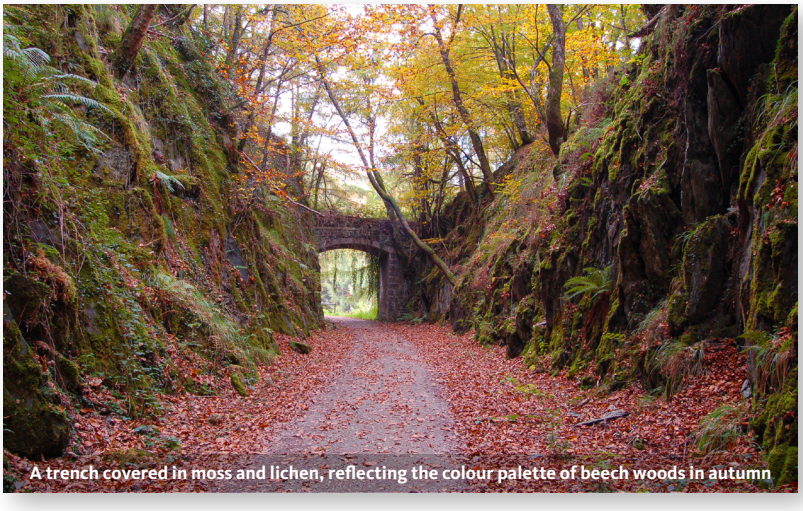
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	144 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	85 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	15,05 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	4 h



UNIQUE TUNNELS SURROUNDED BY A PERMANENTLY GREEN ENVIRONMENT

As in other parts of Spain, old railway lines have been restored for public use, allowing people to explore extremely beautiful natural landscapes. At this stage, the route also offers the chance to pass through some of the most notable tunnels in Spain's Network of Nature Trails, including the Uitzi tunnel in Navarre, which, at 2,700 metres, is the longest in Europe – much to the delight of walkers and cycle tourists.



A trench covered in moss and lichen, reflecting the colour palette of beech woods in autumn



Natural Trails Panel amidst the colours of autumn

The stage begins next to the information panel located opposite the old Leitza station, a building which, together with the old warehouse, has been fully restored and is in a very good state of repair. There is also a car park, a rest area, a fountain and even a helipad here, which makes it easier to plan your route. Before setting off on the tour, it's well worth a visit to Leitza, a town also known for having been the setting for several films, thanks to the beauty of its streets and its grand houses.

Shortly after setting off along the old railway line, the trail arrives at the Iruñaga tunnel, which is 116 metres long and has no artificial lighting. The route then passes the Tellería tunnel – which has now collapsed – on the right.

There are four tunnels in the next 3 km. The first is the Kantina, which is 170 metres long and fitted with lighting. Shortly afterwards, the Urbieta tunnel appears; it is 152 metres long and is also fitted with lighting. Next comes the Leitza Tunnel, which is 649 metres long – the second longest on the route – and is lit by artificial lighting. Finally, the route passes through the Malkorra tunnel, which is 102 metres long and has no artificial lighting.

Between one tunnel and the next, the route winds its way through woods and meadows where Latxa sheep graze; their milk is used to make the famous Idiazábal cheese with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Along this stretch, beautiful panoramic views of the Leitzaran Valley can be enjoyed, leaving the village of Leitza behind for good.

LATXA SHEEP

The Latxa sheep is a popular breed in the Basque Country, Navarre and the rest of the Cantabrian coast, and is possibly the most ancient of the Spanish sheep breeds. The word '*latxa*', of Basque origin, means 'coarse' and refers to the long, rugged wool produced by sheep of this breed.

The history of this breed is closely linked to the mountainous regions of Navarre, where it has traditionally formed part of the livelihood of many families involved in livestock farming.

This breed of sheep is notable for its hardiness, agility and ability to adapt to rugged terrain and areas with high rainfall. Because their wool does not soak in water, sheep are quickly dried off after the rain. Another distinctive feature is that Latxa rams are always ready for a fight.

Milk production is one of the main uses of this breed and is used, amongst other things, to make cheeses covered by the Idiazábal and Roncal designations of origin. The lambs are weaned very early and are traditionally reared for meat as 30-day suckling lambs, or *lechazos*, with a live weight of between 10 and 12 kg. The meat from these lambs is in high demand and highly prized.

Wool, characterised by its 'coarse' texture, was traditionally used in the manufacture of mattresses, hence the name 'mattress wool'. It is currently exported and used in the manufacture of carpets and rugs.



Latxas sheep

The trail meets six other tunnels over the next few kilometres: Tunnel 2, Autxikeneko, Erasote, Tutenea, Tunnel 1 and Guitarraren Buelta. The landscape combines meadows and small larch (*Larix decidua*) forests, which give way to native species such as the beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), which forms beautiful, shady canopies.

