

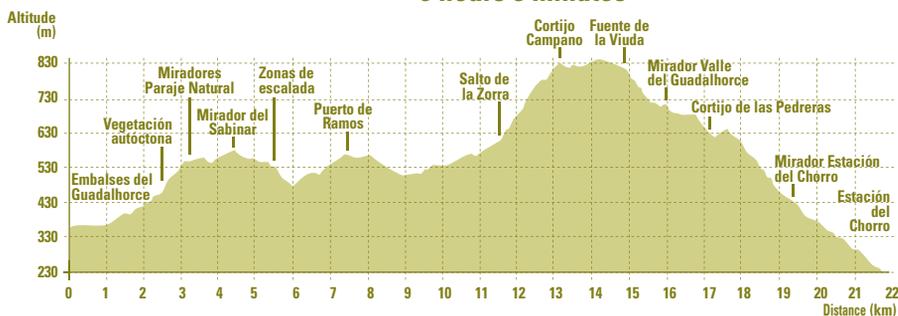
20 CAMPILLOS (Embalses del Guadalhorce)

• ALORA (Estación de El Chorro)

El Paraje Natural – the Natural Area of Desfiladero de los Gaitanes



ESTIMATED TIME
6 hours 5 minutes



LONGITUDE (km)		ALTITUDE AND ELEVATION (m)			
Length	22	Accumulated ascent	680	Final altitude	225
Ascent km	8.6	Accumulated descent	802	Maximum altitude	845
Descent km	9.6	Maximum difference	620	Minimum altitude	225
Flat km	3.8	Altitude at starting point	360	Average altitude	560

» Summary of this Stage «

Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes is a mid mountain area characterized by limestone sierras and hills of sandstone on both sides of the Guadalhorce river in the area known as El Chorro. The proposed route starts northwards from the meeting point of the Guadalteba and the Guadalhorce dams, ascends parallel to the latter and skirts the mass of the Sierra de Huma, culminating at a pass located at 845 metres above sea level, then gradually turning east.

During the descent you will keep veering gradually towards the south and then west, with the so-called Placas Frontales to your right, from which point the track leads in a precipitous descent to a forest of planted Aleppo Pine. The end of this stage is 140 metres lower than the start, at the train station of El Chorro, where train line infrastructures meet those of the reservoir and the central power station of the Tajo de la Encantada.

Throughout the walk, there are numerous cliffs where it is common to see climbers, some of the rock faces are quite large and close to the track. Both at the beginning and at the end of the stage you are very close to the famous Caminito del Rey, originally a service access to the electricity plant. Restoration works of the Caminito began in 2014 to adapt it for the public. Stage 20 is long and there are some major ascents and descents.

 Roughness of the environment	 Navigation in this stage	 Walking difficulty	 Effort required				
2	2	2	4	1.7	20.3	0	NO

Pictograms description MIDE, pages 11 & 17

» Highlights of this Stage «

The Sierra de Huma (place name perhaps deriving from Umar Ibn Haffsum, whose stronghold of Bobastro is very close to the protected Natural Area) is the western bastion of the Central Limestone Arch and stands out dramatically in the landscape, especially against the flat Guadalhorce Valley. This makes the walk, which flanks this entire sierra, almost a full circle and rich in numerous viewpoints which have been assigned GPS points. You have spectacular views over the area of the three reservoirs, the first gorge of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, the Vega de Antequera, the slopes of the Sierra de Huma, the Guadalhorce Valley and the area of El Chorro.

An important focal point here is the protection of an area such as the Paraje Natural. The other is certainly geology, with the diversity of limestone, dolomites, sandstones, and a geological modelling so powerful that it has resulted in the name of Desfiladero which means gorge. The abundance of gorges has made the area of El Chorro into the biggest climbing school in the South of Spain. In the north of the Paraje Natural note the exceptionally dense and extensive thickets of Savin juniper.

Very close to the maximum altitude of the route are the Roman ruins of Nescania, barely recognizable but of great strategic importance because of their location in the most obvious natural passage between the Guadalhorce Valley and the plains of Antequera.

