

# GR 243

## SIERRA de las NIEVES PATH

## ANDALUCÍA

  
ENGLISH  
VERSION  
2022



Diputación Provincial  
de Málaga





**SIERRA de las NIEVES**  
**PATH**  
**Topoguide GR 243**



© **EDITION:**

**Diputación de Málaga**

Tourism and Promotion of the Territory  
C/ Pacífico, 54  
29004 Málaga

**Writing team:**

Rafael Flores Domínguez. *RF NATURA*  
Miguel Ángel Mateos García. *Trail technician*

**Coordination:**

Juan José López Rosa

**English version coordination:**

C. Carlos Guerrero barragán

**Translation:**

James Monro

**Technical supervision:**

Juan José López Rosa  
Alfonso León Hidalgo  
Miguel Ángel Mateos García

**Maps :**

Manuel Perujo Villanueva. *Ronda Cartográfica*

**Graphic design and layout:**

Álvaro Sedeño Márquez

**Photographs:**

Rafael Flores Domínguez  
Antonio Ternero Alcántara. Pages 55 & 56

**First edition:** november 2021

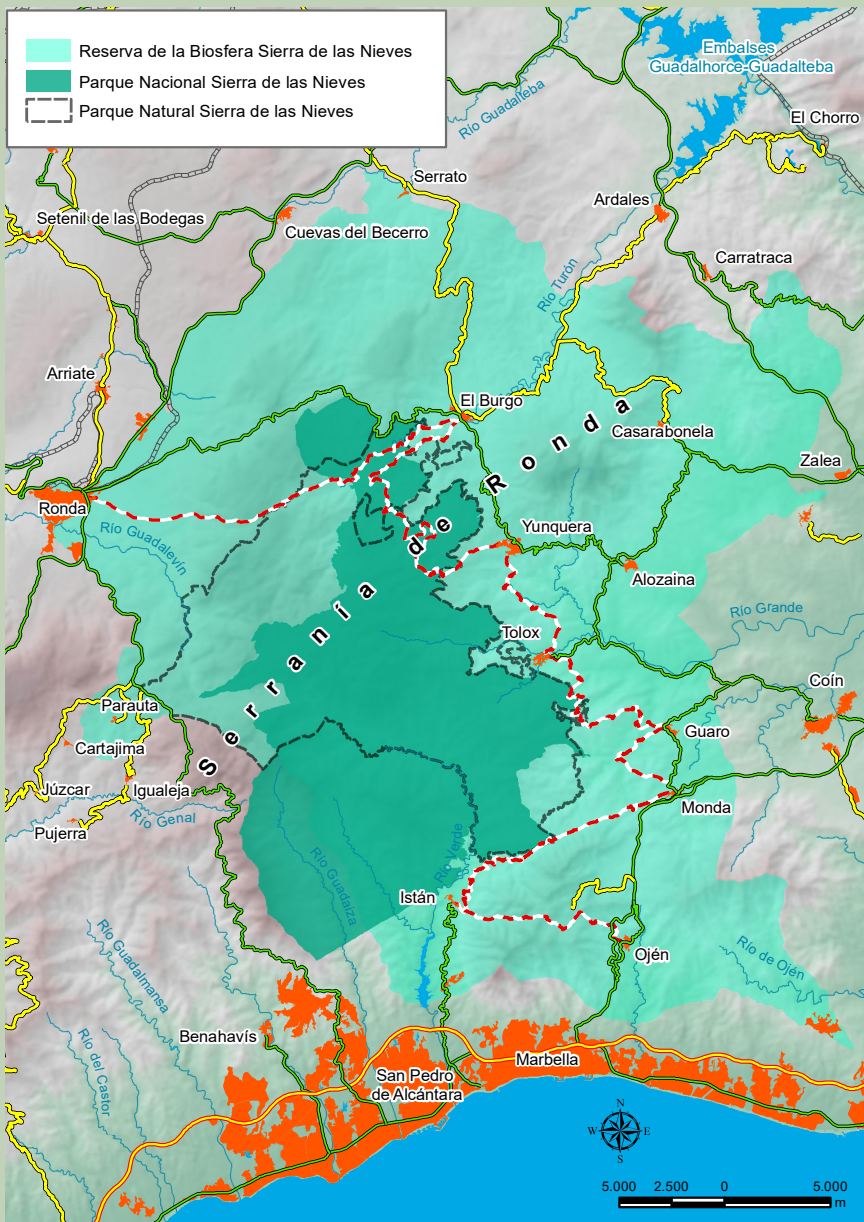
**NON-SALE EDITION**

Printed in Andalusia

**Legal deposit** MA-000-2021







# The Stages

**Stage 1.** Ronda - El Burgo ..... 88

**Stage 2.** El Burgo - Yunquera ..... 96

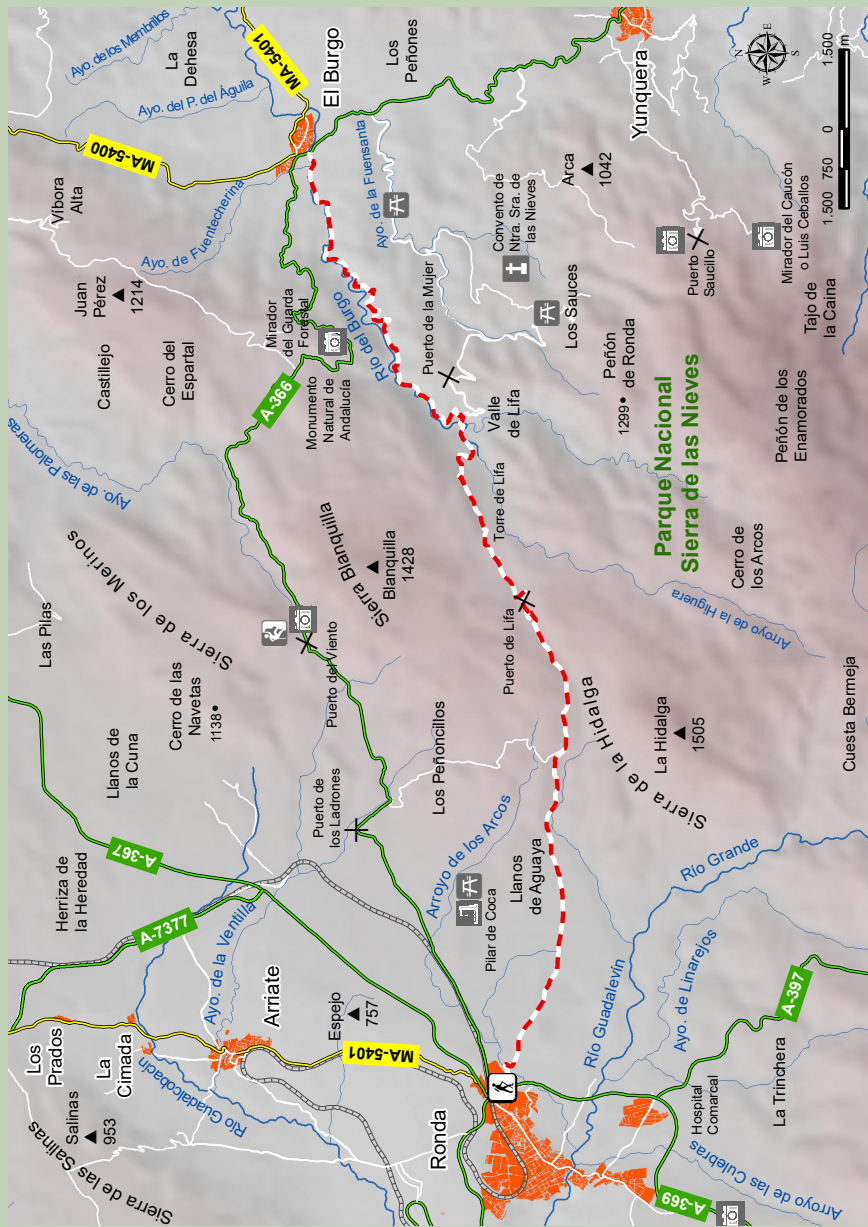
**Stage 3.** Yunquera - Tolox ..... 104

**Stage 4.** Tolox - Guaro ..... 112

**Stage 5.** Guaro - Monda ..... 120

**Stage 6.** Monda - Istán ..... 126










**Stage 7.** Istán - Ojén ..... 134





# Stage 1

## Ronda - El Burgo

Estimated duration	8 h 30 min			3	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	873 m			2	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	1038 m			2	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	23,7 km			4	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5		
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot					



13,5%



71,7%



14,8%



P	O	I	N	T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
1	Ronda				308432	4069485	717 m	Km 0
2	Puerto de Lifa				316708	4068652	1.157 m	Km 9,3
3	Arroyo de la Higuera				320957	4070307	674 m	Km 15,1
4	El Burgo				326068	4073165	551 m	Km 23,7

**Maps:** E/1:25.000 • 1051-I. 1051-II. 1051-III.

**Access to the starting point.** Boulevard next to the fairground area. At the junction of the A-397 to the Costa del Sol, the A-374 to Seville, the A-367 to Campillos and Málaga, and the A-366 to Coín.

**Access to the finishing point.** Bridge over the River Turón. At the entrance to El Burgo (A-366)



### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

Landscapes varying from the level plains of Ronda's plateau to the valleys that feed into the River Turón. This first stretch crosses the fertile plains of Aguaya, bringing the imposing limestone walls of Sierra Hidalga into view to the east. The ancestral way through these is the Lifa Pass, standing at 1,174m above sea level. From this rise, to the west is the Líbar massif, belonging to Málaga's area of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. The city of Ronda, also in view, sits on the plateau overlooking the Guadalevín valley with its famous Tajo gorge. From the hamlet of Lifa, the route descends through the attractive Lifa valley, a splendid area with replanted Turpentine trees within the limits of the Natural Park, the highest level of protection. After crossing the usually dried up stream of La Higuera, it comes to the forest track travelling between El Burgo and La Mujer mountain pass. The track follows the course of the El Burgo river, through limestone and marl limestone peaks with spectacular folds in the strata. Aleppo pine forest covers these slopes, with remnants of the primitive vegetation predominantly Holm and Gall oaks and Wild Olive trees. Several natural pools can be seen, the furthest two are known as Largo del Dique and El Dique, both of which are suitable for bathing. The proximity of the stage's destination El Burgo, the stage's destination, is revealed by a greater anthropization of the territory, with fields of Olive and Almond trees and some vegetable gardens bordering the fertile plains of the river.



