

**STAGE 4:****BAÑOS DE LA ENCINA/  
LA CAROLINA**

This stage of the route connects two highlands towns: Baños de la Encina and La Carolina. The trail will match two traditional paths: the cattle route known as Cordel de Guarromán on the first section of the stage and the former municipal path from Baños de la Encina to La Carolina.

In despite of being a long walk with some hard sections for hiking, walkers will enjoy the beautiful natural features and landscape along the path as well as the breathtaking panoramic views from the highest natural sites. Olive groves, Pine groves and pastures (dehesas) will follow each other as the path progresses along the foothills of the mountain range from where we will have some impressive views of the largest plain fields in the region.

The bucolic Rumblar Valley locates at the northern hills of the mountain range with slopes covered by Rockroses patches and thick Mediterranean forest which is the kingdom of Deer and Wild Boars. In addition, scatte-



Pozo de los Cuellos Water Well

ring mining sites and tailing disposal facilities not longer in use appear to fragment this impressive green carpet comprising a large range of Mediterranean plants.

**Start:** Baños de la Encina

**Finish:** La Carolina

**Distance:** 26 km

**Time:** 7 hours

**Suitability:**



\*

\*Some sections may be hard to accomplish on the bike though

### Dificultad. Valoración según método Mide:



**Environment:** Severity of the natural environment

2



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

3



**Orientation:** Guidance on the route directions

2



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

5

Baños de la Encina - La Carolina



### ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This stage of the route starts off at Baños de la Encina Town Hall. From there, look for San Mateo Street to get to Linares Avenue. All the way from the Town Hall is a gentle descending walk until reaching the J-5040 Road outside the town. Soon after start walking along the road, we will see a service area to the left. In shortly we will leave the road to continue walking onto a path which winds through Olive groves and leads to the Virgen de la Encina Sanctuary and the Jesús del Camino Hermitage. This path also matches the PR A-289, a short distance path towards La Verónica Site.



The beginning of this stage outside Baños de la Encina town

### ••• Km 1 Majavieja Path and La Verónica Site

At this very beginning of the stage, the GR and PR paths match a traditional cattle route (vía pecuaria) on the way to the Virgen de la Encina. After some 500 metres we will leave the path to continue walking on another path to the left that leads to an open area with no Olive groves. There the path meets other paths at a junction from where we will bend to the right onto a serpentine path that gently climbs up to an area with Pine groves. The junction was in the past a 'descansadero', the area where shepherds and flocks came for resting and that used to be well equipped with some buildings and water facilities. In this one, still remain the traces of former garden plots, a former water well and the water trough under the shadow of some fruit trees. In addition, dry stone walls and Prickly Pear Cactuses appear to mark the borders of the path.



A serpentine path gently climbs towards Pine groves

The path continues ascending on slate substrates and towards this hill crowned with a large Pine grove. The area is rich in Brooms and Lavender bushes. From the highest slopes and looking backwards, we will have a beautiful view of the picturesque Baños de la Encina town and the Castilian style Wind Mill at the front.

The top of the hill is also the divortium aquarum, an imaginary line marking the boundary between two or more different watersheds. In this case, division is between the Rio Grande Valley to the north and Jaen's southern plain fields of never ending Olive groves. We will continue walking ahead to the east while bordering a dense Pine grove. The beautiful panoramic views are well complemented with the fresh smell of conifers and vivid flocks of birds such Azure-Winged Magpies.

The path starts descending towards the Rumblarejo Brook. A country estate fully devoted to fighting bull breeding locates to the right of the path where we will pay close attention to the waymarking signs at the junction since the PR A-289 path that leads to La Verónica Site moves away from the GR-48 trail.



Breeding horses in the open range is a common picture along the trail

If we feel like visiting LaVeronica Site, we will have to walk some extra 2 kilometres (going and back to the junction) and go across the watershed and follow up the firebreak track that climbs up next to the fencing. This archaeological site is a fortification from the Argar civilisation, back to the Bronze Age. The reward for the extra walk will be the breathtaking views of the Rumblar River Valley together with the Rio Grande River and the Pinto River.

### ••• Km 4.2 Rumblarejo Brook

From the junction, the path continues ahead and after crossing over a cattle grid will run parallel to Rumblarejo Brook. The Mediterranean forest will enrich with other riparian plants such Oleanders, Hawthorns and

Brambles which grow on the riverbanks.

FOTO: Oleanders



Adelfas

The green waymarking signs along this section of the path are for marking the vía pecuaria path which matches the GR-48 trail. We will wade across the brook by means of a small dyke known as Pantanillo which originally used to be a brick made channel dug to power the nearby Casería Manrique, an oil mill. Nevertheless, wading across the brook will not be very difficult because of the little brook flow.