A few metres after emerging from the Guitarraren Buelta tunnel, the route curves to the left and heads south. This is when the trail reaches reach the most iconic spot on the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail: the entrance to the Uitzi tunnel, which, at 2,700 metres in length, is the longest tunnel in Spain's Network of Nature Trails and the longest in the whole of Europe that is suitable for walkers and cycle tourists, with no motor traffic.

The tunnel crosses the watershed between two major river basins: to the south, the Ebro basin, via the Larraun River, and to the north, the Cantabrian basin, via the Leitzaran River. The abundant water seepage inside the tunnel has, over time, led to the formation of calcium carbonate deposits, which lend the central section of the tunnel a great deal of beauty. This infrastructure is well lit and the road surface is in excellent condition. However, due to its length, the use of a torch is recommended; this recommendation also applies to the other tunnels along the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail.

Soon after the exit of the Uitzi tunnel, the trail turns right and runs along the NA-1700 for 300 m. In this section of the road, the old Uitizi station is found, which now has been turned into a private house and farm. The route then continues along the old railway line, on a gentle, comfortable descent, running parallel to the NA-1700 until the path passes through the next tunnel.



Tunnel 2 with a walker at the end of the tunnel



Whimsical calcium carbonate formations inside the Uitzi tunnel

Before reaching the entrance to the Bartolo Tunnel, a turn-off allows the most adventurous cycle tourists to access Hirumuga Park, a mountain bike (MTB) circuit run by Lekunberri Town Council and Lekunberri Bike. The route combines climbs, descents, jumps and bends through the dense, shady forest, which offers an unbeatable setting for practising this daring sport.

Back on the route, the Bartolo Tunnel is closed due to the risk of rockfalls; the trail, therefore, turns right onto a well-surfaced and clearly signposted track which, after skirting the tunnel, rejoins the old railway line, where it is once again sheltered by the canopy of the mixed woodland, where find oaks (*Quercus robur*), sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*), beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) and hazel trees (*Corylus avellana*), amongst other species, can be found.

After a downhill stretch, the route runs parallel to the A-15 motorway, whilst the town of Lekunberri lies on the other side of the road. After reaching a crossroads and passing through a stretch of deep, beautiful cuttings, the road turns right to pass under the A-15 motorway through a modern tunnel. Next, it turns left and goes through another tunnel, which forms part of the old railway line and has no artificial lighting.

The final stretch runs alongside the houses in Lekunberri until it reaches the old railway station, where the Nature Trail information panel marks the end of the stage.



Walkers beneath the canopy of trees

The old Lekunberri station is the main hub of the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail. This is where the Plazaola Tourism Consortium has its headquarters and its Tourist Information Point, as well as being the stamping point for the Nature Trails and Greenways Passport. It includes information about other places of interest in the area and allows one to discover local produce.

Next to the station, the old railway warehouse building has been refurbished and now operates as a bar and restaurant. In the same area, there is an interpretation centre housed in an old railway carriage, as well as a car park and public toilets, to start or end your journey in comfort.



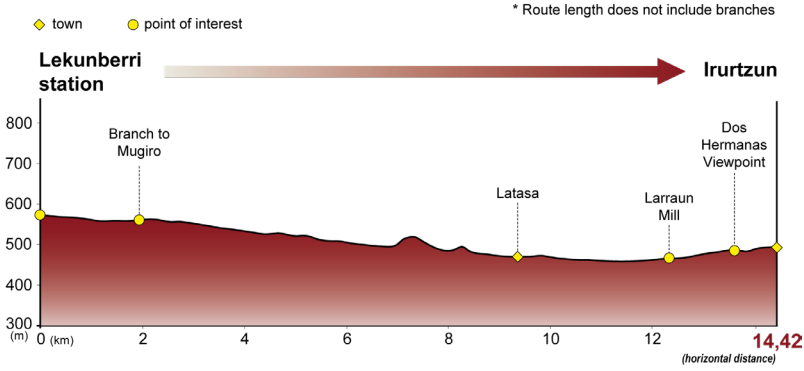
Information board for the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail at Lekunberri station