▲ Ronda and the Aguaya Plains. On the Horizon, the Sierra de Grazalema mountain range

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 71:** Up until joining up with the Ronda to Marbella Puerta Verde Way.
- **Public Footpath - El Burgo-La Fuensanta:** Final stretch of the GR-243.
- **Stage 2 GR-243 El Burgo-Yunquera:** The final stretch.

### A NOTE OF CAUTION:

Up to the route's midway point, the route crosses livestock and game farms, any gates or barriers we come across, must be closed behind us. Under normal conditions, crossing La Higuera stream does not pose any difficulty, however during rainy periods or after storms it may be dangerous. For this reason and due to the lack of a bridge, pay close attention to the weather forecast before tackling this section.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Once on the wide avenue alongside Ronda's municipal sports centre and the Ángel Harillo fairground, look for a tarmacked road heading towards a warehouse of construction materials. The stage's information board marks the start point. Turning right, over the Tomay stream, you soon come to a short climb that takes you up to the Bilbao pass, an exceptional viewpoint out over the Aguaya Plains. This is home to various rain-fed crops, Olive groves and even the odd vineyard. Up ahead, you get a glimpse of the bare Sierra Hidalga, the eastern-most point of the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park, reaching 1,504m above sea level. Some telecommunications antennae can be seen on its southern side, at Las Ventanas pass. The view to the north of this mountain is even more breath-taking. No more than a dozen solitary and striking Pinsapo Spanish fir trees cling to the hillside, serving as proof of what should have been better days for the Andalusian silver fir.

▼ A lone Pinsapo Spanish Fir in the Sierra Hidalgo



“ Until recently, scholars and historians believed the famous Battle of Munda (45 BC) took place on these plains, fought between Julius Caesar’s legions and Pompey, the Younger. According to the latest research, the scene of the battle was south of Córdoba. However, this falsehood led to a characteristic hill located to the south of La Hidalga being called Pompeyo, recognisable by its distinctive rocky horn. Legend has it that, after losing the battle, Pompey hid a magnificent treasure at the base of the cliffs of this mountain, but to date never found. ”

Continuing along the Ronda to Yunquera pathway, the route crosses the Cordel de los Pescadores (meaning: The Fisherman’s Way), signposted by the Junta de Andalucía as the name of Ronda to Marbella Puerta Verde. This livestock track’s name is a tribute to the many mule drivers, laden with seafood who used this. The country house on the corner was once a roadside Inn named Ramirón, a meeting place for muleteers, livestock farmers and market gardeners. The PR-A 73 turns off to the left towards the recreational area at the Pilar del Coca watering hole and rest area, often frequented by walkers and cyclists from Ronda.

We continue straight on here and soon enter the area of Los Peñoncillos, where Holm oak woods take the spotlight. Among the estate’s different land uses, hunting is the most important, with deer being the most coveted game. In mid-September, you may be lucky enough to enjoy the spectacle of the deer rut and even spot deer.

The pathway climbs continually until it reaches the Lifa pass (**9.2km mark**). The exertion soon pays off the higher we climb, with spectacular views of the Ronda plateau and the town itself, protected to the west by the towering peaks of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park.

On the way down from the pass to the Lifa country estate, we can see some decaying Spanish firs on the slope of Carramolo del Queso. These are the remains of an old forest

▼ The Lifa Country Estate





▲ Lifa Tower

that has been felled and charred, owing to its proximity and easy access. During manoeuvres of a battalion based in Ronda, the artillery had no other target than to hit the unfortunate Spanish firs. Clearly, environmental awareness was not what it is today. Thankfully, it is quite different today and thanks to reduced pressure from grazing, small areas of young Spanish firs can be seen finding their footing. We will no longer have a forest as such, but at least the presence of some specimens will motivate the preservation of this natural relic of Ronda's Serranía.

“ The GR-243 Sierra de las Nieves follows the Ronda to Yunquera Municipal Route, an ancestral thoroughfare used since at least the Roman period. The existence of both a quarry next to the old Andalusian farmhouse of Lifa dating back to that period and archaeological remains of the old Roman villas on the Aguaya plains support this idea. Likewise, the derelict Lifa watch-tower confirms the strategic importance of this natural passage of Turón that connects the plateau with the Guadalhorce valley. Take note, the Lifa tower is on private land, so we will have to observe it from the path. ”



The Lifa country estate is found in a wide-open valley, flanked to the north by the Sierra Blanquilla and to the east by cliffs marking the course of the Sabinal stream flowing into the Lifa valley. The remains of the medieval tower that guarded the road and protected the old Andalusian farmhouse are perched on top a nearby promontory.

▲ Lifa Valley

The route continues along a stony path, bordering a delightful forest of Turpentine and overlooking the Sierra Cabrilla. In the autumn months, the forest produces an image of outstanding beauty of rich, earthy and golden colours. The old sheep pens, run down terraces and the derelict mountain farms, such as Moñiguitos or Buenavista are testament to the decline of old mountain cultures, defeated by the new agricultural production systems and competition from intensive livestock farming. On a more positive note, Mediterranean scrubland and its plant species are on the rise: Holm oaks, Gall oaks, wild Olive trees, Mastic trees, Broad-leaved Phillyrea and Turpentine trees that have helped rewild the area.

After crossing La Higuera or Parra stream, we climb up to a forest track running between El Burgo and La Mujer pass (**15.4km mark**). We then descend to the east, following the El Burgo river, which later becomes the Turón. It is a very pleasant section, sticking close to the streambed, which dries up in the summer in the upper course, but flows again from the Nacimiento dam onwards. Where the track runs closest to



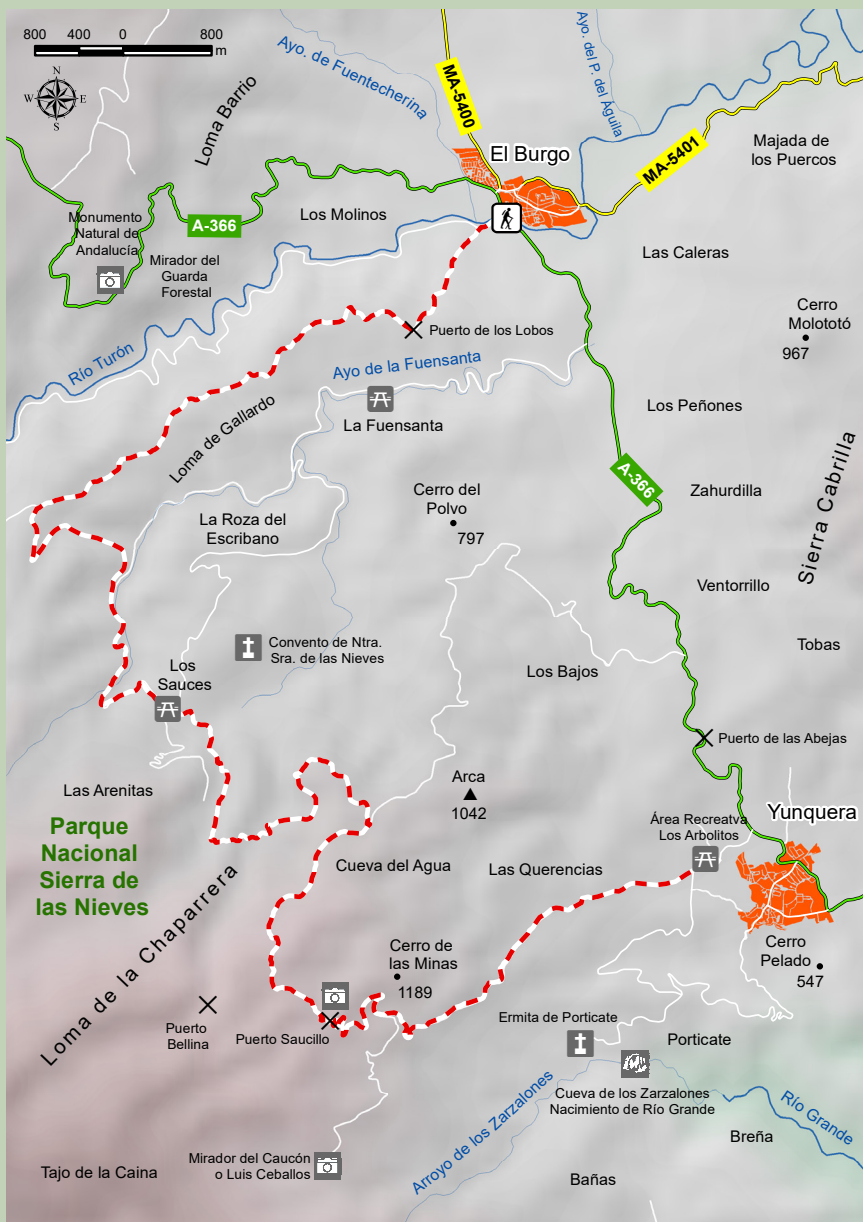
the watercourse, the Fraguaron spring can be found, which causes a spectacular explosion of water after heavy rains. Further down on the right, there is the chance of a refreshing stop at the Quejigo spring.

Along the stretch close to the river, there are several small retaining dams, creating the Turón pools. These were built at the beginning of the 20th century after the terrible storm of 28th September 1906, which destroyed farmland, properties and the meadows' mills, killing five people from two families. The first pool is La Hierbabuena, seen from the municipal livestock installations next to the road. The next is El Nacimiento. From here onwards, the river course is stable. Further down is the La Requena irrigation channel and dam, used to transfer water to the fields. The most renowned pool is El Dique or the Molino Caído pool, since bathing is allowed during the summer season. Above this is another irrigation pool, also suitable for bathing, called Largo del Dique.

El Turón maintains an attractive gallery forest, with interesting species such as Ash, Poplar, Elm, White poplar, Tamarisk and various types of Willow. It is also a haven for fish species such as trout, Iberian nase and chub. The clean and cold waters are also home to otters and a decent population of freshwater crayfish. Our route ends next to the bridge of the A-366 (Ronda-Málaga), on the outskirts of El Burgo, whose remains and ancient walls of the old castle stand out above the whitewashed houses.










