

STAGE 5:**LA CAROLINA/
SANTA ELENA**

This last stage of the route will take us through the mountains and hills in Despeñaperros when travelling from La Carolina to Santa Elena, two border towns with a strong tradition of hospitality and a region where important battles that changed the course of history were fought.

The GR-48 trail comes to finish this adventure after travelling over 500 kilometres from the westernmost spurs of Sierra Morena Massif at the border between Portugal and Spain to the natural 'Gateway to Andalusia' which is Despeñaperros Pass.

This is an easy with no struggle walk suitable for walking, horse riding and mountain biking. Hikers will enjoy breaking at the beautiful natural site known as La Aliseda Recreation Area which is half way to the end and that is well equipped with facilities for picnic and controlled barbecuing.

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Start: La Carolina
Finish: Santa Elena
Distance: 14,8 Km.
Time: 4 horas

Suitability:**MIDE evaluation:**

Environment: Severity of the natural environment .

3

Orientation: Guidance on the route directions

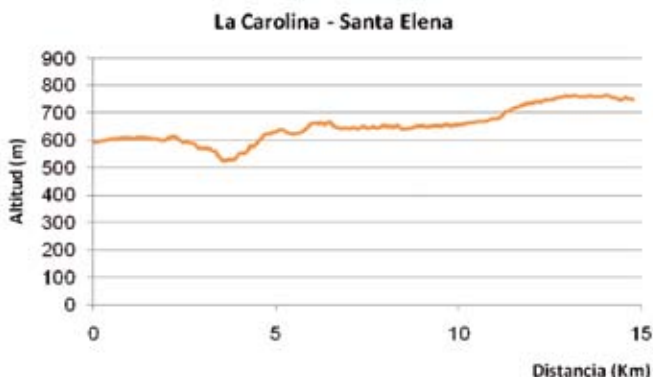
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Track Features: Difficulty in following the track

2

Struggle: Struggle required for accomplishing the route

3



On the first section of this stage, we will travel through a land where most resources have traditionally been devoted to mining activities. Mining activity has also left a clear footprint in the region where the foundations of demolished mine buildings and other related structures such chimneys can be seen on the foothills and mountains as another landscape feature.

Then we will come into an area predominantly dominated by Mediterranean forests with mountains and hills fully covered with Pine groves near La Campana River Valley and La Aliseda Recreation Area. In the late 19th century, these two sites became very popular as healing retreats for members of the Spanish aristocracy.

The GR-48 trail comes to an end in Santa Elena, a highland village surrounded by Despeñaperros Natural Park in Jaen province. Many traditional paths together with an interesting natural and cultural heritage will be the most attractive features of the last stage of the route.

ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

After leaving La Carolina town, we will walk parallel to the N-IV Motorway towards Santa Elena. On having passed by the industrial estate immediately before the cemetery, we will turn 90° to the left to come into Ministro Josep Piqué Avenue and the crossing of the industrial estate. Continue walking straight ahead and pass by the Fire Station before bordering the solar power plant. From there, the trail goes into a tiny country road that moves away from the urban fabric and towards La Aquisgrana Recreation Area where we will see some interesting vestiges of a mining past.

••• Km 2 Los Tramposos Gorge and the Castle

The walk goes ahead and we will soon have some breathtaking views of Sierra Morena foothills and La Campana River Valley which some Olive groves on the fertile slopes and patches of Mediterranean forest and shrub on the higher levels of the hills at the background and former mining buildings spattering everywhere.