- **Starting point:** reservoirs of the Guadalhorce and the Guadalteba, where both dams meet.
- **Access to starting point:** From A-357 road between Campillos and Ardales take the A-7286 then exit, following the signs to Pantanos on an unmarked road. Coming from Ardales take the MA-5403 to the Puerto de la Atalaya. There, the described service road leads to the reservoirs. Take the road leading downhill, the MA-4400, to get to El Chorro.
- **Finish point:** the train stop at the Estación de El Chorro.
- **Access to finish point:** from the Puerto de la Atalaya, access as described above. From Álora, take the A-343 and turn off at the Valle de Abdalajís to follow the MA-4401 or directly from the MA-3401.
- **Possible “escape routes”:** in the first section the “escape plan” is clear: down the network of tracks to the dam of Guadalhorce. There is a tarmac track along its left bank leading to the starting point. However, once you are at the highest point of the stage, the best option is walking down the track to kilometre marker 16 to the Valle de Abdalajís.
- **No return point:** from the Cortijo Campano it is best to keep moving forward.
- **Maps:** Virtually the entire route is on **1038-I** (Pantano del Chorro), except for the final stretch of the pine forest which you will find on the **1038-III** (Ardales).
- **District boundaries:** up to km 4.2 (at the transformer and electricity towers) you are in the district of Campillos. Then it is all Antequera to kilometre 16.2, along tracks which afford some view to the Valle de Abdalajís. You do not enter the boundaries of the latter village because Antequera district is shaped in a strange little wedge enveloping the district of Valle de Abdalajís entirely. The last part of the track of Cortijo de las Pedreras farmhouse and the pine forest belong to the district of Álora.

• Enjoy the walk safely

The total of ascents and descents, the length of the route, the walk's altitude and its solitude require planning this stage in detail. The road at the beginning of the stage has very little traffic but it is narrow and sometimes offers little visibility. There is no possibility of stocking up on drinking water. The water from the Fuente de la Viuda spring has not been treated for consumption. The area of pine forest is very dense. Also, here you must take extra precautions to prevent forest fires. You will cross the Arroyo del Chorro stream bed twice, but it is so unlikely that it will contain any water that there was no need to mark these crossings as fords on the corresponding icon of this stage.

• Connections to other footpaths and trails

Relatively close by, at the dam end of the Conde de Guadalhorce reservoir, there are a couple of paths which have been adapted for walking and which lead along the edge of Embalse del Gaitanejo reservoir and some sandstone areas. These paths are highly recommended and comfortable.

This stage has been designed using the network of service paths for the management of the protected Natural Area and livestock or forestry farms. These tracks coincide, most of the time, with the limits of the Paraje Natural and are well-known stomping grounds for cyclists attracted by the easily accessed, mountainous circular route.

Gaitanejo reservoir's stable water levels sustain well-preserved riparian vegetation



Views over the reservoirs Guadalhorce and Guadalteba during the first steps of the stage

At km 10, on the right, there is a junction with Camino de Sierra Llana which leads uphill to an area of dense Savin juniper and planted pine woods. Five hundred meters ahead you start walking along the very steep Camino del Cortijo del Madroño, until kilometre 12.5 where this Camino branches off to your right (the farmhouse is a little further up). Head for the Cortijo Campano.

From km 14.5 km you will be walking along the Vereda del Tajo de la Pedrera. Ignore the track which leads towards the Valle de Abdalajís, called Camino de los Peñascales, which doesn't belong to the Great Path of Málaga. The best known public path here is the Camino de las Pedreras, leading from the Cortijo under the same name up to the Estación de El Chorro. That route is also described on an information panel at the train stop as Haza del Río. One of the most frequented walks used to climb the Huma is called Escalera Árabe (Arab staircase). It splits off in the area of las Pedreras at kilometre 18, westwards and then northwards.

In this same section, between kilometre markers 16.2 and 22, our walk meets the GR-7 E-4 coming from the east. This is stage 7 of GR-7 E-4, slightly over 10 kilometres long and named El Chorro - Abdalajís.