▼ The retaining dam of the El Burgo





# Stage 2

## El Burgo - Yunquera

Estimated duration	8 h		 2	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	1.632 m		 2	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	1.450 m		 1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	23,3 km		 4	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5	
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot				



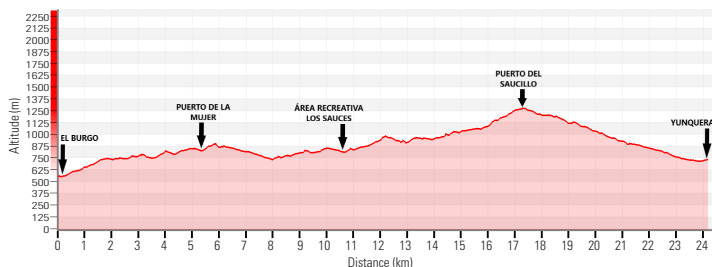
0%



53%



47%



P O I N T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
<b>1</b> El Burgo	326068	4073165	551 m.	Km 0
<b>2</b> Puerto de la Mujer	321852	4070509	869 m.	Km 5,9
<b>3</b> Área Recreativa Los Sauces	323214	4068660	854 m.	Km 10
<b>4</b> Puerto del Saucillo	324485	4065842	1.207 m.	Km 18
<b>5</b> Yunquera	327792	4067215	731 m.	Km 23,3

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1051-II. 1051 IV.

**Access to the starting point.** Entrance to El Burgo (A-366), past the bridge over the river Turón, towards Yunquera, taking the fork off to the right.

**Access to the finishing point.** Los Arbolitos, next to the campsite of Sierra de las Nieves, on its forest track.

### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

The second stage of the GR-243 displays the Sierra de las Nieves National Park's best areas of woodland. The first section runs along land between of the River Turón and its tributary, La Fuensanta. Marl limestone dominates the landscape, with extensive Aleppo pine forest, whose shade is home to a burgeoning population of emerging Holm oaks. The mountain pass of La Mujer, at 874 m above sea level, leads on to an important and rugged part of the El Burgo Sierra, overseen by the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. From here we drop down to La Fuensanta forest track, to then climb up to the Los Sauces recreational area and campsite. From here onwards, several of the tributaries of La Fuensanta stream need to be crossed, including those of La Encina, Los Hornillos and Las Bañas, where there are some well-preserved banks of Pinsapo Spanish fir. Once on the Cueva del Agua track, home to a tree nursery until not too long ago, we will continue climbing up to the highest point of the GR-243 at the Pílon de las Tres Puertas pass, at 1,274m above sea level. The subsequent descent to El Saucillo pass is through enclosed woodland of Spanish fir, where a species known as Candelabra tree stands out. The nearby viewpoint of El Saucillo offers panoramic views of the Guadalhorce valley and several protected natural areas such as Antequera's El Torcal, the mountain ranges of Tejeda and Almajara and the extensive Sierra Nevada. From the viewpoint and car park, wide forest tracks prevail, through a mosaic of patches of forest and various plantations.



Los Perdigonos stream

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **SUP El Burgo-La Fuensanta:** Until Los Lobos pass.
- **SUP El Burgo-La Mujer mountain pass:** Until this pass.
- **SL-A 141:** Between Los Sauces and the Cueva del Agua track.

### A NOTE OF CAUTION

Beware of vehicles on the track sections, especially on the track from Yunquera to the lookouts of Ceballos and El Saucillo. In the winter months, it is important to calculate the time it will take, since both the distance and the accumulated ascent can be demanding. Despite there being several springs, it is necessary to carry sufficient water and food. Although the path is well marked, there may be some moments of doubt at some of the many crossroads and forks. Therefore, it is a good idea to download the route, to follow on a GPS device.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Once you have crossed the Puente Nuevo bridge over the River Turón, leaving El Burgo towards Yunquera (A-366), take the lane to the right, where you will see the stage's information panel. We soon leave the riverbank to take a smaller path leading to Los Lobos pass, on the boundary between farmland and Pine forest. Another pathway forks off towards the scenic recreational area of La Fuensanta; although 1.3 km further on, a different unmarked path ends up in the same place.

▼ Panoramic views of the Sierra Blanquilla mountains





It is then an undulating climb up the elongated trunk that forms the watershed between El Turón and La Fuensanta streams, the latter a tributary of the former. At times, we will have to cross or walk along the firebreaks, a crucial part of the area's forestry management. Further on, the path comes to the viewpoint over the upper valley of the River Turón with its pools and the truncated spurs on the far riverbank. At the top of one of these cliffs we can see the railings and sculpture of the Forest Ranger's viewpoint, declared a Natural Monument of Andalusia for its geological uniqueness. Within these repopulated Pine forests are some unstable terraces with weathered Olive trees, displaying former agricultural uses. Also found here is large number and variety of orchids, especially in early spring. Another abundant species and almost non-existent in other areas of the National Park is the Kidney vetch shrub.

The path ends at the track up to La Mujer mountain pass (**6km mark**), where the Manuel García Rosa Pathway leads off, one of the three signposted forest tracks in the Sierra de El Burgo public forest. A stop-off here is well worth it, if not to catch your breaaeth, then simply to enjoy the wonderful panoramic views. It looks out over the Sierra del Pinar mountains, covered in magnificent woodland of Pinsapo Spanish fir and the Lifa valley, where the ruins of the medieval tower seen in the first stage stand out. That said, we now drop down along this track until it joins another larger track. Rather surprisingly, at these crossroads is a Galician Cruceiro cross carved out of granite, a rock that is geologically foreign to these parts. We have to go back to the 1960s, when by error, four Cruceiros bound for Fonsanta in northern Spain, arrived at Fuensanta (El Burgo). Once here, there was no turning back of course. They were placed at two forks in the track up to Los Sauces. Before you reach this recreational area, is El Higuerón spring, which makes its appearance close to upwelling, and small stream of Los Perdigones, which, in times of heavy rain produces three waterfalls between curious tectonic folds.

▼ Cruceiro





▲ *El Filar* (ridge)  
de los Ermitaños  
outcrop from the  
Huarte mountain  
pass

The track ends at the Los Sauces recreational area, which also serves as a certified camping area and is very close to the old convent of Sierra de las Nieves. A wall next to the car park obstructs the view of the building itself.

“ The Santo Desierto de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves dates back to 1495, when several hermits, who had led an ascetic life in nearby caves, decided to build a hermitage in honour of the Virgen de las Nieves. Work on the chapel and the convent area was completed in 1604. Several other hermitages were later built in other remote locations nearby. This collection of monasteries was governed by the order of the Carmelitas Descalzos. After the Confiscation of Mendizábal in 1853, it passed into private hands and the buildings were put to different uses, such as a wine press and an oil mill. The bells are preserved in the parish church of El Burgo and a painting of the Virgin in the Church of the Espíritu Santo, in Ronda. ”

The route now drops down to the bottom of La Encina ravine, squeezed between the Alhucemar mountain and the ridge off to the east between the hills of La Cruz and Las Camaretas. Pine forest dominates where Holm oak forest once stood, just as the name suggests. Nevertheless, Oak trees are slowly recovering. We soon come to some excavations in the ground, belonging to the mining complex of San Eulogio, some of which are fenced off.



The Agua cave

“ The San Eulogio mines date back to the mid-19th century. They mined the ground rich in (antimony) galena or lead glance. Due to an unfavourable location and its high transport costs, the owners built the smelting furnaces near the entrance to the mine, stoked with wood from the surrounding Holm oaks. To access the main complex, take a short path that leads off the GR-243 route. First are the remains of a metal washing pool and then the furnaces next the openings of three mines. These are dangerous and should not be entered. The main minerals extracted were zinc, antimony, lead and calamite. Without conclusive information, it seems that they ceased functioning in the first quarter of the 20th century. ”

As we climb, the Pinsapo Spanish fir forest of Cubero comes into view in the distance. Its lower section was wiped out by a forest fire towards the end of the last century. On the other side of the valley, also known as Las Minas or Los Algarabeos, we can glimpse the small country estate of Huarte, built partly beneath an enormous rock. We soon come to the fork that leads through the Huarte pass to the Cuesta de los Hornillos ravine. We enter dense Pine forest with some Spanish firs clinging to the shady areas. This long section, with much greenery and low cliffs on either side, passes very close to the Tajo Grande or Tajo del Monje gorge. One of the caves used for shelter by the first hermit is right here. We eventually join a new forest track, make a sharp right turn and continue along in the shade of a forest of Pines, Spanish firs, Cypresses and the occasional Yew tree. After passing by an old garden centre, the section ends at the

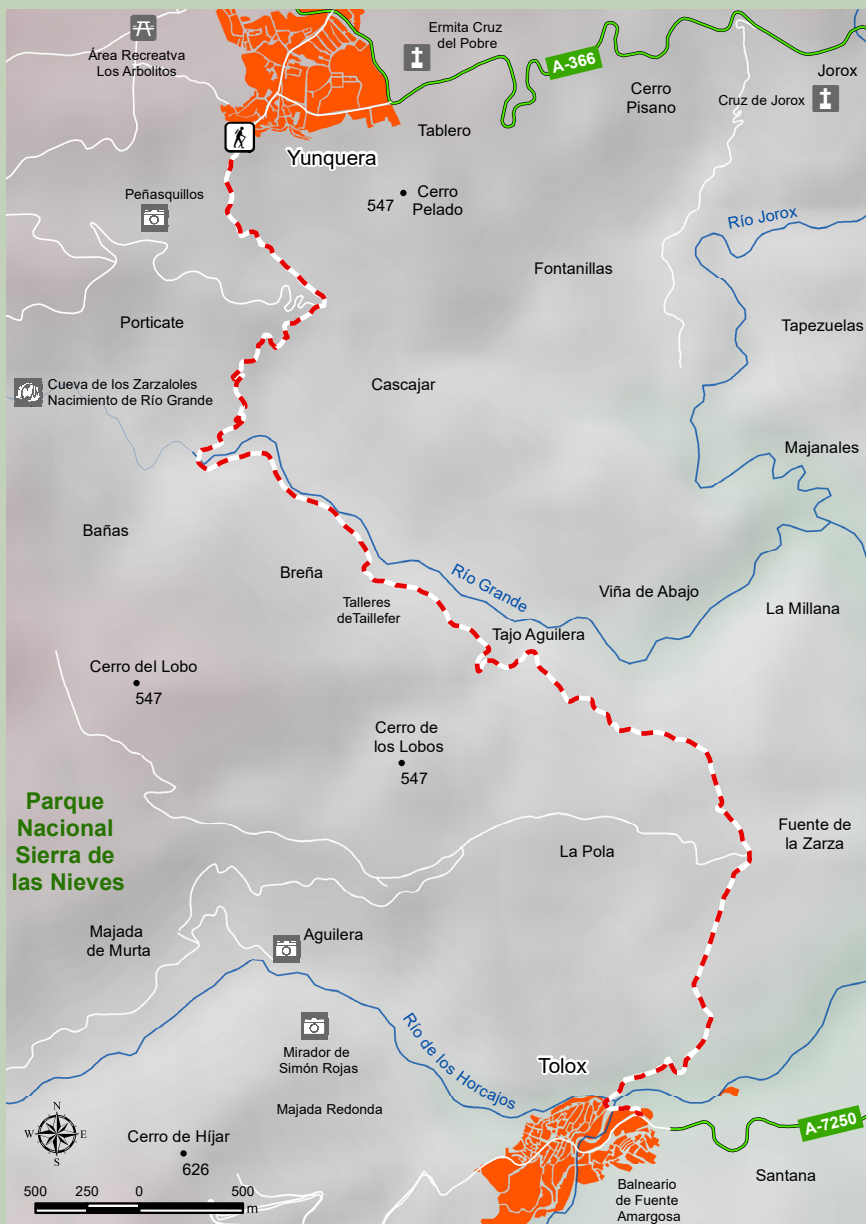
cave of El Agua (**16.2km**), an enormous but shallow cave, once used to shelter livestock and later Spanish fir seedlings. Next to the rock, there are two Hawthorns, considered 'Unique Trees of Andalusia'. There are also a couple of Whitebeam near the cave.