STAGE LEKUNBERRI STATION → IRURTZUN

MIDE

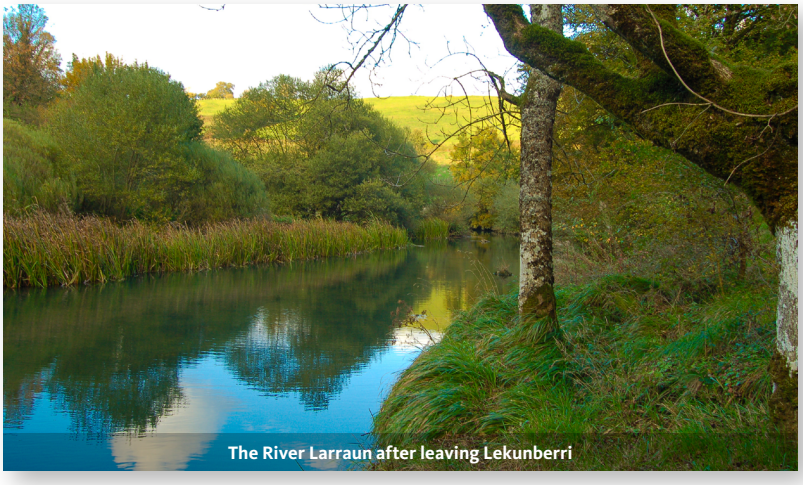
Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	59 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	118 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)*	14,45 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	3 h 45 min

* Route length does not include branches

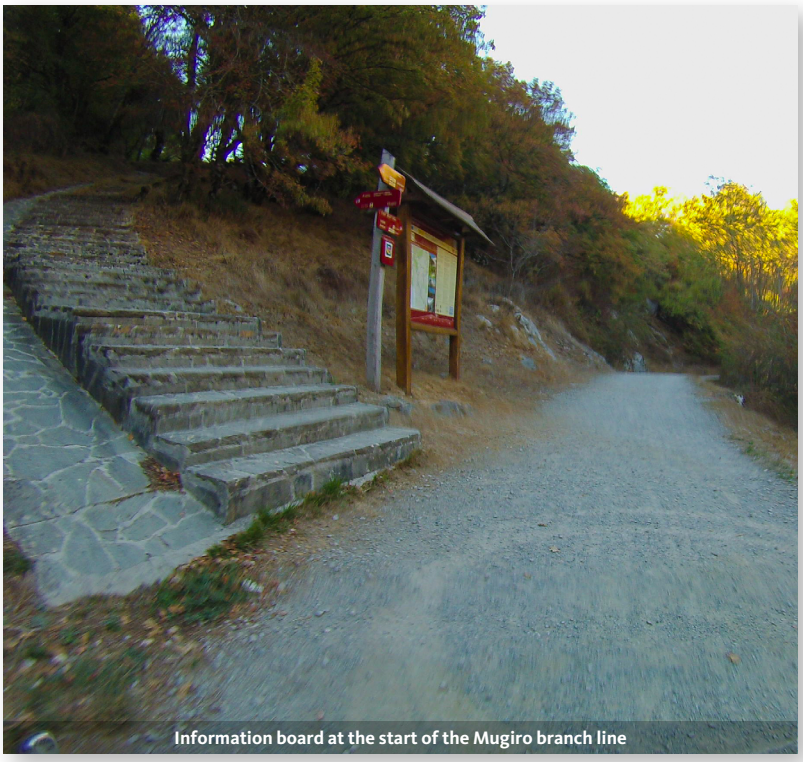


A WALK THROUGH THE LUSH COUNTRYSIDE OF NAVARRE ALONGSIDE THE LARRAUN RIVER, AMONGST SHADY BEECH WOODS AND MYSTERIOUS OAK GROVES

This section of the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail follows part of the route of the old narrow-gauge railway line that linked Pamplona with Donostia/San Sebastián. From Lekunberri, the route follows the course of the Larraun River, through dense beech and oak woods interspersed with meadows and small villages such as Latasa, where examples of traditional architecture can still be seen.



The River Larraun after leaving Lekunberri



Information board at the start of the Mugiro branch line

The stage begins next to the Nature Trail information panel located at the old Lekunberri station. This is where the Plazaola Tourism Consortium has its headquarters and its Tourist Information Point, which is also a stamping point for the Nature Trails and Greenways Passport.

The route passes the Aralar campsite on the right and, shortly afterwards, crosses the NA-1300 road to head towards the Larraun River. From here, it runs parallel to the riverbed through some truly stunning countryside, notably featuring ash groves (*Fraxinus* sp.) which were pollarded in the past to make use of their slender branches and leaves as fodder and bedding for livestock.

After walking for one kilometre, the trail reaches the Mugiro dam on the Larraun River. At this point, an interpretation panel from Nature Trails offers two options: to continue along the old railway line or to take a turn-off to the left to visit Mugiro.

MUGIRO BRANCH LINE

This branch line, just over 1.5 km long, begins with a steep flight of steps, which means that anyone cycling along the route will have to climb them via a ramp built on the left-hand side of the steps. Once up the stairs, only the most experienced cyclists will be able to tackle the next steep section whilst riding their bikes. The route then turns right onto Calle San Francisco in the municipality of Mugiro.