The middle part of Stage 20, in any case, is certain to have coincided with the path that had been used from the Neolithic period to link the Guadalhorce Valley with the Vega de Antequera by the Puerto del Rosalejo pass.

THE RIVERS AND THE WATER

From the very start of the stage the reservoirs of the Embalse del Guadalhorce and Guadalteba are the main attraction. The reservoirs meet at the bridge which is also the finish point of the previous stage. The two dams can be seen from different points of the route, especially from the viewpoints at km 3, where you can also enjoy the view to the reservoir of the Conde del Guadalhorce and of the Turón river, located slightly further down (about 25 metres). The meeting of the three dams occurs in less than one kilometre in a straight line, which produces such a dramatic effect of amassed water that most visits to this natural expanse focus around this area.

Below the dams, you can also catch a glimpse of a sinuous, milky green river course. Its colour comes from the gypsum and clay sediments sifting into the water at the river source upstream. This is the river Guadalhorce, which engulfs the other two smaller rivers in the area of the reservoir of the Gaitanejo. The Embalse del Gaitanejo harbours prolific vegetation on its banks as its water level is more constant. There are some interesting patterns carved in the sandstone rock by the water, including a few cave dwellings.

Unusual shapes of Aleppo pines and slopes of the Huma with Savin juniper thickets, seen from the first vantage points of the walk



Planted pine woods envelop the dams of the two reservoirs



The main part of stage 20 takes you into heavily karstified landscape, which makes water circulation on the surface hardly possible, mainly occurring during heavy rain seasons. It is a phenomenon some authors have denominated karst desert, due to the harsh water conditions generated by these eroded calcareous rocks. The Savin juniper, forming extensive thickets here, must be recognised as a specialist plant in this type of environment which makes this species all the more important.

The only water spring along the way is at kilometre 14.750; you need to pay close attention to find it as it is a little remote. To get to the Fuente de la Viuda and nearby Cortijo de la Rejanada follow the main track for a few metres rather than following the walk which circles around the place. The reason why the water spring emerges here, are the impermeable clay layers at the mountain pass which expel the water circulating underground via drainage galleries formed by karst. The importance of this water source since time immemorial is confirmed by the existence of the nearby ruins of Nescania. At the end of the stage the walker is reunited with the Guadalhorce river at a new reservoir, Tajo de la Encantada, which regulates the flow but is also used to generate electricity.

WALK DESCRIPTION

»» The Viewpoints of the Paraje Natural reserve

After a kilometre and a half of service road leading along the banks of the Guadalhorce reservoir and quite near the quarries where aggregate composites were extracted for the construction of the reservoirs, the track turns right. Forest tracks are closed to car traffic as they lead uphill between Aleppo pines. In shady areas at high altitudes but also here and there amidst the pine trees, the native vegetation appears, struggling to regain its place. Good-sized Holm oaks, Junipers and Terebinth at times form small woods with the undergrowth of Mastic, Gorse, Buckthorn, Savin Juniper and Kermes oak, giving you an idea of the ancient splendour of the forest.

Soon you reach a part of the track that affords a broad view of the entire complex of El Chorro, the Sierras of western Málaga and the beginning of the first gorge of the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes. Higher up, from an area with compelling underbrush of Esparto grass, Rosemary, and Cistus under the pine trees which have been contorted by the wind, you can see in all its grandeur the magnificent Savin Juniper forest of the Arroyo of Todosaires and the northern slopes of the Sierra de Huma.

One of the most interesting vegetation formations of the stage are the forests of Savin Juniper



The impressive los Gaitanes cliffs and in the background Mesa de Villaverde with a chimney on top



»» Los Tajos

Next you reach a great plain (km 4.5), la Cornicabra, with initial stages of reforestation and an extensive area of Thyme which is used by bees from the nearby hives. The road comes to a mountain pass which is a natural passage way between two rocky escarpments. It leads along a power line which you encounter first at the border of Antequera and Campillos districts. The lower cliff is facing north and the higher one west, and both are famous as climbing areas due to the excellent quality of the rock and the many overhangs. The place is known as Desplomilandia (Overhang land) and the rock face above is called El Triángulo after the shape of the rock with some cattle corrals at the base.

