

STAGE 3 :

CUMBRES DE SAN BARTOLOMÉ/ CUMBRES MAYORES



This stage of the route covers a region known as Las Cumbres which comprises three different municipalities: Cumbres de San Bartolomé, Cumbres de Enmedio and Cumbres Mayores all they connected by a network of traditional paths, countryside alleys, causeways and cattle tracks. The region is clearly influenced by the customs of the nearby Extremadura and therefore primary land uses are cattle breeding and pasture management.

This easy West-East oriented route with a few slopes yet some sections of the path may deteriorate especially when wading across some brooks. Nevertheless, the whole track is suitable for walking, biking and horse riding.

A common feature along this section of the trial will be the dry stone walls on both sides of the track. These walls mark the limits between different pastures which are mainly devoted to livestock breeding, especially Iberian pig bred in 'montanera', the period during which the pig grazes in acorn-rich pastures. The main cultural expressions along this section of the trail are many towers and fortress located in the small towns and villages along the trail together with the paved path nearby Cumbres Mayores town.

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As for the wild life, a large range of birds and other animal species associated to pastures and river banks are the most significant. Corn Buntings and Larks are easily spotted in these fields without paying much attention to other birds of prey such as the Common Buzzard and the Red Kite. In addition, the region is also home to a large range of wild vegetation which is a much valuable natural resource. Activities very popular in the region are the collection of wild Asparagus and especially of Gurumelos mushrooms (*Amanita ponderosa*) both very much appreciated in the local gastronomy.



Black Kite

Start: Cumbres de San Bartolomé.

Plaza de San Sebastián.

Finish: Cumbres Mayores (Callejón del Cementerio Alley next to Iglesia Square and the Castle)

Distance: 10.8 km

Time: 3 hours and 30 minutes

Suitability:



Difficulty: MIDE evaluation



Environment: Severity of the natural environment.

1



Track Features: Difficulty in following the track.

1



Orientation: Guidance on the route directions.

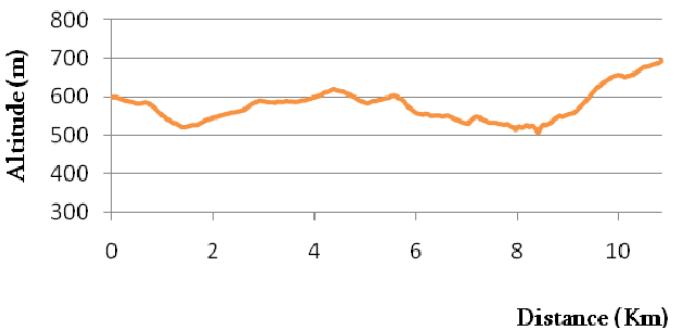
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Struggle: Struggle required for accomplishing the route.

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Cumbres de San Bartolomé - Cumbres Mayores



ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The origins of the region known as Las Cumbres seem to be in the Roman period. According to some authors, in the 5th century people from Nertóbriga, a town located up in the north and in the Beturia Céltica region, moved to the south when searching shelter and protection in the highlands causing a series of small towns and villages. Later, the region was colonized by Berbers since the orography of the region appeared to be ideal for shepherding.

In the Middle Ages and during the Reconquista period, Fernández III King of Castile commissioned and founded the San Bartolomé Parish Church renaming the site as Cumbres de San Bartolomé. Nevertheless, even today and thanks to the oral tradition the former name of Cumbres de Abajo and Cumbres Bajas still are in use. The site together with other sites in the region played an important defensive role when defending Castile from



A remarkable picture: a pasture surrounded by dry stone walls

the Portuguese attacks and many towers, forts and castles were built in the villages and towns causing many people from the northern regions of Castile, Galicia and León to move in here.

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This stage of the trail starts off at the San Sebastián Square in Cumbres de San Bartolomé town. From here, we will head east while walking along an alleyway that will come to a path known as Camino de las Viñitas. Following this path that winds through vegetable gardens and plots, we will come to the Barranco de las Cañadas Ravine where the main features are pastures and Olive groves. Nevertheless, what it will call walkers' attention most is the goat cattle since they are many cattle exploitations along this section of the route.

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The path which become rockier, starts descending while approaching to the brook in the Barranco de las Cañadas Ravine.

••• Km 1.5. Barranco de las Cañadas Ravine

After wading across the brook, the path continues on ahead while having the ravine to the left. As the path descends, Mediterranean undergrowth predominates with bushes of Myrtle, Wild Pear trees and Wild Olive trees. On the slope to the right, 'majanos' (landmarks made of a pile of stones) and stone fences are marking the borders between different private Country Estates.

The path progresses parallel to the brook which carries less water now. Brambles, Oleanders and some White Poplars line up along the banks though. A sequence of pastures of Oaks is the main landscape feature where Great Tits and Blue Tits flutter about while searching for the abundant insects in the pasture.



A fountain-trough with a large basin at the Barranco de las Cañadas Ravine

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The path starts going up and passes by a water trough located to the right. This is a rectangular 'fountain-trough' of about 12 metres long made of adobe bricks. On the opposite side of the trough is the tube from where the water is spilled into a basin. The water passes from the basin into the trough by means of lowering the railing.