The remains of a country house near Los Tramposos Gorge

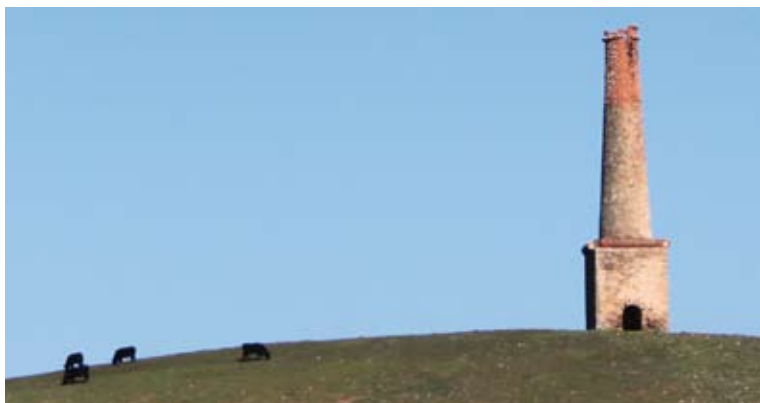
The path runs parallel to the wavy countryside road and winds through a treeless grassland area for cattle grazing. The remains of former shepherds' houses on the hills are some examples of the footprint left on the landscape by farming activities.

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The descending path comes to an area where we should pay attention to the direction signs to leave the road after a curve. There we will find two country gates. Choose the one to the right and after crossing it we will come onto another path that leads to Los Tramposos Brook.

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The path starts descending through this treeless meadow with some riparian vegetation of Oleanders and Brambles along the brook banks. After wading across the brook, the path passes by a country house well flanked by Eucalyptus trees. Immediately after, we will start climbing a hill where can be seen some abandoned buildings from a mining past such ruined chimneys, demolished country houses and other similar structures.



Livestock appears to be guarding former mine buildings

As we said before, the site supports scarce vegetation although approaching the top of the hill there is good samples of serial shrub of Common Thyme and Marjoram. This open meadow is also home to some bird species such the Corn Bunting, the Crested Lark and flocks of European Goldfinches.

The silhouette of the Castle framed by the rock behind is to our left. The castle which is also known as Torreón del Águila after the Muslim name (Hins-al-ugab) remains as a silent witness of a bloody past when many battles were fought in these hills. Today, Orellana Breeders' fighting bulls appear to be guarding the castle and the surrounding areas to Las Navas de Tolosa. The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa took place in 1212 in Miranda del Rey, a nearby small village to the north. The crushing defeat of the Muslim army which was defending this natural access to Andalucía was an important turning point in the medieval history of Spain.

The path reaches the top of the hill crowned with a small pasture of Holm Oaks. There, it will join the Motorway service road. There, we will leave the path that bends right and towards Orellana Perdíz Hotel and the service area to continue walking along the fencing until we get access to another path to the left that leads to a modest livestock farm where we should cross another country gate which is blocking the path.

After bordering the farm that remains to the right, we will start climbing up and towards a Pine grove. The path continues ascending between Pine trees and Mediterranean Cypresses at the highest level but also some Olive trees to the right. Our sense of smell will be rewarded with the fresh smell of conifers as this pleasant walk progresses. Eventually, the path meets La Aliseda countryside road where we should go across the road and to the left to continue walking onto a firebreak track that runs parallel.

••• Km 6. La Aliseda Road

At the right side of the JA-7100 road we will continue walking ahead and towards La Aliseda. The path avoids a large curve and now and then comes into nearby granite areas with boulders. Lichens and moss grow on the rocks surface because of the moist in the site.

From these high lands we will have a most impressive view of La Campana River and the gorge. The castle seems to hanging over the valley from one of the roughest and watersheds. Holm Oaks and Mediterranean forest begins to show at the highlands.

The path meets the road again and we will see a waymarking sign that tells us to continue walking ahead and on this tarmac for about 2.7 kilometers. All precautions must bear in mind when walking on the road though.

The walk is pleasant on this section of the route. The Mediterranean forest



Panorámicas del entorno del Castillo de las Navas de Tolosa

of Holm Oaks enriches with Rockroses, Lavenders and Rosemary shrub growing on both sides of the road. The path goes through La Inmediata Country Estate where still we will see some abandoned shot towers to later come into another country estate, Las Cañadas from where it will run parallel to the road. The nearby river causes the fresh air and moist. Just before coming at the bridge over the river, we will leave the road behind us to continue walking onto another path that runs upstream and along the river.

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••• Km 9.5 La Aliseda

The path will wind through a most interesting natural and historical site in this section of the route. As we walk upstream and along the river, we will see an excellently preserved lush riparian forest on the riverbanks with some great specimens of Ash-trees, Alders and Poplar trees.