In Mugiro, the trail passes close to the Txantonea house, in whose square the draw for the firewood lots takes place; this, together with the church, the pelota court and the inn, are the most notable buildings. The trail takes the NA-7505 road as it leaves the village and immediately afterwards turns right onto the dirt track.

At the next junction, take the right-hand turn, which marks the start of the descent. The path then turns into a concrete surface and the gradient increases considerably, with several zigzags that have to be negotiated with extreme care. The final stretch, lined with chestnut trees, leads to the Natural Trails information panel, which marks the return to the old railway line.

Those who choose to continue straight on along the main route, following the old railway line, will pass through a tunnel with no artificial lighting and will see the Ixkier Waterfall on their right, a beautiful spot formed by the course of the Larraun River.

After passing the information panel for the Nature Trails, where the Mugiro branch ends, the route enters a dense and beautiful beech forest, where the few clearings offer spectacular panoramic views, like natural windows. In this damp, shady woodland stand several sections of masonry wall that form part of the railway line; these have been colonised by various species of mosses and lichens, providing these constructions with botanical interest. Other tree species, such as oaks and chestnut trees, grow alongside the beech trees.

A few kilometres further on, the path emerges from the woods and reaches the San Migeltxo rest area, located beside the NA-1300 road, the perfect spot to take a break. From here, the route runs parallel to the road along a gravel track that has been fully adapted for hikers and cycle tourists.



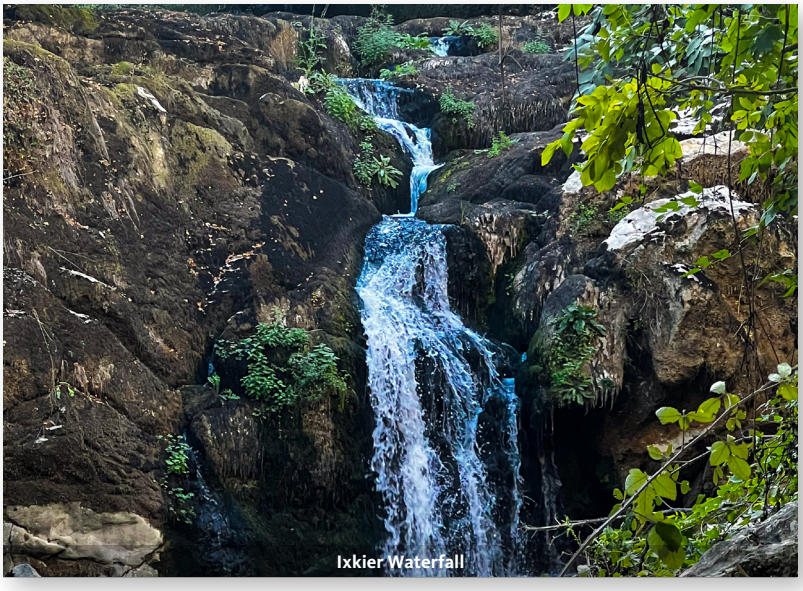
A pile of firewood at Txantonea (Mugiro)

After crossing the first footbridge over the Larraun River, on the left-hand side of the route, there are the remains of one of the many ironworks that dotted these valleys. These steelworks transformed iron ore – sourced mainly from the mines in Gipuzkoa – into metal, using the power of the river's water and the calorific value of the coal provided by these forests. Traces of the stone channels that were used to carry water to these facilities can still be seen today.

Further on, a second metal footbridge allows crossing the river. All around it lies a lovely riverside woodland, featuring willows (*Salix* sp.), alders (*Alnus glutinosa*), brambles (*Rubus ulmifolius*) and hawthorns (*Crataegus monogyna*). Its waters are home to a significant trout population; it is no surprise, then, that the Larraun River forms part of the Upper Navarre salmon farming region, which ensures the sustainable management of the wild trout populations that thrive naturally in its waters.

The route continues down the valley until it reaches a concrete bridge. At this point, the path turns sharply to the right and climbs a steep slope to enter a mixed forest of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), oak (*Quercus robur*) and centuries-old chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). The journey continues as we tread upon the thick carpet of leaves provided by these lush deciduous forests, whose trunks are adorned with ivy (*Hedera helix*) and moss, a sign of the high humidity that characterises the region's climate.

After a descent along a stretch of concrete road and a few metres running parallel to the A-15 motorway, the trail passes the small graveyard in the village of Urritza and rejoins the Larraun River. Its unusual source, located in the municipality of Iribas, at the foot of the Sierra de Aralar, has earned it the nickname of "the Guadiana of Navarre" (the Guadiana is a river in Southern Spain which is said to have an intermittent course).