While looking for the top of the ravine, the Viñitas path makes a 90° turn to the right and starts climbing up while heading south-east. Dry stone walls mark the borders on both sides of the path while large specimens of Oak trees and some Hawthorns give shadow to the walkers.

On reaching the highest point on this climbing, the path becomes a tarmac road. There the path makes again a 90° turn this time to the left and towards the N-435 road. An underpass facilitates going across the road to start walking ahead and towards Cumbres de Enmedio town.

The path continues climbing while winding through a pasture of Broom bushes and an Olive grove on the top of the hill. Then, the path starts climbing down until it meets the countryside road that connects Cumbres de San Bartolomé and Cumbres de Enmedio small towns. On reaching the road, we will go to the right and continue walking ahead and towards Cumbres de Enmedio main road.

••• Km 4.85. Cumbres de Enmedio

Cumbres de Enmedio is the smaller municipality in Andalucía region with some fifty people living in it. Most streets in the village still keep the traditional stone pavement proper of these highland towns and villages. The main road goes through the village and passes by the church to finally come to die into a small square. This is a good site for a break and

walkers may quench their thirst in the fountain located on the left side of the square. A nearby steel made weather vane representing a wild Lynx is perhaps a fade memory of a time when those animals used to gad about in this mountain range.



Weather vane representing a Lynx in Cumbres de Enmedio village

On having left behind Cumbres de Enmedio village and as the walk progresses towards Cumbres Mayores town, we will come to a roundabout outside the village. In here, we will leave the countryside road to continue walking straight ahead and on a dirt path with dry stone walls on both sides. These stone walls will be the walkers' companion until almost the end of this section of the route.

The path now winds through a former Oak woodland converted into a pasture where *retinta* and *avileña* cattle races are predominant. The path continues ahead and between the La Aldea pasture which stretches in a beautiful valley to the left and the El Endrinar pasture on the opposite side of the path.

As the path starts climbing down, Mediterranean undergrowth becomes more frequent on both sides of the path. The path will wade across different streams and minor brooks where Brambles, Round-Leaved Mint bushes and Reed finely develop. By the dry stone walls proliferate plant species such ferns, different types of moss and Navelwort plants. These are plants which are well adapted to this rocky habitat type growing together thanks to the water infiltration through the stones and under the shade of the vertical walls.

••• Km 7.2. The Cortijo y Majada de Suárez Farmhouse

At this point of the stage the trail meets other path that we will ignore to continue walking straight ahead. This other path that branches off to the left connects with another long distance trail known as GR-42 towards Segura de León town.

Shortly after passing by the above mentioned junction, our track enters Cumbres Mayores municipality where the highlands pastures are mainly devoted to cattle breeding, specially the Iberian pig. Livestock exploitations of Iberian pig in 'montanera' are well represented in this region. A good example of this type of farming can be found in the surrounding areas of the Cortijo de Peliche Farmhouse where an interpretative board locates with accurate information about this traditional activity. The way Iberian pig is bred in the region has gained national and international recognition by means of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Denominación de Origen, DO (classification which is part of a regulatory classification system aimed to identify the quality and geographical origin of Spain's finest wines and food products).

As the walk progresses, the path deteriorates and starts climbing down when fording the Barranco de la Magdalena Ravine to come to an open meadow fully devoted to cattle breeding. Then the path changes direction sharply to the right to start climbing up a hill on the shady side of the ravine where vegetation is more abundant. The trail continues climbing up and at some point on the slope gets to a junction of paths. Ignore those other paths and continue walking on this track until reaching the top of the hill. The path continues uphill while fitting between a thicker Mediterranean woodland and undergrowth. The reward for such a steep climb

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Cattle in open pastures. A very common feature in the area

is the astonishing view from the top of the hill. A landscape of pastures and Mediterranean woodland widens in front of us having to the North some villages and small towns like Higuera la Real located in Extremadura region.

The path swings right at a junction on the slope heading on towards Cumbres Mayores cemetery. From this point onwards, walkers may enjoy walking on a traditionally paved path which goes around the small town and passes by the impressive wall of the Castle. After passing by one wing of the churchyard, the path comes into an alley to the left that comes to die in the square near the Castle known as Plaza de la Iglesia where this stage of the route finishes.



Near Cumbres Mayores village

Fountains

••• In past times, sites where water sprang spontaneously were considered to be real oases and most cattle routes and traditional paths could even change direction in order to get passing by one natural fountain or well where both animals and men quenched their thirst.

Natural fountains and springs were of such importance that in many cases villages and towns were arranged around them. It is a quite common feature in the region having a main square with either a fountain, a water trough or a 'lavadero' (a stone made basin for sluicing clothes) around which the town develops. Each of those

water structures shows a particular shape and peculiar architecture.

Nevertheless, fountains and springs were not only a source for water collection but also a busy meeting point for locals. People used to gather around the fountain and so they were workers, cattle breeders, women carrying pitchers of water on their heads and children involved in water games while refreshing themselves from the heat of the summer. One could say that those water sources were the 'community centre' of the past time where many community issues were dealt to by everyone in a daily basis.

Water wells, fountains and water troughs appear to be the guardians of a silent legacy. Coming close to any of those water troughs takes the walkers deeply into the sound of the rippling water which seems to repeat the noises of the quiet hot days and thirst quenching added to a well deserved break in one's journey.



Large stone made water trough and basin in Cumbres de Enmedio village