Some fruit trees and great Walnut trees remain near the former spa resort and where used to be gardens plots. Despite the short flow, the river never dries which proves to be essential for some animal species living in the area as Deer and Wild Boars whose tracks can easily be spotted on the riverbanks.

Rapids, waterfalls and pools mark the course of the river at La Aliseda recreation area. A former public launderette or bag wash (formerly wash house) locates downstream just before a recreation area with facilities for picnic (benches, picnic tables, etc) where there is also a small viewpoint and some looking old Sweet Chestnut Trees with their peculiar twisted trunks.



Bridge over La Campana River

••• Km 11 Santa Elena former path

On leaving behind La Aliseda recreation area, the path will come by another bridge over the river to continue straight ahead avoiding going across the river. Soon after, the path will split into three different paths; one of them will run parallel to the river although we will continue walking onto the central one that slightly starts ascending a soft slope while bending to the right.

While still climbing up between Pine groves and young Holm Oak trees, the path will sharply turn to the right to move away from La Campana River valley. Along the path grow some species of aromatic plants such Lavender and Marjoram shrub and the path surface appears to be paved by outcropping slate slabs on the bare substrate.

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Riparian plants and trees give colour to the monotonous green in autumn

The path continues ahead and winds through Pine groves where we may enjoy the voices of different forest birds and even spot the Chaffinch or the Great Tit. The noise of birds amplifies with large flocks of Azure-Winged Magpie and especially with the colourful and noisy Eurasian Jay. All they will be very alert to our movements as we pass through the forest.

The path meets perpendicularly a firebreak track atop the hill. There we will bend to the left to continue walking along the firebreak while the path will move ahead. The firebreak track climbs down and almost meets the road although at sudden it will turn to the right to start climbing up again. Patches of Cork Oak trees begin to share ground with the still predominant Pine groves.

The track meets the road again and passes by the main access to Piedras Blancas Country Estate. We will walk a few metres along the path that runs parallel to the fencing until it makes a 90° turn and moves away.

The noise of cars travelling the nearby motorway becomes louder as we approach to Santa Elena. However, we will have some metres before coming into the town which also give us the chance to enjoy walking through a large Pine grove where we will discover the beauty of a rare tree species native to America, the Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*).

The path meets again the road to La Aliseda which leads to the pedestrian overpass above the highway -Autovía de Andalucía- to finally come into



A section of the trail runs under the shadow of Monterey

Pine trees

Santa Elena. This small highland town which locates at Despeñaperros Mountain Pass is at the time the end of the stage and of the GR-48 trail through Sierra Morena Mountain Range.

La Aliseda

●●● In the past, La Aliseda Spa resort comprised some twenty different mineral fountains and springs, all they considered to have curative powers. However, the site was internationally recognised for the healing properties of the mineral water from two fountains: San José and La Salud.

Generally, waters at La Aliseda were carbonated and nitrogen-containing waters and especially recommended for treating certain pathologies of the circulatory and respiratory systems. Similar healing properties were also found in mineral waters of other towns and villages such Villaharta, Marmolejo and Puertollano.

The beginning of the 20th century witnessed a great boom at La Aliseda. The medical benefits of the water together with the freshest and purest air in the highlands and nicer weather conditions attracted attractive to many bathers and therefore in the site were built facilities such a hotel, private and renting lodgings, and a retail shop; a large garden with fruit trees and garden

plots was designed too. Today the remains of the spa bath and other structures can be seen downstream and on the riverbanks to the right. Some great samples of old Sweet Chestnut trees and Walnut trees remain in the plain fields where probably used to be beautiful gardens and plots.

A well preserved riparian forest locates along the river banks where Ash-trees mix together with Poplar trees and beautiful patches of Alder trees which are key waterside trees and clear bio-indicators of a healthy and constant river flow.

In the river, small waterfalls and ponds built with natural stone masonry are home to many amphibian species such the Iberian Water Frog, the Iberian Midwife Toad and the Marbled Newt.

Certainly, the medical properties of the water cannot be the solely and not the most notable attraction at La Aliseda since this is a natural site of great environmental and ecological conditions under which a well preserved riparian ecosystem exist.

