

**STAGE 4 :****CUMBRES MAYORES  
/HINOJALES**

This stage of the route is a very easy walk connecting Cumbres Mayores town to Hinojales, a small highland village. Still within the limits of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Natural Park, the trail will match some former traditional paved paths and tracks which gives an extra value to the stage.

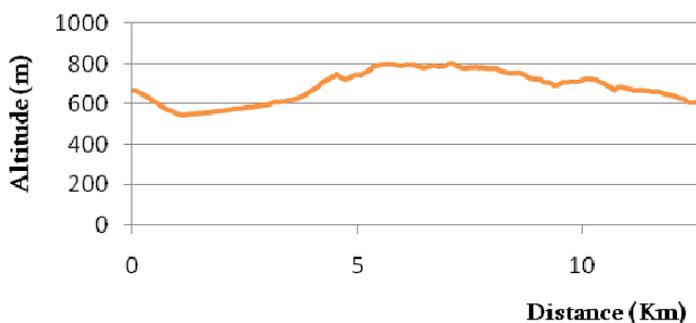
The track heads on south direction while moving away from the typical landscape at the border between the regions of Extremadura and Andalucía. Then it will come to a much shady and humid region where Portuguese Oaks and Cork Oaks are a clear sign of a closer groundwater level. In fact, a large section of the track matches the course of water that supplies Hinojales village and even passes through one of the few well preserved patches of Chestnut trees. The Chestnut tree is also the symbol of this mountain range.

Even most part of the trail uses former and traditional paths and cattle routes, a section of the track runs by the A-5300 road. This is a quiet highland road with no much traffic and even walkers will have the chance to enjoy the astonishing views at their backs of scattering villages in breathtaking valleys.

As mentioned above, this is a very easy walk and the path narrows and perhaps deteriorates in the fewer metres. This is a flat route and the ideal stage for hiking, biking or horse riding; the only steep climbing will happen when approaching the Gracias Mountain Pass at the Sierra del Viento mountain range.

**56****GR-48Huelva****Start:** Cumbres de San Bartolomé**Finish:** Hinojales**Distance:** 12.6 km**Time:** 4 hours**Suitability:****Difficulty: MIDE evaluation****Environment:** Severity of the natural environment.**1****Track Features:** Difficulty in following the track.**2****Orientation:** Guidance on the route directions.**2****Struggle:** Struggle required for accomplishing the route.**3**

## Cumbres Mayores-Hinojales



### ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The route starts off at Cumbres Mayores town. The trail heads towards a tunnel beneath the road next to the petrol station and soon after passing the tunnel it matches a beautiful traditional paved path. The path starts climbing down after passing by a gorgeous stone made water trough to the right. This water trough is certainly a beautiful work of stone and still keeps the former stone decorating the front. Water comes out from a side and it is poured into another smaller basin which has the typical shape for the better filling of pitchers and all sort of water containers. By means of lowering the railing, the water comes to fill in the large water trough which is about seven metres long.



Stone made water trough and basin at the beginning of this stage of the route

As we continue walking, we will bump into another water trough which is blocking the path. Decorating the trough there is a triangular shaped stone front with an almost illegible inscription from the 19th century. Also located on the front stone are two taps from where the water is poured into a square shaped basin which was used for water collection and for washing in running water. By means of a tile, the water passes to a lower level where locates another rectangular and larger basin from where the water is supplied to a modern cistern.

The path descends gradually while tracing a large zigzag and widens when approaching to an area of different plots separated by dry stone walls. From here we will have a panoramic view of the *Riofrío* Valley and the Huelva-Zafra railway line crossing over the valley. Later the trail will go across the railway at a level crossing. The path comes to a site where two brooks meet. After fording the brooks, the path connects with a dirt path to the left known as *Camino del Moral* that immediately heads up towards a countryside road.



The landscape resembles a mosaic of farming plots

### ••• Km 1.2. Camino del Moral path and the Puerto de Gracia Mountain Pass

The *Camino del Moral* path is an easy and good quality dirt path. The path winds around an area of farming plots and cattle exploitations. After passing by a dairy the path wades across a small brook which supports some associated bushy vegetation such as Reed and Brambles.

The path continues straight ahead until it meets the A-5300 road where we will turn right and towards Hinojales village. After some 350 metres walking along the road and at the kilometre 8 another path branches off

to the right. We will follow this new path that gently climbs up through Oleander patches while running parallel to the road.



Panoramic view of Cumbres Mayores from the Sierra del Viento mountain range

The climbing comes to an end when the path meets a sharp curve of a former road. There, the path bends left while heading again towards the A-5300 road. We will follow along the road for a while having at the back a beautiful view of Cumbres Mayores town and the highlands. At the kilometre 10 we will go onto another path known as *Camino del Venero* that branches off to the right. At this point we will be half way to finish this stage of the route. The *Puerto de Gracia* mountain pass is already at sight.

### ••• **Km 6. Camino del Venero Path**

The *Camino del Venero* path starts after passing across a cattle grid. This is an area of hills covered with large meadows and pastures which are ideal for cattle breeding, a most traditional activity in the region. It is not casual that this area is known as *Cerro del Viento* (Hill of the Wind) since this section of the mountain range comprises many hills.