Ixkier Waterfall



Latasa Footbridge

A few metres further on, the path continues alongside some simple wooden benches, running alongside the A-15. It then continues along the left bank of the river, passes under the motorway and reaches the Venta de Urritza (*Urritzako bentak*). After crossing the NA-1300 road with care, the route turns left and continues for about 40 metres along the signposted hard shoulder of the road, until it takes the first path on the right, rejoining the old Plazaola railway line. At this point, there are signposts for the Imotz-Basaburua Trail Network (*Herrien Arteko Xendak*), a network of restored old rural paths that link the various villages, allowing visitors to explore one of the least-known yet most charming valleys in the Humid Navarre region.

The route then passes through a tunnel about 160 metres long with no artificial lighting. Next, a section protected by a wooden railing leads to one of the few original bridges on the Plazaola that are still standing, built to span the Basaburua creek.

The route continues towards Latasa along the right bank of the Larraun River, amongst oak woodlands of pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*), and past small vegetable gardens and meadows, where it is common to see flocks of Latxa sheep grazing.

Once in Latasa, the two-storey building of the old station, built in stone and brick and in a good state of repair, is a notable feature. Before continuing, it is well worth taking a detour to visit this little hamlet, through which the old royal road linking Pamplona and Donostia/San Sebastián used to run. Notable examples of its architectural heritage include the Church of San Esteban, with its Gothic façade and imposing tower; several stately homes – some with 16th-century coats of arms on their façades; and the unusual 1955 pelota court, on the left-hand side of which the windows of the adjoining house can be seen.



Wooden train at the Irurtzun rest area

Continuing along the route, the route reaches the junction with the NA-4130 road, which has to be crossed with care. A footbridge built on the piers of the old Plazaola Bridge then allows one to cross the Larraun River. From here, the typical riverside woodland stretches before the trail and, to the left, stands Mount Arriketa, whose slopes are covered with oak and beech trees. On the right, the river flows peacefully past the hamlet of Latasa.

After another signposted junction with the NA-1300 road, where care needs to be taken around traffic, the route continues on the other side of the road, passing behind the bus stop. After walking just over 200 metres along a tarmac section and passing under the A-15 motorway, the route joins the junction with the NA-7503. The surface of the path is once again compacted gravel and the route runs parallel to the NA-1300, offering beautiful panoramic views of Mount Arriketa.

Further on, the route crosses the road again and continues along a stretch bordered by a wooden railing on the left – which separates it from the Larraun River – and a hedge on the right, alongside the NA-1300 road. After 700 metres, the road crosses this road for the last time at the bridge over the river.

From here, the path winds its way along the valley floor beside the Larraun, nestled between steep slopes covered in dense, well-preserved woodland, which provide the perfect habitat for the abundant wildlife found in the area, including species such as hares (*Lepus* sp.), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), badgers (*Meles meles*) and wild boars (*Sus scrofa*), whose presence is even noticeable in the vicinity of the villages.

After passing under the A-15 motorway between the imposing pillars that support it, the whitish outcrops of limestone stand out on the opposite hillside amongst the trees. In this environment, it is possible to spot birds of prey such as the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), red kites (*Milvus milvus*) or common kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*). It is also possible to spot griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), which live in the nearby rocky outcrops, and hear the cheerful song of other small birds.

A new underpass beneath the motorway offers a view of the Kaxarna service area in the distance. Next to the information panel for Nature Trails, there is information about other routes starting from this point, such as the Senda de los Pescadores (SL-NA 140) and the Sendero de Aitxita (SL-NA 131). From here, the path crosses the Larraun River once again and descends until it reaches the old Larraun mill.

After passing the mill, the route runs alongside the NA-1300 road for a stretch. The route passes under the A-15 motorway and climbs until it reaches the Plazaola tunnel, which has a separate traffic light system for motor vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. It is important to observe the road signs and wait for the appropriate signal before crossing.

After passing through the tunnel, the trail leaves the road and continues along a dirt track to the Dos Hermanas viewpoint, from where these twin striking rock formations can be viewed. Then, at the next junction, the route takes the path on the right to tackle the final stretch of this stage, which once again follows the old railway line.

The stage ends in Irurtzun, at the Nature Trails information panel, located next to a rest area with a children's play area and a large car park.