The route then joins an attractive pathway, which we leave almost immediately, to join another that climbs up towards the Pilón de las Tres Puertas pass. The Pinsapo Spanish fir, king of the Andalusian forest, takes centre stage along this section. It is worth pointing out the wise forestry management here, because had the pine reforestation not been carried out in the 60s, it would not be growing today and the Andalusian silver fir would have taken over. Little by little the pines are being removed, whose presence is not always appreciated. We pass other signposted pathways leading off and then before reaching the Puerto del Saucillo viewpoint, we will be surprised by the spectacular Candelabra tree, acknowledged as a 'Unique Tree of Andalusia'.

From this rise, reachable by a track from Yunquera, there is a wide-open view of the Guadalhorce valley and the bay of Málaga. To the east, you can also see the main peaks of Málaga's section of the Subbética mountains, of the Tejeda and Almijara mountain ranges, as well as the outlines of the neighbouring Sierra Nevada National Park. The remaining stretch to Yunquera is an easy section through a diverse canopy of vegetation: Pinsapo Spanish firs, Pines, Cherry trees, Chestnut trees and mainly the ancient terraces where Olive trees, Almond trees and vineyards thrive.

▼ Yunquera  
and the Sierras  
of Cabrilla and  
Prieta, from the  
El Saucillo pass
















# Stage 3

## Yunquera - Tolox

Estimated duration	3 h			1	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	357 m			2	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	757 m			1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	8,8 km			3	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5		
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot					



ASPHALT

15%



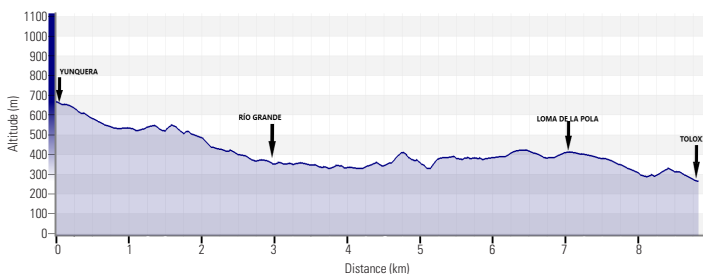
TRACK

85%



FOOTWAY

0%



P O I N T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
<b>1</b> Yunquera	328274	4066670	665	Km 0
<b>2</b> Río Grande	328092	4065101	372	Km 2,9
<b>3</b> Loma de la Pola	330738	4063216	392	Km 6,9
<b>4</b> Tolox	330212	4061974	265	Km 8,8

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1051-II. 1051 IV.

**Access to the starting point.** Los Patos Mill, reachable from the centre of town along Calvario and Agua streets.

**Access to the finishing point.** San Roque Avenida. Entrance to Tolox along the A-7250 road.

### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

The route of the GR-243's third stage between Yunquera and Tolox is a constant surprise in terms of scenery. The variety of rock formations and landscape undoubtedly serve to enliven the journey through terrain, which is constantly alternating between woodland and fields of crops. The modelling and carving out by the River Grande played a large part in the landscape's creation. In addition, the hydroelectric infrastructure on the River Grande is also on display. From the off-set, we will gradually cross the exemplary agro-system of the Plano river, a tributary of the Grande. We later reach the Castaño pass, the meeting point of several paths, as well as varied geology such as the extraordinary peridotites. After the resulting descent, we cross the River Grande, entering the areas of La Breña and La Pola, following the GR-243 signs through a network of agricultural and forest paths. This leads on to a viewpoint next to the municipality of Tolox's reservoir. It is also an excellent natural lookout spot to see the transition between the Sierra Parda mountains, covered with extensive Maritime pine forests, and the rolling fields of crops covered with woody varieties, with varying degrees of success. In this transition between forest and agriculture, Tolox is strategically located on the mound formed between the rivers Los Caballos and Alfaguara, expanding its motley and whitish urban centre, evidently of Andalusian origin.



▲ Los Patos mill

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **SL-A 246:** The first hundred metres of the stage.

### A NOTE OF CAUTION

It is prohibited to pick fruits from the private land alongside the pathway. Not only is this private property, but they are the livelihood and way of life of local residents. Although there is limited road traffic, stay aware of passing vehicles to avoid any accidents. It is not permitted to walk along the irrigation dams, nor along those linked with the hydroelectric complex. On rainy days, it is advisable to wear mid-calf length walking boots, as some sections of the track can get muddy. Despite the short distance and keeping to tracks, be careful not to overdo it on the steep sections on the climb from River Grande to the rise of La Pola. A pair of telescopic poles will help here.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

At the end of Agua Street is the building of the old mill, Los Patos and several of its most significant elements, such as the double water channel and the aqueduct that crosses the street. It was used specifically for milling wheat, propelled by the waters of the river Plano. Upstream from this, is an interesting agricultural system made up of a web-like network of irrigation channels and terraces that follow the contour lines, held in place by thick dry-stone walls. Apart from the occasional vegetable garden, the terraces are home to Vineyards, Fig, Fruit and Citrus trees. In recent years tropical plants, especially Avocado trees, have become the crop of choice. It is a quite stunning setting; a seemingly masterful visual reading of an outstanding agricultural and cultural

▼ Terraced orchards



landscape. It combines well with the overbearing and harsh Sierra Cabrilla mountains and the white-washed village of Yunquera. Its travertine bedrock is subject to the raggedness of the slope's ancient method of multiple cropping. Water, soil and seed in perfect symbiosis. This is the Andalusian concept of the vegetable garden. Now it is called sustainability. From this site, we can also see the installations of the Yunquera waste water treatment plant.

At the valley bottom, we cross the modest Plano River and continue along the track towards the Castaño pass. This a meeting point of paths and an interesting site to appreciate the external geological processes and the overthrust faults of varied rock formations, including sedimentary, metamorphic and igneous rocks, such as the peridotites. We go straight over this crossroads, down a steep descent to the water's edge of the River Grande. Before crossing over, it is worth taking the short detour to the right to see the San Pascual power station building (**2.6km**).

“ The last quarter of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century were golden periods for Malaga's industry, thanks to the enterprise and determination of several family groups, both local and foreign. This boosted different sectors such as the agri-food, iron and steel and textile industries. During this period of rapid growth and requirement for energy resources, a total of three power stations were set up on the banks of this river: San Pascual, San Augusto and San Eugenio. The San Pascual power station still has its gardens and architecture showing a certain grandeur. At the rear of the building is the Güichi, the steep stepped waterway connected to the dam, that channeled the water through the generator. Further on towards Tolox, we can see the colossal irrigation channel and other buildings such as the warehouses belonging to Taillefer, the Malagan company that was awarded the management of the electricity supply in those days. Eugene Taillefer, a French agricultural engineer, arrived in Spain, recruited by Manuel Gutiérrez de la Concha, Marquis of Duero, founder of an agricultural colony that became the town of San Pedro de Alcántara. Taillefer had important agri-food, timber and automobile businesses. ”



▲ The San Pascual power plant and the 'El Güichi' waterway

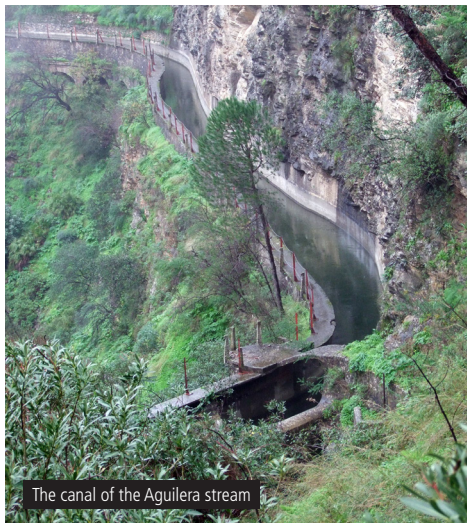
The track climbs up the steep slope to bring the irrigation channel into sight on one side, which is well fenced off. In Yunquera they call it 'the Dike.' We move away from the river and climb high enough to contemplate the enclosed valley with few arable fields. The surrounding pine-covered slopes are completed with Olive and Almond trees. Due to less agriculture, Holm oaks, Wild olive trees and Carob trees are reconquering territory, accompanied by a thick undergrowth. Along the riverbeds, due to the humidity and less exposure to the sun, Gall oaks grow freely.

On one side of the path, we can vaguely make out the remains of one of the derelict canals, small dams and the interesting small bridges crossing over to the other side. Further on, you will see an old entrance to a tunnel that was later deepened by a local in search of riches, hence its nickname, 'the Treasure Tunnel.' Shortly before the GR-243 turns south and leaves the River Grande, take extra care when crossing of the Aguilera ravine, which is quite rugged and surrounded by abundant vegetation. From the track, you go down a short but steep trail to the canal which carries water to the abandoned San Augusto power station. Be careful, the descent is not recommended for sufferers of vertigo or those not comfortable on unsteady terrain. A viaduct crosses the stream that plunges down to the River Grande in several waterfalls.





