

**STAGE 2:****VIRGEN DE LA CABEZA/  
VIÑAS DE PEÑALLANA**

The GR-48 trail continues ahead and through the Sierra de Andújar Natural Park in Jaén province. On this stage of the route, some sections of the trail will match other paths and tracks used by the pilgrims and carts when travelling from Andújar town to the Virgen del a Cabeza Sanctuary. Along this stage of the route, hikers will discover many cultural and religion features directly related to the pilgrims' fervour which can be breath in this mountain range.

In the first section of the stage, the trail clearly descends into the Jándula River valley and from there it will follow the serpentine A-6177 road while climbing up towards Viñas de Peñallana housing, a natural site to enjoy some breathtaking views of this rough and wild land. Hikers will also have the opportunity for a better understanding of the natural world around them because of the information boards placed in different natural viewpoints like the one at the Mirador del Peregrino Viewpoint.

Water streams are deeply fitted into the omnipresent granite bedrock while scouring out rough valleys and awesome granite boulders and rocks. Certainly, the region is the kingdom of granite rocks and Rockrose shrubbery, perhaps one of the last bastions for the Iberian Lynx recovering and survival.



Valle del río Jándula

This will be an easy walk which is suitable for hiking, biking and horse riding although it may harden when descending towards the Jándula River, near Encinarejo Dam. Last quarter of the stage is all about a soft and

easy climbing up to the top of the mountain range and the trail matches a comfortable mountain road.

**Start:** V. de la Cabeza Sanctuary

**Finish:** Viñas de Peñallana

**Distance:** 17,2 Km.

**Time:** 5 hours and 30 minutes

**Suitability:**



\*

\*Some struggle when climbing down to Encinarejo Natural Site

### MIDE evaluation:



**Environment:** Severity of the natural environment

3



**Orientation:** Guidance on the route directions

2



**Track Features:** Difficulty in following the track

2

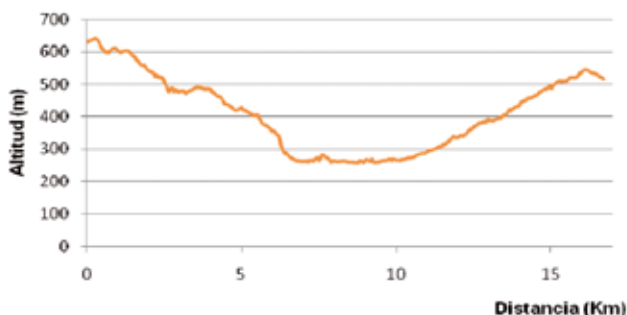


**Struggle:** Struggle required for accomplishing the route

3

48

### Virgen de la Cabeza - Viñas de Peñallana



GR-48 Jaén

### ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The trail starts off at the Virgen de la Cabeza Sanctuary in Andújar municipal district. With a population of over 38000 people, the municipality which is the fourth larger in Spain stretches some 963 kilometres.

According to the traditional belief, on August the 12th, 1227 and in the early morning, the spirit of the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Alonso de Rivas, a young shepherd from Colomera –a village in Granada province. After healing the shepherd's disable arm, Virgin Mary asked for a hermitage to be built after Her Name at the very exact place where the miracle happened, that is atop the Cerro del Cabezo Hill. Every year



Nuestra Señora de la Cabeza Sanctuary

since 1304, over 600000 pilgrims gather on the last Sunday of April to honouring the Virgin Mary which is locally known as 'La Morenita'.

Some 300 metres from an information board and towards the Sanctuary, the trail matches another path to the left that comes out from Alcala la Real Brotherhood buildings. Eventually, we will walk through the picnic area while having to the right the Cerro del Cabezo Hill before heading towards the Area Recreativa del Jabalí, a nearby recreation area.

### ••• Km 1.5 Sendero del Jabalí Path

As the Sanctuary and the surroundings areas remains to our back, the path starts descending through Pine groves and shrub and passes by a natural site known as Huerta de los Frailes. We will enjoy the breathtaking view of the valleys carved on the granite bedrock of the southern hills and the Cerro del Cabezo foothills. The valley which locates closer to us is the Arroyo del Membrillar Brook valley.