The walk has been taking you northwards so far. The track leads downhill now and you pass by a junction to your left (km 6). Then you begin a long climb eastwards across a seriously deforested hillside above the impressive Tajo del Cabrito. This rocky escarpment is a truly insurmountable obstacle both for people and animals, hundreds of meters high and two kilometres long. At the Puerto de Ramos, 7 and a half kilometres into the stage you can engage in an enjoyable exercise of

trying to imagine the tops of the high cliffs by examining the nearby karst formations on your left: rock pinnacles and piles of rock plates similar to the ones found at El Torcal de Antequera. The Savin Juniper grows in the narrow passages. In comparison, the slope on the right, a result of hillside landslides, has a less rugged appearance.

You start descending now, accompanied by the view to the plains of Antequera. The path is immersed in a very dense thicket of Savin Junipers, which has an appearance of a forest but is composed of shrub-sized plants. Pass by two junctions on the left and a flat area which is sometimes ploughed to be sown. (km 9.5). The path gradually veers southwest. A few meters ahead there is a detour that leads in a zigzag to the Sierra Llana.

»» Across limits of the Paraje Natural

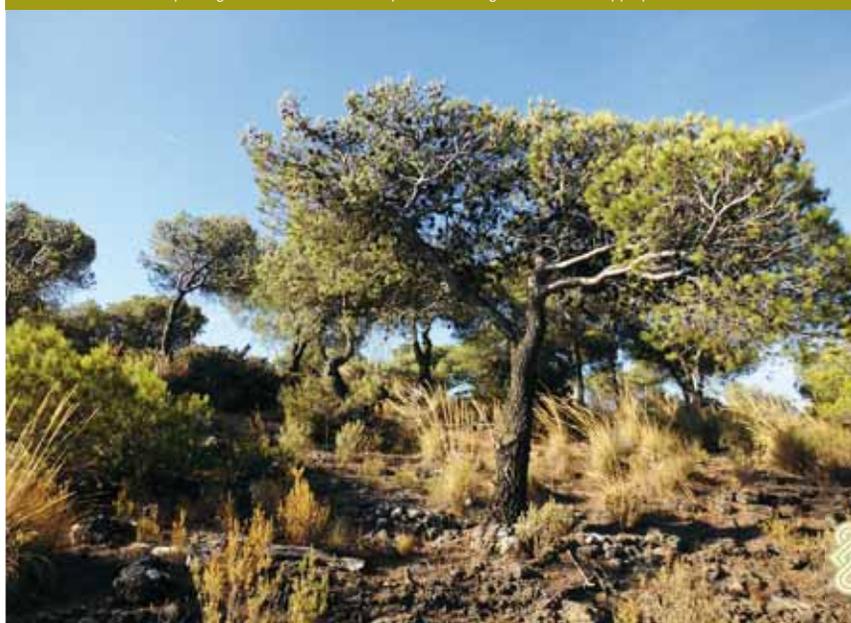
Here the most physically demanding section of stage 20 starts. From kilometre 10 to 13 you need to conquer a continuous 300 meter climb. You will pass a junction on the left,



A flat area replanted with conifers and overtaken by herbs

Camino del Cortijo el Madroño, which goes through a rocky valley floor with another cliff to the right, the Salto de la Zorra. The climb becomes easier and takes you eastwards by the Cortijo de Campano farmhouse, located in a cultivated area, contrasting strangely with the wild surroundings. Ahead, there are excellent views of the gorse-covered 1186 metre high Pico Capilla.