In the spring season, the Mediterranean undergrowth shows a magnificent display of chromatic contrast because of the blooming of white Rockroses, yellow Gorse and purple Lavender. It will also be easy to watch some birds of prey such the Tawny Vulture flying over the valley while taking advantage of the thermal currents proper of the high mountains.

The path continues ahead and passes by a ruined country house with no roof. Some stone walls still are up though. As the walk progresses the number of trees increases and humidity becomes more perceptible. After passing through a Pine grove, the path starts climbing down while winding between

some spattering Portuguese Oaks. The path continues ahead and soon it will come by the water cistern that collects the water from the region's springs to later supply Hinojales village. The path then comes to an area of former mining sites while heading south and towards the top of the ravine known as Barranco de la Corte. This is a natural site of Portuguese Oak patches and traditional vegetable gardens.



Colourful pasture in spring time

We will continue walking on this path until it meets a small brook. After fording the brook, we will bend right to follow a dirt path that winds through a nearby Olive grove. The borders of this traditional path are the dry stone walls that run along the track and that are also home to interesting plant species such as Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*), adding a natural feature to this section of the route.

A peculiar strategy when combating the negative effects of the Olive Fruit Fly (*Bactrocera oleae* (Rossi)) tree is happening in the nearby Olive groves. The idea is very simple. Plastic bottles containing a solution of Diammonium phosphate and water are hanging from the Olive tree branches. Flies which find this solution very attractive end up trapped inside the bottles. This appears to be a quite acceptable and sustainable approach since chemical elements used in phytosanitary treatments are not in place.

Some demolished and ruined small country houses locate at the higher slopes of the hill. Those houses will make a good reference when spotting some exceptional specimens of Chestnut trees to the left of the path. This is a moistly shady site where the dry stone walls along the path are fully covered by the green moss. Soon the path will come into a forest of Holm oaks, Portuguese Oaks and big Cork Oaks. The ground under the trees resembles a tapestry of Peony flowers which will show all their pink colours in the spring.

### ••• Km 10.3. La Sabia Site

After a gentle climbing, the path meets a junction where we will pay close attention to the direction signs. At the junction, we will go onto another dirt path that continues straight ahead while slightly bending to the left. This is a quite hard to follow path because of the irregular and deteriorated surface yet it is wide enough for a cart to pass through ('de ancho carretero').

This is a beautiful section of the route with some sections of a former paved path. The path gently drops down until it meets a small brook which supplies water for the small gardens and fruit trees of the nearby farms. We can hear the singings of Blackbirds, Great Tits and Blue Tits; all they



Great Tit

large in number in the site. The path then swings right before fording the brook to continue ahead while passing by a cluster of small farms and pigpens to the left. From there we will follow a countryside road which still keeps the original dry stone walls.

A nearby Olive grove secures firmly to the scarce fertile soil while the tree's three roots appear to be drilling out the dark outcropping of tosca limestone. No doubt this is a good example of the wild farming in the region.

The path continues ahead and meets again the A-5300 road and we will start walking towards Hinojales and on the left side of the road. After some two hundred metres and immediately before a 'no overtaking' traffic sign of the road we will go onto another path that branches off left.

The route progresses again on a dirt path that runs perpendicular to the road. We will ignore an iron country fence which is blocking the path to swing right and on to another dirt path with dry stone walls on both sides. The path gradually drops down while heading south. Hinojales' bell tower can be spotted in the distant.

The path continues descending until the end of this last slope where it meets another dirt path at a junction. That other path is the one from where the next stage of the route will start towards Cañaverale de León. At the junction there is an information board of the Natural Park with some interesting information about the *Camino de la Víbora* path. On having come to the road that connects Hinojales and Cañaverale de León villages we will go across the road to continue ahead to continue along an alley with dry stone walls. Turn to the right at the junction with a fountain and a water trough to come into Hinojales village which is also the end of this stage of the route.



## The sweet chestnut tree

••• The Sweet Chestnut tree is the most emblematic symbol of the *Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche* mountain range yet they are very little in number along this section of the trail. For many centuries, Sweet Chestnut groves have shaped both the landscape and the culture of this highland region. Paradoxically,

original woodland of Oaks was substituted by Sweet Chestnut groves; as the centuries passed by, those groves became fully mature woodlands. Today and under the Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, these very ancient chestnut woods are classified as Natural Habitat of Community Interest whose conservation requires the designation of Special



Areas of Conservation. In addition, the sites are also under special protection by means of the *Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche* Natural Park act and regulations.

Sweet Chestnut trees require very particular ecological conditions for good growth and further development. Those

conditions can barely be found in some specific areas within the Iberian territory and the *Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche* mountain range is one of those. Some

of the region's natural sites comprise most of these requirements: a sub acid-neutral

soil (pH 5.8 – 6.7) which is very rich in organic matter; humidity is relatively high with an average of rainfall of some thousand litres per square metre and year; and mild springs and summers.