The gauging house



The canal of the Aguilera stream

“ The River Grande flows very close to the San Pascual power station through a spectacular cave. This impressive mountainous location can be reached by following the route of the SL-A 246, which coincides with the start of stage 3 of the GR-243. The area's rugged terrain and the abundance of water have allowed various canyon descents to be set up in recent years. The most vertical, located above the Zarzalones spring, is known as Agua Injerta. From the cave to the San Pascual power station is the fast-flowing canyon descent of Zarzalones, the most visited by fans of this outdoor activity. The dam's overflow channel was also installed above the power plant. For obvious reasons, it is known as San Pascual Canyon. The last one is the Aguilera Canyon, with an impressive initial vertical abseil of 33 metres, followed by others of 14, 17 and 9 metres respectively. Canyoning requires knowledge of alpine climbing techniques and a certain amount of experience. It is advisable to acquire the specialised services of one of the local active tourism companies in order to ensure the highest levels of safety. ”

Returning to the path, we continue between ridges covered with Olive and Almond trees, enjoying splendid panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. If we look closely towards one of the meanders of the River Grande, we can make out the attractive, reasonably large and country estate of La Puente, with an air of stateliness. Next to the main building there is a small chapel. Nearby, we can also see the beautiful bridge with a semi-circular arch over which one of the roads from Tolox to Yunquera used to pass, as shown on a map from the Geographical and Statistical Institute dated 1953.

La Pola ridge (**6.9km**), where we meet a crossroads and water deposit, marks the end of the climb. The reward is an enjoyable and easy track from here, following the gentler slope of the River Grande as it flows between farmed ridges towards the Guadalhorce Valley. To the south and west, the mountainous nature of the Sierra Parda persists, in stark contrast to the grey of the Tolox mountain range. Against this backdrop of green, reddish and earthy tones, the town centre of Tolox, our destination appears in all its splendour.

Before reaching the Avenida de San Roque in Tolox, we need to cross the Alfaguara River, which in this section and until it joins the river Grande in the area of Las Millanas, is known as the Almozara.

▼ The Treasure Tunnel












La Puente

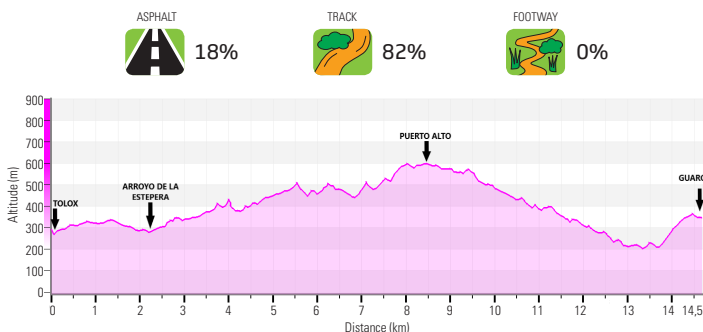




# Stage 4

## Tolox - Guaro

Estimated duration	5 h		 2	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	897 m		 1	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	850 m		 1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	14,7 km		 3	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5	
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot				



P O I N T	X	Y	ALTITUD	DISTANCE
<b>1</b> Tolox	330240	4061937	271	Km 0
<b>2</b> Arroyo de la Estepa	331564	4061053	319	Km 2,1
<b>3</b> Puerto Alto	332805	4058905	594	Km 8,8
<b>4</b> Guaro	335681	4058455	347	Km 14,7

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1051-IV. 1065-II. 1066-I

**Access to the starting point.** From the San Roque Avenue, the main access road to Tolox turns into Calle Erilla, where the stage begins.

**Access to the finishing point.** Camino del Arroyo street, next to the main road to Marbella (A-7100), at the crossing with the road that loops round Guaro to the west.

### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

This fourth stage, between Tolox and Guaro manages to maintain the bar very high in terms of the scenic beauty and environmental interest, as set by the previous stages. Both at the beginning and at the end of the route, the human influence in the surrounding countryside of these two towns is very evident. Small farmhouses and fields intermingle with second homes, in many cases built on the foundations of old farms. Olives remains among the most important crops in these parts of the Biosphere Reserve, and whose tradition goes back centuries. During the route, we will discover how the peridotites of the easternmost stretch of the Sierra Parda de Tolox give rise to Maritime pine forest. Its dominance is only interrupted by some scattered clumps of Oak and Chestnut trees, which reveal the intrusion of other geological materials. The route reaches a series of mountain passes in the slate hills, while overlooking an array of colourful mountains made up of different rock types: the limestone of the Sierras Prieta, Cabrilla and Tolox, and the reddish limestone of the Sierra Parda de Tolox. The halfway point, the Puerto Alto pass, at just over 600 m above sea level, is an attractive viewpoint overlooking the light-coloured hills covered with vineyards, Almond, Fig and Olive trees. To the south, the contrast with the brittle profiles of the Canucha and Blanca mountain ranges is very evident. From here, we descend swiftly towards the Seco stream, one of the River Grande's tributaries, the principal tributary of the Guadalhorce to the west.



▲ A Tavertine platform close to the Seco stream

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 274:** From Puerto Alto pass until Guaro.
- **PR-A 279:** For a section of 450m near Puerto Alto pass.



## A NOTE OF CAUTION

The route follows forest tracks and farm lanes throughout, which usually have little traffic. This makes staying aware even more important, especially close to Tolox and Guaro. The route's profile is a typically jagged one, one of the so-called leg-breakers, climbing and descending constantly. Walking sticks and decent footwear will make it easier. Fruit should not be picked from the bushes along the route. Water can only be obtained from the Fuente de la Teja stream, as the rest of the watercourses are seasonal. The stage's different environments favour spotting numerous birds, so binoculars are a good idea to spot the smaller birds.

## ROUTE DESCRIPTION

We depart from Tolox along Erilla Street, past the village's last houses and several commercial premises. A short distance further on we leave this road to Coin and turn right along the branch that heads to the ford crossing of the Estepera stream, which is lined with dense vegetation. We now face the Estepera slope, surrounded by vines and enormous Olive trees that are hundreds of years old.

▼ Sierra Parda,  
Tolox



“ In the municipality of Tolox, the Santana Olive tree is famous for its size and age, estimated at some 800 years old. By this measure, it must have been planted in the period of Almoravid or Almohad rule. We cannot be sure, however oral tradition states that under its shade rested the troops of D. Luis Ponce de León, the peacemaker of the Moorish rebellion of 1570 in the Ronda Mountains, during the War of the Alpujarras. Tolox and Istán were important strongholds against the Christian power. From this turbulent period in Tolox's history, we have inherited the festivity 'Day of Las Mozas' which commemorates the dispute that took place at Christmas 1539 between a Moorish woman and a Christian woman over the use of an oven. This led to a major altercation between the two communities. The Christians of Tolox called for help from the villagers of nearby villages, who chased the Moors away by clanging cowbells and conch shells. Since then, it has been a deep-rooted tradition in the festive calendar. ”

Once at the top of the Albarejo hill, the track runs along the interfluvial ridge between Las Viñas and El Negro streams, both tributaries of the Estepera stream. In view from this stretch, one of the route's few flat sections, above the pine-covered Cerro Redondo ridge is the imposing massif of the Tolox mountain range. Its highest summit, Torrecilla (1,919 m) stands out high above. The panoramic view to the north is equally as pleasing to the eye and is rounded off by the Cabrilla and Prieta mountain ranges, and the town of Yunquera sitting just below. Its whitish tint reveals its sedimentary origin, just the same as the Sierra de Tolox.

Shortly before crossing the Viñas stream, the same track doubles as the border of the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. The Maritime pine stands out as the undisputed king of the forest. It is accompanied by magnificent shrubs such as Mastic, Juniper and Mediterranean fan palm. The Puerto del Rey pass signifies the first contact with the catchment area of the Fuente de la Teja stream, which flows all year round. While crossing this stream, it is possible to replenish our water supply from the

▼ The Teja Spring





▲ Panoramic view of the whitish Sierra de Tolox mountains

stream-bed itself. It flows between huge slabs of peridotite rock, and in just over 5 km it flows from Aranda hill (1051 m) to its confluence with the Estepera stream, at 200 m above sea level.

The next point of interest is the Puerto de Chiribenítez pass (**5.6km**), an important crossroads and border between Tolox and Monda municipalities. The boundary of the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park makes a sharp turn here, taking us further away from the protected area. From a bird's eye view of the landscape, there are three very different natural environments: the gentle slate hills covered in Olive trees, Vines and Almond trees; Pine forest on peridotites and the Mediterranean scrubland, with Holm oaks, Cork oaks and patches of Chestnut trees occupying the less accessible areas. For a short section, our route coincides with the PR-A 279 (Guaro - Chiribenítez), to then turn eastwards, around an elongated ridge with various peaks over 600m above sea level. This rise divides the catchment areas of the Estepera and Seco streams, both of which belong to the Río Grande basin. We soon come to the Puerto Alto pass, the route's highest point. A stop-off here is much recommended, to take in the extensive views in the immense Guadalhorce Valley and the rugged profiles of the Canucha and Blanca mountain ranges. In their north-facing valleys, you can almost make out the silhouettes of some clumps of Pinsapo Spanish firs that, quite incredibly survived the forest fires. Just as miraculous, are the Cork oaks along the path edges, accompanied by Laurel-leaf



rockroses and Spiny broom. This serves as an example of the mixed forest that once occupied these parts. The PR-A 274 pathway (Guaro-Puerto Alto) joins us from the south and stays with us until the end of the stage.

When the GR-243 route turns south (**11 km**), a steep slope takes us down to the Arroyo Seco stream, which as its name in Spanish indicates, dries up in summer. Up ahead are splendid views of the villages of Yunquera, Alozaina and Guaro, or the iconic Sierra Alpujata formed of peridotite rock. The slopes adjacent to the Arroyo Seco stream have recently seen a growth in the cultivation of tropical produce, particularly avocados. Some traditional arable farmland remains however, on the river meadows. The systematic abandonment of farmland of all types has led to a certain recovery of the riverside vegetation. There is an increasing number of Willow, Basket willow, African tamarisk, Oleanders and, above all the Cane reed, which is not autochthonous to these parts and clogs up some stretches of the riverbed. On the earthy banks, several nesting bee-eaters have been sighted.