Around the summit Esparto grass and cistus bushes prevail, amongst scattered Aleppo pines





Oaks and Savin junipers in the nooks of the karstic relief of limestone cliffs

The maximum altitude reached during the stage is at the Puerto del Rosalejo pass, where the Roman city of Nescania was founded, at kilometre 14 and 845 metres above sea level. From here the walk descends turning gradually southwards. On the left, away from the path, there are the Fuente de la Viuda natural spring and the Cortijo de la Rujanada farmhouse. The maximum altitude of these mountains is at the grey limestone summit of Huma (1,191 m) which the walk skirts around. In the area there are a few farmhouses below the path: Tajo del Palmito, Castillo and the Peñascales, which lends its name to the road that comes from the Valle de Abdalajís, from the MA-4401 road.

The inlet (tail end) of the Guadalhorce reservoir dominates the landscape to the north of the walk



» El Camino de los Pedregales

As the path arrives at the district boundaries of Álora (km 16.2), it connects with the GR-7 E-4 and assumes a south-west direction. La Pedrera farmstead, a group of houses between olive groves at the foot of the sierra, has a network of dirt tracks which you keep following up to the pine forest of the Arroyo del Chorro. Similarly to other reforested areas, the purpose of the pine wood is to prevent the siltation process of wetlands by strengthening the rocky slopes. Now, and virtually until the end of the stage, the track enters the limits of the protected Natural Area, the Paraje Natural.

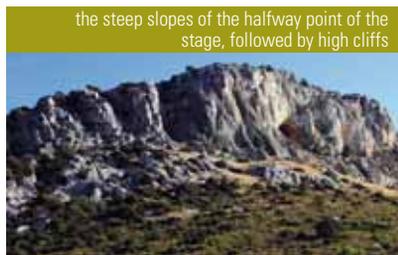
The track is steep and it levels out with the first bends at the beginning of Escalera Árabe (km 18) and a second more pronounced zigzag where you have a broad view of the area of El Chorro settlement, Las Mesas de Villaverde and the first part of the next stage. There are remarkable sheer cliffs that the track passes to the right. Aid (sport) climbing and classic climbing are done on the rock faces. The sector is known among climbers as the

low, medium and high Frontales (Bajas, Medias and Altas and contains a legendary cave route called Poema Roca (The Rock Poem).

The track enters pine woods almost devoid of any shrub vegetation due to its density, and then crosses the ravine twice in areas protected by retaining walls. First houses appear, then you arrive at the little neighbourhood where you can wander a while through its streets and arrive at the end of Stage 20. ○



Puerto de Ramos; a Savin juniper forest developing in the passage ways of the "little El Torcal"



the steep slopes of the halfway point of the stage, followed by high cliffs



during the ascent to the highest point of the walk, looking east to the Pico Capilla summit

LIST OF GPS POINTS OF THIS STAGE (UTM)

1 Reservoirs of Guadalhorce and Guadalteba	30S 0339794 4089821	360 m	2 Turn off the service road	30S 0340796 4090311	400 m
3 Native vegetation and shelter zone	30S 0340910 4089905	505 m	4 Three reservoirs viewpoint	30S 0340736 4089750	530 m
5 Paraje Natural Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, viewpoint	30S 0340769 4089713	555 m	6 Viewpoint to Savin Junipers at Tajo de Ballesteros	30S 0341778 4089926	575 m
7 Puerto and climbing area of Desplomilandia	30S 0341894 4090899	535 m	8 Puerto de Ramos and "Torcal" karst formations	30S 0343355 4091694	570 m
9 Salto de la Zorra	30S 0345130 4090215	600 m	10 Mirador del Pico Convento y Antequera, viewpoint	30S 0344600 4089518	835 m
11 Cortijo Campano, farmhouse	30S 0344804 4089326	830 m	12 Puerto del Rosalejo and the detour to Nescania Roman ruins	30S 0345437 4089277	845 m
13 Fuente de la Viuda spring and Cortijo de la Rejanada farm	30S 0346196 4088985	805 m	14 Cortijo de las Pedreras, farmhouse	30S 0345379 4087512	640 m
15 Junction to Escalereta Árabe, Arab staircase	30S 034641 4087023	560 m	16 Ford across Arroyo del Chorro	30S 0343731 4086436	330 m
17 Estación de El Chorro, station	30S 033261 4086029	255 m			