Walkers at the Nature Trails information board in Irurtzun

LARRAUN VALLEY

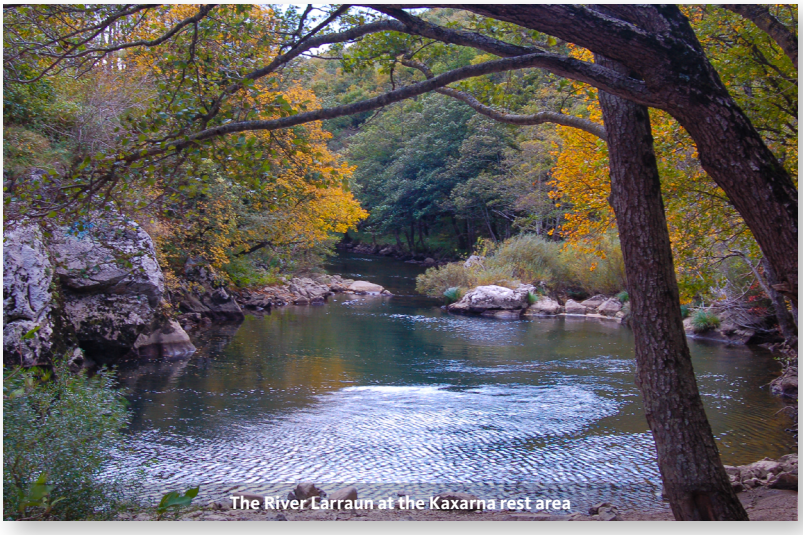
The Larraun Valley is a small valley in the north-west of Navarre, located between the Aralar mountain range and several other mountainous features such as the Araxes massif and the Azpirotz and Leitza hills, all of which are predominantly limestone.

The municipality of Larraun comprises the villages of Albiasu, Aldatz, Alli, Arruitz, Astita, Azpirotz-Lezaeta, Baribar, Etxarri, Errazkin, Gorriti, Uitzi, Iribas, Madotz, Mugiro and Oderitz.

The valley has an average altitude of around 1,000 metres and lies in the transition zone between the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions. It features lush, green vegetation, with a mosaic of meadows and extensive oak and chestnut forests covering the valley floors, whilst dense, well-preserved beech forests cover the upper slopes.

The geological substrate of the Larraun Valley consists of a range of Mesozoic rocks from the Triassic and Upper Cretaceous periods. The limestone nature of the terrain encourages the development of karst features, including caves, aquifers and springs. Among the best-known caves in Navarre are the Mendukilo, Akelar, Artzainzulo and Lezegalde caves.

As well as walking the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail, there are other places of interest to discover in the municipality, such as Larraspil, the source of the Larraun River and the Dolmens Trail.

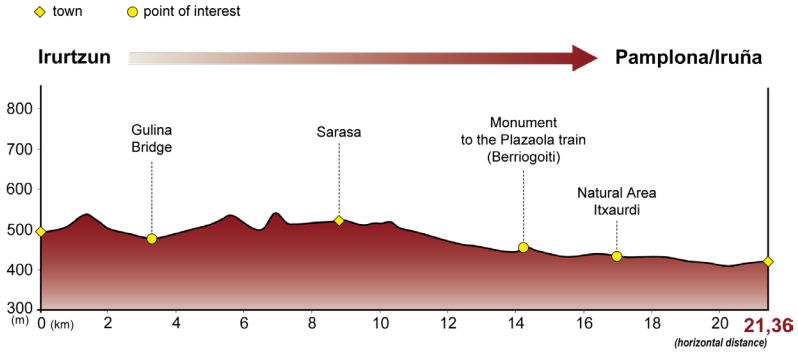


The River Larraun at the Kaxarna rest area

STAGE IRURTZUN → PAMPLONA/IRUÑA

MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	Upward gradient	224 m
Guidance along the route	1	Downward gradient	293 m
Route difficulty	2	Route lenght (actual distance)	21,38 km
Amount of effort needed	3	Time	5 h 50 min



FROM THE PEÑAS DE DOS HERMANAS TO THE ARGA RIVER, BRINGING THE TRAIN JOURNEY TO AN END IN THE CAPITAL OF NAVARRE

This final leg of our rail journey takes us closer to the capital of Navarre. The pine and oak forests gradually give way to farmland and intensively farmed meadows, forming a landscape mosaic of unique beauty, before finally merging into the suburban and urban areas of Pamplona, a green and welcoming city that extends a warm welcome to walkers and cycle tourists.


River Arga



The Chapel of the Holy Trinity in Ergo

The final stage begins at the Nature Trails information panel, located next to the car park and the Irurtzun rest area. Once the road leaves the town centre behind, the route runs parallel to the N-240-A road. On this stretch, travellers will come across an old stone boundary marker with an inscription carved into it: "A PAMPLONA TRES LEGUAS", meaning 'Pamplona three leagues away' showing the distance to the Navarran capital.

The route zigzags past several houses and crosses the NA-4171 road, which leads to Aizkorbe. The path then winds its way through pastures where Latxa sheep and horses graze.

To the left of the route, the Trinidad de Ergo shrine dominates the landscape for several kilometres, whilst always being surrounded by enigmatic beech forests (*Fagus sylvatica*). After crossing the NA-4120 road with care, a building with distinctive architecture catches the eye: the Karmapa Mikyö Dorje Buddhist Centre.