▲ On the horizon:  
Sierra Canucha &  
Sierra Blanca



“ Andalusian historians have often written about the qualities of Gauro’s agricultural landscape, where vineyards, Fig trees and Blackberry bushes flourish. From 1485, both the Mudejar population and the new Christian settlers maintained these traditional crops, although with the definitive expulsion of the Moors, the cultivation of Mulberry trees would eventually disappear. Almost the same fate fell on the vineyards, which were massacred by the phylloxera plague in the mid-19th century. It was from then on, that Olive trees were introduced on a massive scale, as well as the Almond tree, which would become one of the mainstays of this beautiful village. Its fruit, the almond, is an essential ingredient in the region’s highly acclaimed pastries and deserts. The village identifies so strongly with the Almond tree, that events are organised to appreciate the flowering period. ”

For a stretch, we walk alongside the Arroyo Seco stream, between fallow fields and arable land or citrus cultivation. The final kilometre of Stage 4 opens out into terraced fields and groves of a variety of trees, as a clear reward for the effort of the ascent. We enter Guaro from the northern part, where the town has spread along the road to Monda.

▼ The Valley  
of the Arroyo  
Seco stream












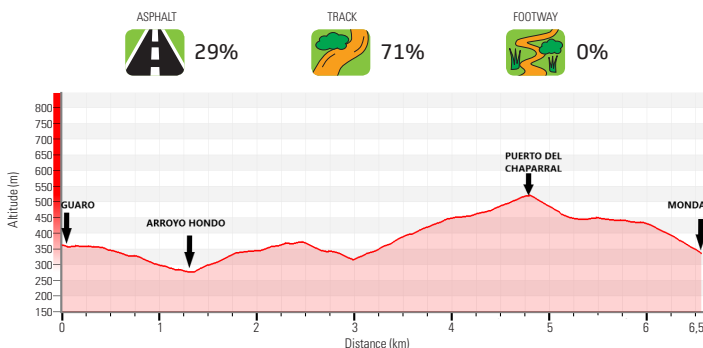




# Stage 5

## Guaro - Monda

Estimated duration	3 h			1	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	625 m			1	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	324 m			1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	6,5 km			2	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5		
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot					



P	O	I	N	T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
1	Guaro				335690	4058444	362	Km 0
2	Arroyo Hondo				334618	4057851	268	Km 1,3
3	Puerto del Chaparral				334447	4056318	513	Km 4,8
4	Monda				335916	4055754	337	Km 6,5

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1065-II. 1066-I.

**Access to the starting point.** Calle Camino de Sotornil, which leaves the crossroads in Guaro, on the A-7100.

**Access to the finishing point.** Guaro Avenue. Entrance to Monda from Guaro on the A-7100.



### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

The shortest stage of the GR-243 Sierra de las Nieves takes us through a hilly area and smaller watercourses, which drain into the Grande River down the Seco stream. As an overview, the landscape is a combination of copse-covered hills, emerging tropical plantations on the floodplains and patches of Mediterranean vegetation in the most inhospitable areas, with scattered Cork oaks, Holm oaks and Aleppo pines. From the route's highest points, there are stunning panoramic views of the different mountain ranges that surround us: the Sierras Blanca and Canucha to the southwest. In the same direction, are the easternmost hills of Monte Albornoque and the Dehesa traditional pastures of Moratán and Gaimón covered with woodland of Pine and Oak. La Parda de Tolox, to the northwest, stands out for not only its distinctive reddish colouring, but also for the raised plateaux of the Tolox mountain range towards its rear. From the Chaparral pass, looking towards Monda, the fertile Guadalhorce Valley and the coast, where the Pine-covered slopes of Alpujata and Mijas mountain ranges, bring a change of scenery.

▲ Campos de labor y forestal

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 279:** Up to the stage's mid-point.

## A NOTE OF CAUTION

The route runs along farm tracks often used by vehicles, so it is necessary to pay attention. We must respect the farmland and refrain from picking fruit from the groves. Due to limited water sources, carrying a supply of water is strongly advised. As the stage has a leg-breaking profile, with constant ups and downs and few flat stretches, telescopic poles are recommended. Take a pair of binoculars with you to be able to see the birds in their different natural environments along the way.

## ROUTE DESCRIPTION

We leave Guaro along the Sotornil or Hondo stream path, coinciding with the route of the PR-A 249 (Guaro-Chiribénez), passing farmhouses, second homes and a mosaic of groves among which Olive trees, Almond trees and the recently added Avocado trees stand out.

▼ A mixture of woody crops



“ The productive system of polyculture, is an important resource in a region affected by the Mediterranean climate's fluctuations, with cyclical droughts and infestations of pests that have come to diminish harvests. Until recently, polyculture allowed a subsistence economy based on self-consumption and the sale or exchange of surpluses. The terraced and uncultivated areas that can be seen along different stretches and the ruins of a good number of rural properties are the remains of a way of life that will cease to exist and to which we are mere witnesses. The lack of mechanisation, partly due to the difficult terrain, and the costs make the development of competitive agriculture unfeasible. Some farms have opted for quality and artisanal production methods. ”

Looking over to the west from here is a striking contrast between the hilly farmland, with dark green patches of scrubland, against the arid and lighter Tolox mountain range. Once we have forded one of Arroyo Seco's tributaries, we gain enough height to see out over a wide area that includes the Tolox mountain range, where the highest peaks of the National Park are located, as well as the Canucha mountain range, also of sedimentary origin. The Parda de Tolox mountain range stands out for its ruggedness, with its reddish colouring and ample cover by forest of Maritime pine trees. Without a doubt, this stretch provides a marvellous synopsis of the geological richness of the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve and the associated rock types and vegetation.

At the bottom of the valleys, some travertine platforms can be seen, created by water flowing over carbonate materials, forming small detritic platforms in the form of natural terraces. Farmers have used these to create irrigated vegetable plots. Halfway along the route, at the hamlet of La Erriza del Manchego, (**km 3.2**), the GR-243 route makes a sharp turn to the south and begins a long climb up El Retamal. This provides views to the west of the deep valley shaped by the Seco stream. We eventually reach the Chaparral pass, the

▼ Some Cork oak trees are still found alongside the pathway







▲ Monda

highest point on the route, at 522m above sea level. This is an ideal natural viewpoint to appreciate one of the most significant mountains in the Sierra de las Nieves National Park: Sierra Real. Indeed, this large peak formed of peridotites is now part of the new protected area thanks to the great environmental treasures it holds. Among these are a good number of endemic serpentine botanical species, including the Pinsapo Spanish fir.










“ Sierra Real was the focal point of an important Moorish revolt that took place between 1569-1570 and was led by El Meliche a native of Istán. The Moors established a stronghold on the Plaza de Armas peak, also known as Arboto. Philip II sent the Duke of Arcos, in command of 4,000 foot soldiers and 100 cavalry to put down the insurrection, with the captured Moors being deported to North Africa. These events have had a great influence in the names of locations in Sierra Real: Plaza de Armas (literally: Weapons Square), Puerto de la Refriega (literally: Skirmish Pass), etc. ”

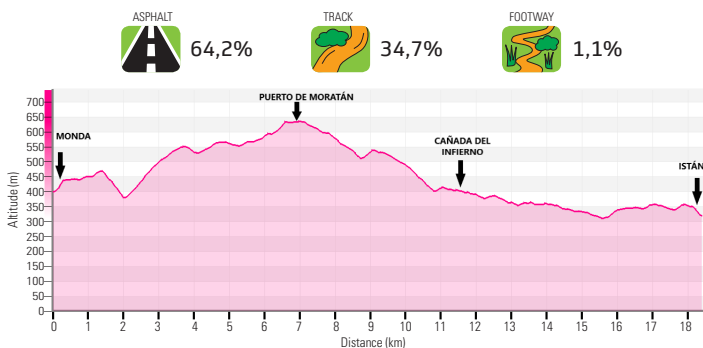
We now enter the river basin of the River Seco, not to be confused with the Seco stream, and come across the wide open Guadalhorce Valley and the mountain ranges of Alpujata and Mijas. In the centre of the patchwork of hills, mountains and fruit orchards lies Monda on a plain, at the foot of the ancient castle of La Villeta, converted into a country hotel. We descend steadily until we reach the road to Guaro, next to the sports facilities and municipal swimming pool. Continue walking on the right-hand side along the pavement and soon arrive at the centre of this pretty white village.



## Stage 6

# Monda - Istán

Estimated duration	6 h			2	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	454 m			1	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	542 m			1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	18,4 km			3	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5		
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot					



P O I N T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
1 Monda	335908	4055386	401	Km 0
2 Puerto de Moratán	330252	4053081	630	Km 7,1
3 Cañada del Infierno	327631	4052186	391	Km 12
4 Istán	325776	4050130	320	Km 18,4

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1065-II. 1066-I. 1065-IV.

**Access to the starting point.** Istán Street, west of Monda town centre.

**Access to the finishing point.** Calvario Street. Entrance to Istán from the area of 'Nacimiento de Río Molinos', next to municipal sports facilities.

### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

Stage 6 of the GR-243, between Monda and Istán, runs along the southern border of the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve. It takes advantage of the natural corridor where the pine-covered slopes of the Sierras Canucha and Blanca mountain ranges meet the hilly pastureland of Moratán, the rugged Mount Albornoque and the River Verde valley. The peridotite rock of the Sierra Real mountains completes the natural panorama. The route takes us through a patchwork of landscapes which highlights the huge environmental value of this area. Then, after this initial variety of farmland, we approach the pine-covered slopes of Canucha, punished by forest fires. The section along the northern edge of the Moratán Dehesa pastureland brings together the best of Mediterranean woodland, with dense Pine forest and plentiful Cork oak alternating with Gall oak groves, with some clumps of Pinsapo Spanish firs in the shady Canucha canyons. The Moratán pass represents the dividing line between the river basins of the Grande, to the east, and the Verde, to the west. Taking advantage of the clearing along the Albornoque stream, a tributary of the River Verde, it descends in the shelter of the immense Sierra Blanca mountains. At the valley bottom, cultivated plots and woodland dominate. Meanwhile, close to Istán it is the fantastic agricultural system that takes centre stage on the terraces surrounding the River Molinos. Its source, as well as being a thirst-quenching attraction, signals the end of the stage.