Ignore another path that crosses perpendicular and continue walking ahead. The path surface becomes slippery because of the granite sand known as 'saliega' resulting from a series of weathering actions. Granite rock has traditionally been used in local building. A good example of this is a former ruined country house which locates to the right and that still hold the charming features of traditional rock buildings. The views around us are particularly bucolic and hikers may be likely of spending some time in this natural site.

The path continues ahead and becomes wavy between great varieties of lush Mediterranean undergrowth. Rockroses and Mastic Trees appear to be competing for supremacy in the area and tracks of Deer and Wild Boars can be spotted on the sandy ground.

Gum Rockroses are well accompanied by their 'little sister' the European Frostweed (*Xolantha guttata*). This is an annual herb whose flowers are relatively large with five yellow petals which generally have a dark spot at the base. In Spanish, this plant is known as Hierba de la Patata de Tierra or Madre de las Criadillas since it is associated and live in symbiosis to rare fungi (Criadillas de Tierra) that grow underneath.

As the walk progresses, the path matches again the firebreak track while approaching to the Área Recreativa del Jabalí (recreation area) where reforested Pine groves and other conifer species are the main natural feature. The area near the road is well equipped with some picnic tables, benches and other utilities. The main feature is a sculpture carved in the rock which is locally known as El Jabalí Solitario (The Lonely Wild Board). The sculpture by Luis Aldehuela, a local artist from Andújar, represents the main character in Jaime de Foxá's novel, 'Solitario' (1961).



El Jabalí Solitario Sculpture

On leaving behind the recreation area, the path will head towards Sendero del Jabalí – Encinarejo Path that runs parallel to the road. After a kilometre or so we need to pay attention to the trail sings since we will leave this path to continue walking onto another firebreak track which is blocked by a countryside gate.

### ••• Km 4.42 Climbing down towards the Encinarejo Recreation Area

We access to the firebreak track after crossing a country gate that must be shut behind us. The track descends steeply. After some four hundred meters we will leave the firebreak track to make a 90° turn to the right and continue climbing down towards the stream bed which is the head of a

small seasonal brook that flows down and parallel to our path. Landscape is clearly dominated by Reeds and phreatic woody shrub which is a sign of the nearby phreatic level and of the seasonal nature of the water stream.

It is paramount to keep walking onto the waymarked path. Temporal enclosures for Rabbits locate along the path. Those are to provide food for the Iberian Lynx since the path winds through an area which is one with the highest density on the world of this most endangered big cat.



Boards along the path tell about Iberian Lynx existing in the area

As the walk progresses, meadows with Pine groves and Mediterranean shrub will remain behind us and the path turns to the left and away from the track to coming into a rougher area with great granite rocks and boulders outcropping on the slopes surface. We may now guess the Jándula River valley at the bottom of the hill. The hill is locally known as 'Loma de Vaciabolsas' perhaps the name is after any former bandit.

The climbing down hardens because of the steep and the slippery sandy path surface which now is curving and twisting like a snake in order to avoid granite rocks and boulders. Bikers must find this section of the path a bit more difficult.

After crossing other country gate, the path comes to the bottom of the hill and matches another track connecting an Electricity Power Station and



Big granite rocks and boulders along the descending path

Encinarejo Dam. The path bends to the right although hikers may choose to come and visit Encinarejo Dam which is really near and that has the shores turned into inland beaches in the summer season.

After walking up to the Dam, we will come back to the path leaving the dam behind and going downstream. We will enjoy the Jándula River companion for some 2.5 kilometres as it flows parallel to the left of the path.



Cauce del río Jándula

The large watercourse is also well protected by a continuous riparian forest of Ash trees on both riverbanks. The river water is really cold because it comes from the dam pipeline located at the lower section of the dam.

The area is part of Encinarejo Recreation Area and therefore is well equipped for better enjoying Nature. There are scattering picnic tables and benches along the riverbanks and a small birdwatching hut where we can watch for any bird like the Grey Heron which is very common in this site.

### ••• Km 9.58 the A-6177 Road (section)

Step by step we will leave the agreeable companion of both the Jándula River and Encinarejo Recreation Area to connect to the countryside road towards Viñas de Peñallana and Andújar towns. We will eventually find ourselves outside the Sierra de Andújar Natural Park after going across the bridge over the river.