The top of the watershed comprises large meadows and pastures which become muddy and with large seasonal ponds in the rain season where we could spot birds like Wagtails. The Olive grove that locates to the right and on the northern side of Cuesta de los Santos slope is a clear example of different uses of the land in order to maximize benefits reported from livestock breeding and agriculture.

The path continues ahead while looking for the head of the watershed. The vary habitat types in the area –cultivated fields, Mediterranean forest and undergrowth- cause many different bird species to come together and so we may watch many Passeriformes species (perching birds) such Goldfinches, Common Greenfinches, Blue Tits and Great Tits.

On having come to the head of the brook, the path will go across and into another watershed with an impressive granite site, locally known as Peñones de Chirite, and large granite boulders to the left causing a sandy granite floor. Many paths and tracks exist all over the site and many of them will come together while heading to the right where the head of another stream exists in a small valley and the first water source of Arroyo del Pilar Brook locates.

The brook flows down towards the campiña to the south while the path moves in the opposite direction and as it does the cattle route that joins to the left. We will find ourselves in a completely different natural environment after crossing a wiring gate that must remain closed behind us. The site is large Holm Oak woodland as the natural reception area of a most extensive one, Navarredonda pasture. The path runs parallel to the fencing to the right until it meets the path that leads to La Nava country house. Ignore that path and continue walking ahead and towards a rounded hill covered with Holm Oak woodland. From there the path starts climbing down sharply between rills resulting from water erosion while looking for the Parrilla Brook. Immediately before coming to the brook, we will leave the vía pecuaria path to come into Navarredonda pasture after crossing a wiring country gate which locates to the left of the path.

### ••• Km 9.5 Navarredonda Pasture



Navarredonda Pasture

After coming into Navarredonda Pasture, the path starts climbing until meeting another track which is the one leading to La Nava country house that we met earlier. There we will bend right and to the north. From here, we will have a beautiful view of this beautiful pasture land which is fully devoted to cattle breeding. Surrounded by the pasture is the cluster of barn, country houses and the main farmhouse.

The path surface is in better conditions now and the path continues ahead with gentle ups and downs through pastures of young Holm Oaks. The walk pace is pleasant along this section as marked by the distant sound of cowbells. The landscape turns wilder and bucolic and perhaps any bird of prey such Common Buzzards and Kites can be watched flying over our heads. As the path continues climbing up to the top of the hill, we will enjoy the



Black Kite

panoramic view of the valley and the tails of the Rumblar Reservoir to the north and to the left of the path. This is a rougher watershed covered by Mediterranean shrub and Rockroses patches which become a gift to the senses in the spring time when all plants are blooming.

As the walk progresses, the path will split into two and we will continue walking onto the path to the left which will come out of Navarredonda Pasture after crossing a an iron countryside by a large Holm Oak tree. Then we will be entering La Parrilla Country Estate.

The path continues ahead while tracing up a large ascending curve. On both sides there are many granite boulders which cracks are home to many vertical White Asphodel plants that seem to competing in colour with some purple Lavender bushes.

The path passes by the Parrilla farmhouse and this seem to be a good site for breaking and recover after the climbing. From here we may also enjoy a panoramic view of valleys and hills. After a well deserved break, we will continue walking on the same path that soon will split into two. Then choose the path that branches off to the left and that runs parallel to the fencing. Again we will enjoy the panoramic views of the northern hills and watersheds and the tails of the Río Grande River, main tributary to the Rumblar River. The hills, fully covered with lush Mediterranean undergrowth and shrub, appear to be resonance boxes reproducing Deer grunts in autumn.

### ••• Km 13. Quinto de los Cuellos Pasture

On this section of the stage, the path winds through flat pastures. We will come across many country gates blocking the path. Remember, all country gates must remain closed behind us to prevent livestock and cattle

from trespassing on other land. Eventually, the Centillo path will join us on its way down from the northern regions.

After passing by Quinto farmhouses, the path leads to the east and until anew junction where we will bend right onto a path that winds through a large watershed and between meadows. We will be leaving this pasture-land after crossing another country gate located near a water trough.



Quinto farmhouse.

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GR-48Jaén

Water troughs turn to be extremely important to wild animals. Cattle Egrets make frequent use of them as amphibians and reptiles are complementary food to insects. On the other hand, amphibians such Midwife Toads, Western Spadefoot Toads and Salamanders lay their eggs in this artificial ponds. Birds of prey such Black Storks and Golden Eagles may be spotted when flying for hunting over the troughs.

On leaving behind and to the right the pond, the path continues ahead now matching a former path that links Baños de la Encina and La Carolina towns which is the one that we will follow up to the end of this stage of the route. Atop the hill is the watershed line that marks the boundaries between the extensive plain cultivated fields to the south and the northern hills and some scattering deserted mining sites.