Shortly afterwards, the El Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail opens to panoramic views of the town of Gulina and passes over a viaduct with the same name that is made up of 17 stone arches. The route passes through a pine growth with a mix of cork oak, to then be surrounded not long afterwards by agricultural land until arriving at the town of Sarasate, the road that leads to this town has to be crossed with care (NA-4121).

After climbing a short, steep slope, the path runs parallel to the AP-15 motorway and descends to a semi-circular tunnel that passes beneath it. On the other side of this, the descend continues for a 200m section of solid cement, separated from road N-240-A by a concrete road safety barrier.

A second tunnel, similar in design to the first, runs once again beneath the AP-15 motorway. The route then tackles a short, albeit steep, climb of just over 300 metres, with several bends that require careful attention and will put the skills and fitness of cycle tourists and walkers to the test.

Once the route has overcome this challenging stretch of terrain, the panoramic views of Erice de Iza and its church of San Andrés are worth the climb. The path then descends until it rejoins the old railway line, passing the ruined San Bartolomé shrine on the left.

As at the start of the stage, the route once again runs parallel to the N-240-A road and heads into Sarasa. The highlights of this town include the Church of San Martín and the Cabo de Armería Palace.

After leaving the village behind, a Nature Trails interpretation panel provides more information about the route. Shortly afterwards, the trail crosses the NA-4104 road and, a little further on, the NA-4109, before reaching the small viaduct that spans the Zuasti creek. The path then climbs briefly before resuming the gentle descent that characterises much of the route.

Cultivated land, mainly used for rain-fed cereal crops, is playing an increasingly important role. After crossing the NA-4508 road leading to Oteitza, the route passes close to the church of San Juan Bautista, on the outskirts of the town centre. Next to it is a rest area to stop off and get some rest in the pleasant shade.



Karmapa Mikyö Dorje Buddhist Centre

To the left of the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail, one village gives way to another. Next up is Elcarte, with the Church of La Purificación to the north of the town; shortly afterwards, the village of Ballariáin comes into view, with its Church of San Pedro also to the north of the village.

Further on, the route crosses the Juslapeña River using a viaduct and leads onto a straight stretch that culminates in a steep, short climb, with the Plazaola Railway Monument at the top. This monument consists of a stone arch, one of whose carved stones pays tribute to the railway and one of its tunnels.

The arch marks the entrance to Berriogoiti, whose proximity to Pamplona is apparent. In the southern part of the town, the old town stands out, featuring the Church of La Purificación and the town hall, whilst the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail runs through the town via an area of more recent development.

After walking a few metres across farmland, the route enters the Plazaola Industrial Park. On the right are the industrial buildings and, on the other side, a modern residential area in Aizoáin. Following the signposts, the route wanders through the streets for a few metres before continuing along a tarmac track which, after turning right, becomes a dirt track. This section runs alongside the Aizoáin Barracks, which is home to the 66th 'América' Mountain Rifle Infantry Regiment.

Once past the military zone, the road passes the entrance to the Itxaurdi nature reserve on the left and runs close to Berriozar, which is located on higher ground. Shortly afterwards, it crosses the NA-4106 road.



Fort of San Cristóbal



Plazaola Monument

To the left, Mount Ezkaba stands out; at its summit stands the Fort Alfonso XII, also known as the Fort San Cristóbal. Built between the late 19th and early 20th centuries to defend Pamplona, it offers spectacular views of the city. It was subsequently used as a prison during the Spanish Civil War. It was designated a Site of Cultural Interest in 2001 and a Site of Democratic Memory in June 2026.

Although the urban environment is already clearly visible to the right of the route, with its residential buildings, the route continues through the Parque San Cristóbal along a concrete path for walkers and cycle tourists.

By zigzagging to the right and left, the trail passes under the PA-30 motorway. On either side of this pass, a short section of the original railway track has been preserved, paying tribute to the old Plazaola narrow-gauge railway. Next to the tracks, a mural depicts, amongst other things, a tunnel with two people sitting on a bench.

The route then goes to Parque de la Esperanza, where there are drinking fountains. A few metres further on, it enters Pamplona via a cycle lane separated from motorised traffic, which allows one to cycle along this stretch without sharing the road with vehicles.

Firstly, take the cycle lane mentioned at Plaza Virrey Armendáriz, crossing Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada Street and Cruz de Barkazio Street, before continuing along Bernardino Tirapu Street. Those walking along the route can continue along the pavement, following the route. Along this street there are a series of



Gulina Viaduct

pedestrian crossings suitable for cyclists and pedestrians, some of which have dedicated traffic lights. Further on, the route turns right and continues along Travesía Bernardino Tirapu, following the cycle path to cross the road by the Arga River, at which point it reaches Kosterapea Park.