▲ The old cobbled pathway

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 136:** From the fork of the 'Cañada' track to Istán.

## A NOTE OF CAUTION

Except for a short stretch of pathway, the entire stage runs along lanes. Vehicles are more frequent from the tarmacked area towards Istán. At weekends, a reasonable number of cyclists also use these, following routes offered by Istán Town Hall. Carry a good supply of water, food and snacks, as there are no refreshment points along the way. On a long stage like this, proper footwear and the use of walking sticks is a great help. We must not light fires under any circumstances and should be respectful of the farms, refraining from picking produce from the fruit groves and vegetable plots.

## ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the western part of Monda town centre, very close to the school, take Istán Street, which leaves the village and heads off along a track into the fields. From the highest point on this stretch, we go down an old cobblestone path, whose surface is not in the best condition, but reveals its former importance. Further down is the Seco streambed, an old acquaintance from stage 5. It can be crossed very easily, as it normally lives up to its name (dried up). We now climb

▼ The Dehesa  
pastures of  
Moratán





“ On the far side of the road is the Moratán-Bonorque estate, one of the most spectacular properties in the area due to its environmental wealth and agricultural uses. It is renowned for its Dehesa pastures where new plantings are common. Since the construction of an irrigation dam in 2001, walnut trees and some irrigated plots have been introduced. A large number of livestock graze & roam freely on the estate, however perhaps the most interesting use of the land is the extraction of cork, from whose industry we have inherited the chimney of the old boiler, still visible. In the more mountainous area, of woodland of Oak & Pine is most common, with the odd clump of Pinsapo Spanish firs, such as the one at La Sepultura. Hunting for both big and small game, is limited to the Moratán and Gaimón game preserves. Part of the estate falls within the boundaries of the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park.”

until we reach a sideroad leading to the A-355 road. Here, we take a right to go uphill, along the road to Istán.

This route skirts the northern slopes of Sierra Canucha, where the forest fires have depleted the woodland; in its place, shrubs and bushes have taken over and cover almost everything. From a certain height, a wide panorama of hills and mountain ranges come into view. To the east, these tend to merge into the fertile fields of the Guadalhorce Valley.

It is a continual climb, while our attention is drawn to the contrasts of landscape, especially to the south, in Sierra Canucha, with steep slopes and parallel ravines that display the dark profiles of the brave Spanish firs that have managed to survive the fires. Although they no longer form a proper forest, the clumps in the upper reaches of the Gonzalo Pérez and Los Cuchillos ravines are making positive progress, with many young saplings around the edges.

The route now runs along the southern boundary of the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. From the Moratán pass (7.9km) onwards, where paths turn off up to the Golondrinas and Tolox passes, the vegetation intensifies with extensive Pine forests and fertile Oak forests. Everything to the north belongs to Monte Albornoque, a veritable jungle where we find





▲ Pinsapo Spanish firs in the Sierra Canucha

the very best of Andalusian woodland, including the exclusive Pinsapo Spanish fir. The terrain is favourable for wildlife and one of the habitats of the elusive Moorish roe deer.

The descent has privileged views of the Sierra de Tolox's contrasts in rock types. Sedimentary rocks made up of limestone and dolomites, mix with the reddish slopes of the Sierra Real, covered with immense forest of Maritime trees. This is the image to the north, however to the south is just as surprising. Sierra Blanca, a coastal mountain range, displays a broken and rugged terrain, where Carob trees, Holm oaks, Pines and Mediterranean fan palms, among others, find their place to spread.

The PR-A 136 Cañada del Infierno pathway runs along one of the ravines to our left, a terrifying name (Hell's Ravine) that highlights the steepness and difficulty of the route. From here onwards, both approved trails run side by side as far as Istán. This watercourse, normally dry, joins the stream of El Portugués to form the Albornoque, the southern-most tributary of the River Verde, which flows through agricultural land of orchards and citrus groves on well cultivated meadows. We

continue in the same direction as the flow, glimpsing the window that opens onto the Mediterranean, whose influence can be seen in the variety of groves and agricultural plots, where the mountain Olive grove also takes a lead role.

Close to Istán, we come to a crossroads, where a track leads down to Vegas del Colmenar (**14.5km**), along which the Río Verde flows. In summer, this track is used by a large number of people who come for the coolness of the banks and the pools, including the famous Canalón pool, located in a narrow gully into which the waters of a broken irrigation channel flow, creating a truly beautiful scene. In the distance, Istán appears perched on a travertine platform overlooking the enclosed valley of the River Verde. Just beneath it, are terraces occupied mainly with Avocado trees, although citrus fruit trees also abound, along with some traditional agricultural plots. To the south it is sheltered by the Sierra Blanca mountain range, split by impressive ravines, for example one that carries the waters of the river Molinos at the same height as our path, a place frequented by locals and those from further afield alike, in the shade of colourful Oleanders. Some come

“ The agrosystem of the Molinos river is a perfect example of land-water symbiosis. The paradigm of hillside cultivation. To control the steep slope, the Berber settlers in the 8th century terraced the land, which is irrigated by a network of irrigation pools and small ponds. Thanks to the force of gravity, the water flows from the upper to the lower pools, with the surplus flowing back into the watercourse. Nothing is wasted, which is why fruit trees flourish next to the channels and, in other cases, there are remains of some hydraulic devices, reminiscent of the small mills of the Rif. Up until not long ago, a local official in charge of water settled the disputes between the farmers and established an irrigation schedule. The combination of vegetable gardens, aromatic plants and groves, together with the sound of trickling water, help to create a very pleasant and soothing atmosphere. This is the maximum expression of water culture, an imprint of our Andalusian past, the recreation of an agricultural-garden concept. ”



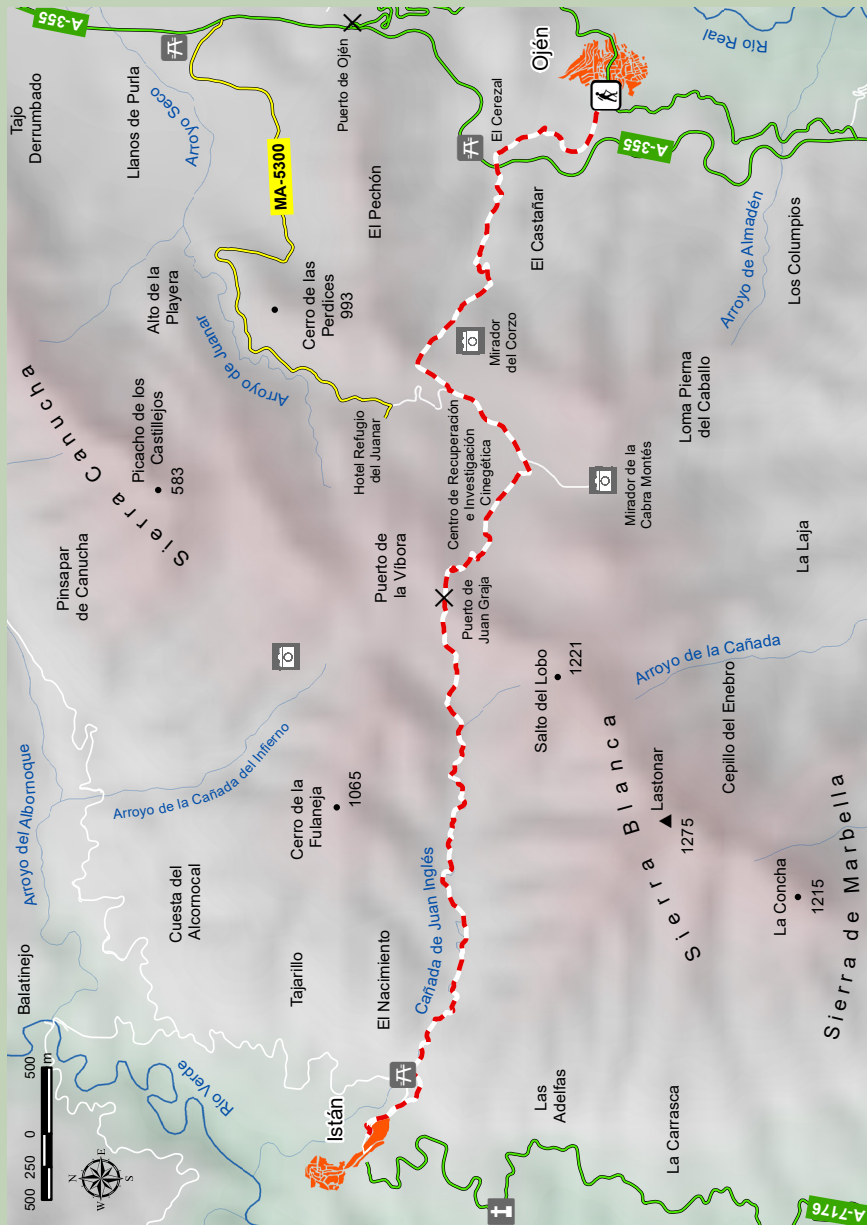
▲ The reserve of  
El Coto

to fill their water bottles and others to take photographs of this beautiful spot. This is the source of one of the irrigation channels used to water crops.

Close by Istán is El Coto, a true haven of greenery, criss-crossed by the restored Moorish channels, adapted for humans on different levels, but interconnected by pathways. It is well worth taking a detour from the GR-243 to reach the entrance to Istán, where the El Chorro fountain and the irrigation channels that run underground through the urban area, visible at some points through the so-called "charcones" (pools), await us.