From this point to the end of this stage of the route, the trail will match this serpentine road while gently climbing up to Viñas de Peñallana Housing. Despite of being walking along the road, the surroundings are really interesting because of the natural and ethnological features in the area; the later clearly related to the pilgrimage to the Cerro del cabezo Hill. Nevertheless, we should pay attention to the road and, especially if we are hiking on weekends and/or bank holidays when we can have some heavy traffic about.

It will be easy to spot some samples of Deer by the road as they are likely of being grazing in the meadows which are the natural border between the Pine groves and the road. The green mass of Pine groves will be suddenly cut by the Barranco de Valdeinfierno Ravine which locates to the left. As the path continues climbing up, Mediterranean undergrowth comprising Rockroses, Mastic Trees and Wild Olive trees is colouring the hillslopes.

On the hills we can observe many distinctively shaped large granite boulders. At the 16.7 kilometre, the trail passes by a large granite block which is known as 'La Piedra que Habla' (The Talking Rock). The rock is in fact a monument with a poem carved on the rock surface. The work was commissioned and fully paid in 1923 by José del Prado y Palacio, Marquis of Rincón de San Idelfonso and Minister for Public Instruction under Alfonso XIII reign. He also was the author of the poem.

The serpentine road continues climbing up and soon we will reach the Mirador del Peregrino, a natural viewpoint which locates by the road. This is a good place for breaking while looking at the landscape and admiring the moving sculpture representing a man pointing at the Sanctuary as showing the site to a child next to him.

The end of the stage is not far from here. After some few meters of soft climbing, the road comes near a cluster of houses by Viñas de Peñallana



La Piedra que Habla Monument

Housing which locates just before Los Pinos, a tourist resort. There is also the junction with Los escoriales Road (JH- 5002) which is the end of this stage of the route and the beginning of the next one.





Mirador del Peregrino Viewpoint

## The Oldest Pilgrimage Tradition in Spain



••• According to tradition, when Saint Eufrasio arrived to Spain, he brought with him a sculpture of the Virgin Mary to which he was devoted to. Later in the 8th century when Arabs occupied Andújar, the sculpture was hid in a most remote hill in Sierra Morena mountain range to keep it away from profanation.

Later on in the 13th century a most amazing event happened. In 1227, a shepherd called Juan Alonso Rivas from Colomera (Granada) who had a disabled arm was shepherding his flock in the valley near the Cerro del Cabezo Hill. That night the shepherd could see some glowing lights atop the hill and heard a tolling bell in the distance. He climbed up the hill in the middle of the night and found the sculpture hid between the granite rocks where he kneeed and at sudden his disabled arm recovered mobility and healed.

The shepherd fervently asked for a sanctuary to be built atop the hill and became a most important character in Andujar history. The sanctuary was finally built between 1287 and 1304 and thoroughly reformed at the end of the 16th century. On April the 20th 2010, the sanctuary was granted by law the title of Basílica Menor (Minor Basilica).

Over 600,000 pilgrimages from all over the country gather at the Cerro del Cabezo Hill on the last Sunday of April to honouring the Saint. This Saint Virgin is locally known as 'La Morenita', a nickname clearly referring to the dark colour of the sculpture and that is also the main theme of the official hymn.

*"Morenita y pequeñita  
lo mismo que una aceituna,  
una aceituna bendita,  
Morena de luz de luna,  
Meta de jiennense anhelo;  
bronce de carne divina,  
escultura en barro santo,  
un chocolatín del cielo  
envuelto por la platina  
del orillo de su manto.*

*Es la Ermita  
reja que su marco aroma  
entre jaras de la sierra  
una cita,  
colgada entre cielo y tierra.*

*Morenita y pequeñita  
la virgen su gracia asoma  
entre el joyel que la encierra,  
Morena de luz de luna,  
desde el olivar del cielo  
que en platas de hojas se cierra  
cayó una aceituna al suelo,  
rodó y se paró en la sierra.*

*Morenita y pequeñita  
¡Una aceituna bendita!  
Es la Ermita  
reja que su marco aroma  
entre jaras de la sierra  
una cita  
colgada entre cielo y tierra."*