The route reaches the Arga River and crosses it via the Plazaola Bridge, once again offering a glimpse of features that were once part of the narrow-gauge railway. The bridge is a great place enjoy the views of the river before continuing through a small railway tunnel. However, it is worth taking a detour to the right to head up to Kosterapea Park, where the Trinitarios Railway and Greenways Interpretation Centre is located. There, the Navarre Association of Railway Enthusiasts organises fun activities for the whole family, such as rides on miniature railway replicas, which are open to children and adults alike. The centre also provides information on various routes that follow old railway lines.



Returning to the route, the route passes through the tunnel – which is perfectly lit and blends seamlessly into the urban landscape of Pamplona – and continue along the Paseo Biurdana. Along this stretch, there is a cycle lane and a cobbled path for cycle tourists and hikers respectively, leading to the Trinitarios urban lift, where the route continues along the Paseo Biurdana, but on the same route from this point onwards.

With little effort, and with the Arga River to its right, the route leads to the Julio Caro Baroja Secondary School, located on the left. The centre preserves the former building of the Navarre Provincial Agricultural Farm, which once housed an agricultural research and training centre. That is where the school's popular nickname, "The Farm", comes from.

This unique building marks the end of the Plazaola Greenway Nature Trail. The Arga River Park, the historic centre of Pamplona and the city's many attractions provide the perfect finale to this journey through railway history and the landscapes of the north.

PAMPLONA (IRUÑA)

The capital of Navarre and the main hub of the Autonomous Community has a population of around 200,000. It is internationally renowned for its San Fermín Festival, one of the most iconic celebrations, and boasts a rich historical and cultural heritage.

Some of the main monuments of its historic centre, which is also a stop on the Camino de Santiago, are the Plaza del Castillo and Plaza de la Ciudadela stand out for their many emblematic buildings such as the Palace of Navarra, the Cathedral, the churches of San Nicolás and San Cernin, the Museum of Navarra, the Oteiza Museum, the General Archive of Navarra, the Gardens of La Taconera, the Baluarte, the Planetarium, the two university campuses, the City Hall and the Parliament.

The city is also notable for its connection to the Arga River, the banks of which have been redeveloped as an urban riverside park. Its green spaces offer another way to discover this city, which holds the distinction of being the capital with the most trees and square metres of green space per inhabitant in Spain.



Pamplona City Council

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MANAGING ENTITIES:

- **PLAZAOLA TOURISM CONSORTIUM**
  (*https://plazaola.eus/en/*) 948 50 72 05

- **ANDOAIN COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.andoain.eus/es/*) 943 30 08 30

COUNCILS:

- **ANDOAIN COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.andoain.eus/es/*) 943 30 08 30

- **BERASTEGI COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.berastegi.eus/es/*) 943 68 30 00

- **ELDUAIN COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.elduain.eus/es/*) 943 68 31 21

- **LEITZA COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.leitza.eus/es/*) 948 51 00 09

- **LARRAUN COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.larraun.eus/es/*) 948 50 42 07

- **LEKUNBERRI COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.lekunberri.eus/es/lekunberri/*) 948 50 42 11

- **IMOTZ COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.imotz.eus/eskabide-orokorra/*) 948 50 33 64

- **IRURTZUN COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.irurtzun.eus/*) 948 50 00 51

- **ARAKIL COUNCIL**
  (*https://arakil.eus/*) 948 50 01 01

- **IZA/ITZA COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.municipiodeiza.es/*) 948 60 04 65

- **BERRIOPLANO/BERRIOBEITI COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.berrioplano.es/*) 948 30 31 29

- **BERRIOZAR COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.berriozar.es/*) 948 30 10 34

- **PAMPLONA COUNCIL**
  (*https://www.pamplona.es/en*) 948 42 01 00

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

OTHER LINKS OF INTEREST:

- **BASQUE COUNTRY TOURISM**
  (*https://tourism.euskadi.eus/en/*) 945 01 80 00

- **NAVARRA TOURISM**
  (*https://www.visitnavarra.es/en/*) 848 42 04 20

- **LEITZARAN VISITOR CENTRE**
  (*https://www.leitzaran-andoain.eus/es/*) 943 30 09 29

STAMP POINTS ON THE NATURE TRAILS AND GREENWAYS PASSPORT:

- **LEKUNBERRI TOURIST OFFICE**
  Plazaola Street, 21, Lekunberri 948 50 72 04



Cicloturista en las cercanías de la estación de Leitza

Nature Trails









Since 1993, the Nature Trails Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has the main objective of re-conditioning old unused infrastructure (railway lines, livestock trail or traditional paths), to give them new life as spaces for citizens to use and enjoy.

This guide offers detailed texts and accompanying maps for the nature trails completed to date, which are one of the best ways of getting close to nature and discovering the culture and traditions of our territory.