Istán ▼












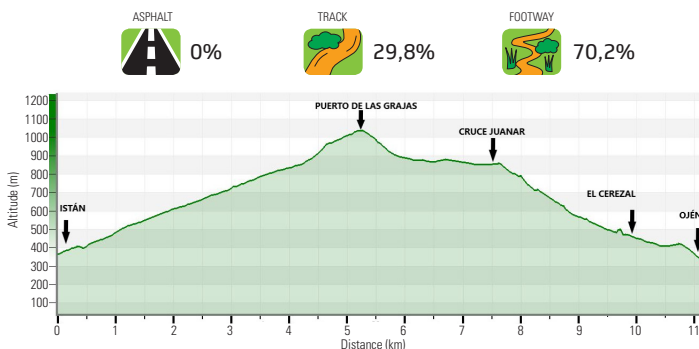




# Stage 7

## Istán - Ojén

Estimated duration	4 h 25 m			3	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	719 m			3	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	758 m			3	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	11,1 km			3	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5		
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot					



P	O	I	N	T	X	Y	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE
1	Istán				326116	4049767	366	Km 0
2	Puerto de Juan Graja				329969	4049466	1034	Km 5,2
3	Cruce Juanar				331501	4049433	856	Km 7,6
4	El Cerezal				333277	4049083	469	Km 9,8
5	Ojén				333723	4048249	327	Km 11,1

**Maps** E/1:25.000 • 1065-IV.

**Access to the starting point.** From the Altos de Istán Hotel, a little above the municipal sports facilities.

**Access to the finishing point.** Access road to Ojén (A-7103), next to the public car park.

### THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

Istán and Ojén are two beautiful white villages not far from the Mediterranean coast. However, they are found on opposite sides of the dramatic Sierra Blanca, on the western and eastern side, respectively and south of the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve. The route follows the Alternative Route 1, Stage 2 of the GR-243, which bridges the gap between them along mountain pathways. The first part of the route runs along the wild track of Juan Inglés, at times along the dry riverbed itself and at others along the stony path. In some sections, the path crosses exposed slabs of rock, although chains are there to aid us. The generally constant climb continues until the Juan Graja mountain pass, overlooking the Juanar plains, the only reasonably sized one of its kind on this stage. After this pleasant section through Pine forest and Mountain olive groves, the route drops steeply down the upper part of the Cerezal ravine. Pine forest covers the higher areas and there are spectacular views of the cone-shaped Nicolás hill. Close to the recreational area of El Cerezal, the orientation and enclosed nature of the gully allows the development of ombrophilous, moisture-loving vegetation that creates an almost jungle-like landscape. From here to Ojén we will travel along a track with views of the village, which we reach after turning off along a narrow path.



▲ Enormous Mediterranean fan palms

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 135:** The first 120 m.
- **PR-A 137:** The first 70 m.
- **PR-A 138:** The first 70 m.
- **PR-A 139:** The first 120 m.
- **PR-A 140:** The first 70 m.

### A NOTE OF CAUTION

Due to steep slopes and the very stony and uneven surfaces in some sections, this route is not recommended for less accustomed to hiking or those who are not in good physical condition. A decent supply of food and water is necessary. Ankle high walking boots are also recommended. During adverse weather conditions or fog, it is not advised to undertake this route. Nor should we go alone. A GPS device is useful to ensure we follow the route correctly. The MA-5300 road leads to the Juanar natural space and hotel, which can be considered if necessary.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

The start of the stage and its information panel, can be found on the access road to the Altos de Istán Hotel. This is also the starting point of other pathways in this municipality's network. A little further up, at the reservoir that provides Istán's water supply, we leave the main path, which the PR-A 137, PR-A 138 and PR-A 140 continue to follow, this latter towards Marbella.

▼ The ravine of  
Juan Inglés and  
El Picacho



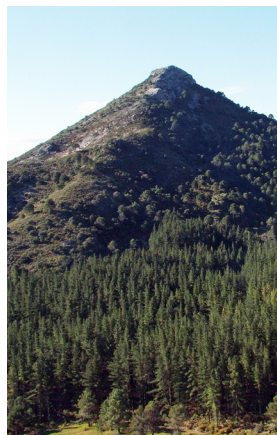


A short way further on, we pass the turn-off to the right to El Picacho (PR-A 139) and La Concha (PR-A 135), peaks popular with the most daring mountaineers, are on our right. About 200 metres further on we come across a clay pigeon shoot. Here, at the foot of the Juan Inglés ravine, the track ends and the adventure begins.

The path starts behind the building, passes one of the dams on one side and through a gate, which we must close behind us. The path continues along the streambed itself thanks to the porous limestone base soaking up the rainwater, expelling it a short way downstream creating the source of the River Molinos. Steep valley sides surround us and there are even some fairly daunting cliff faces, such as on El Picacho, a very characteristic rocky outcrop visible from the town of Istán itself. A little further up, the ravine enters a rather haunting gorge, a popular crag with climbing enthusiasts. These Sierras have been systematically punished by forest fires, the majority of which are caused by humans. Nevertheless, nature manages to recover from the wounds and exudes life everywhere: almost tree-sized Mediterranean fan palms, Mastic trees, Spiny broom, Savin juniper, Junipers cover the mountain slopes. The green shoots of some young Pine saplings that survived the ferocious flames force their way through, in their endeavour to spread their seeds to ensure survival. In the meantime, a recommendation: climb slowly and calmly, according to the saying: Climb like an old person to arrive like a youngster.

▲ Sacaroidea  
sands at the Juan  
Graja pass

▼ The Cruz de Juanar  
peak and El Hornazo plains



As we gain height, the gully opens out into different ravines that form a fairly wide catchment area. The path now alternates between the bed and the valley sides, although it eventually bends round to the east, to bring the Arenal plains into sight, sitting between the Fulaneja and Púlpitos hills. What is now almost impenetrable undergrowth, was once a field of crops, a reminder of those times of subsistence. Close to here, a tiny path climbs up to the Tres Pinos pass, located on the main ridge of Sierra Blanca, home to the Lastonar hill (1,275 m), the highest point of this mountain, and La Concha (1,215 m), one of the standout peaks of this Malagan region.

Our next objective is within reach: the Juan Graja pass (**5.2km**), easily recognisable by its tall Pine trees. This area is very popular with mountain goats, which can be seen clambering around among the jagged rockfaces. Once you reach the stage's highest point, it is a good idea to take a short break to cool off and gather strength for the rest of the stage. The panoramic views are a real treat, with views over the catchment area of the Juanar stream. To the south is the imposing peak of the Cruz de Juanar, on whose summit is an enormous cross, as its name indicates. Every year people from Marbella, Ojén and other neighbouring villages, congregate

▼ The footpath that descends from the Juan Graja pass





here on pilgrimages for a Mass. In the hollow, we can see the plains of El Hornazo covered by dense forest of Monterey pines and in marked contrast, the Juanar Olive groves.

We continue onwards and descend along the signposted path that allows us to view the dissolving of the dolomites into a fine sand called Sacaroidea, due to its resemblance to sugar. The route now enters and crosses the Pine forest with its undergrowth rich in ferns, scenery that is more typical of more northerly latitudes. In the middle of the forest, on our right-hand side is the PR-A 168 (Juanar-La Concha), a pathway which we will join further ahead. We leave this idyllic section and enter the Juanar track, next to the facilities of the El Juanar Game Recovery and Research Centre, belonging to the Serranía de Ronda Andalusian Game Reserve.



▲ Through Pine forest towards El Juanar

“ The Serranía de Ronda National Hunting Reserve was created in 1948 with the idea of protecting and recovering the populations of Spanish ibex and roe deer. During its existence it has changed its name according to the administration in charge at each moment. In 1972 it was renamed National Hunting Reserve and finally, in 2003, under the management of the Andalusian Government, it was renamed The Andalusian Hunting Reserve of the Serranía de Ronda. Adjacent to this recovery and research centre, an enclosure was set up where mountain goats and roe deer recover from various ailments. In addition to managing hunting quotas, the organisation carries out important conservation work that has led to stabilising the population of the roe deer in the Serranía de Ronda. ”

After joining the Juanar track, it veers left. The PR-A 169 (Juanar-Marbella) path starts on the opposite side, heading towards the nearby Cabra Montés viewpoint, which is a much recommend visit. We continue straight on, keeping an eye out for the small Pinsapo Spanish firs in the Pine forest. A few minutes further on is an important fork in the path. Straight on leads to the mountain hotel El Refugio de

Juanar. To the right, there are two paths, the first towards the nearby Corzo viewpoint, and the second towards Ojén, which is the one we take.

“ The Refugio de Juanar hotel was built in 1906 by José Aurelio Larios y Larios, the third Marquis of Larios. He belonged to an important family that boosted the Malaga economy throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Larios family managed important textile, agri-food and wine industries, among others. The current hotel has a very interesting history, including being visited by King Alfonso XIII as a guest of the Marquis of Larios, with whom he shared a love of hunting. Then in 1965, it was incorporated into the nationwide network of Parador hotels. Charles De Gaulle, who was President of the French Republic, stayed here to write some chapters of his memoirs. Today, it is still a hotel and restaurant, but under different management. The facilities built by the Marquis for the management of the hunting reserve remain within the Juanar site. ”

Despite the steep slope, the sandy bed and the perfect design of the pathway make for a leisurely descent. The surrounding scenery could not be more mountainous and rugged, surrounded by Pine forest interspersed with Holm oaks, Junipers and Carob trees, above which the conical Nicolás hill stands out. Halfway down, where the Cinco

The El Cerezal track ▶





Dedos pass is (8.6km), we come to a turn-off which also has Ojén as its destination. On this occasion we take the path to the left, which leads directly to the bottom of El Cerezal ravine. Thanks to the humidity provided by the orientation and enclosed nature of the ravine, there are such interesting species as the Gall oak, Butcher's broom and the Laurustinus.

After passing through the tunnel under the A-355 road, we come to the recreational area of El Cerezal. The current refuge was once one of the Marqués de Larios hunting lodges. In this very attractive spot, a botanical trail has been laid out with information boards about the different species and trees. There is a beautiful collection of Cork oaks and an individual Aleppo pine which has been included in the catalogue of Singular Trees and Shrubs of Andalusia. After the gate, we turn right onto a track that takes us to the village of Ojén, along a narrow path that leads off to the left.

▲ A clump of Cork oak in El Cerezal

The Nicolás peak from the valley of El Cerezal ►





# GR 243

## SIERRA de las NIEVES PATH

## ANDALUCÍA

The GR-243 Sierra de las Nieves is a route approved in 2009 by the Andalusian Mountaineering Federation that consists of six stages and two variants. The route connects the towns of Ronda, El Burgo, Yunquera, Tolox, Guaro, Monda, Istán and Ojén, all belonging to the Sierra de las Nieves Biosphere Reserve, a vast territory that covers an area of more than 94,000 ha in thirteen Málaga municipalities .

The trail runs along old roads and ancestral cattle trails, revealing the best of the agricultural and mountainous landscapes of the geographical space of the Serranía de Ronda, discovering the enormous environmental richness of the Biosphere Reserve and its core area, the Natural Park and National Sierra de las Nieves.



Diputación Provincial  
de Málaga