Salamander



The path continues ahead and soon will be entering Carboneros municipality. After crossing a country gate which is blocking the path, we will come into a site with the typical enclosures for testing fighting bulls' bravery (tentadero) which will remain to the right of the path. There is also a small factory which resembles the local countryside buildings of stone and masonry.

After crossing another country gate, the path will come into Nava de los Cuellos. The site is a large and open plain field with fewer trees. The farmhouse which locates at the soft rounded hill is another beautiful example of rural architecture as uses slate rock masonry and beautiful buttresses. This bucolic site is complemented with a picturesque water well.

Together with other villages and towns in the region such La Carolina, Carboneros, Guarromán and Miranda del Rey, Los Cuellos was one of the settlements established along the mountain range within the Nuevas Poblaciones de Sierra Morena housing plan, back to King Carlos III reign.



Enclosure for testing fighting bull's bravery

However, this colony failed to progress and settlers moved to other nearby villages remaining the site just as a cluster of farmhouses and barns.

The path passes between the farm buildings to continue ahead and after crossing another country gate. La Carolina town can be easily spotted from here yet another six kilometers remain to the end of this stage.

### ••• Km 19.5 Los Cuellos Path

The path surface is in good conditions along this section. The most interesting features will be the breathtaking views and the impressive landscape. On the foothills we will see many abandoned mining sites and mining facilities not longer in use; a silver-green sea of Olive groves stretching the southern watershed to the right; in bright sunny clear days, can be seen the foothills of Sierra de Cazorra, Segura y Las Villas mountain range and Sierra Mágina mountain range on the westernmost horizon; and Los Vilches village which is half way from us and that can be easily spotted because of the Castle which locates



Panoramic view at the last section of the stage

atop a round hill. The castle has been converted into hermitage though.

We will continue ahead and pass by Los Ruices farmhouse which locates atop a hill to the right. There are some vegetable plots near the farmhouse and a brick made water well and trough locates opposite to them and by the path.

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GR-48 Jaén

Cattle have been substituted by sheep, especially *segureña* race. Sheep flocks are travelled from the winter pastures located in Sierra Morena Highlands to the summer ones in Santiago de la Espada and Portones municipalities at the heart of Sierra de Segura mountain range.

Eventually, the path enters La Carolina municipality while passing by the impressive La Cerrada farmhouse which locates atop a hill to the right. This site is locally known as La Media Legua (half league) since that is the distance remaining from the site to La Carolina town.

The path makes a sharp curve and we will be facing a treeless and dry environment. However, this site is home to the Lesser Kestrel and other bird species associated to meadow-steppe habitats which may find their ideal food in this dry meadow. Following a conservation programme, Lesser Kestrel specimens were relocated in La Carolina municipality.

On the left side of the path we will see a most peculiar series of folds in granite layers which resemble semicircular arches. The Cerro de la Cruz Hill also locates to the left of the path. This is an impressive 650 metres high hill which is very popular among hikers and local occasional walkers because of the impressive views from the top of the hill.

Shortly after passing through this site, the path meets El Centenillo Road. There we will bend to the right to continue walking along the road until come into Virgen del Rosario Avenue, outside the town. At the roundabout, choose the road to the left that leads into the town by Camino de Baños Street where this stage of the trail finishes.

## Baños de la Encina Castle

••• Baños de la Encina is a Highlands town located in a most mountainous region where the impressive Burch al Hammam Castle majestically stands atop the nearby Cerro del Cueto Hill. The castle silhouette appear to be printed on the highlands landscape and even from far distance one can guess the intricate maze of streets which is the town as well as its rich cultural heritage.

The history of the castle goes back to the Muslim period in the Iberian land. The building was believed to have been built in the Caliphal period. However, late archaeological discoveries have helped to date the castle in the Almohad period (middle 12th century). This is one of Europe's best preserved Moorish fortresses as it has little deteriorated through centuries and still keeps its almost untouched original features.

Soon it will keep our attention the fourteen squared towers together with the pentagonal one that fits inside one of the walls corners. One

of the towers was restored during the Christian period and therefore has some characteristics which cannot be appreciated in other Moorish buildings. This tower looks upon the town and is known as either Torre del Homenaje or Almena Gorda because of its shape.

The main access to the castle locates to the east wing and it is well flanked by two towers. We enter the courtyard where there is a large cistern with a barrel-vault ceiling which splits into two different naves separated by pilasters.

The conquest of the castle was tough and evolved some legendary events. According to tradition, in 1189 the Queen of Castile visited the castle and there she gave birth to her first son Fernando III, the Saint who will finally conquest the castle to the Moors in 1225.

The castle was classified as National Monument in 1931, a just recognition to the historical and cultural values of this beautiful building.

