

STAGE 5**HINOJALES****/ARROYOMOLINOS DE LEÓN**

This is one of the longest stages of this long distance route, the GR-48 Sierra Morena Trail. Nevertheless, hikers could break in Cañaverale de León town which locates half way to the end of the stage. *Cañaverale de León* is also a site where many different traditional cattle routes, highland paths and trails come together; there the GR-48 trail will meet a section of the most famous trail in Spain: the *Camino de Santiago* Route.

Our trail stretches across ancient pastures locate along a series of mountain ranges comprising the *Sierra del Puerto* and the *Sierra del Bujo* mountain ranges. The trail will climb up until passing across the *Alto de la Toba* Mountain Pass. From where it will progress along the northern side of the mountain range to finally come to die in Arroyomolinos de León.

The track is easy to walk despite the many ups and downs and the fording of different water streams. Perhaps, the most interesting natural feature is the *Rivera del Montemayor* Site. The *Montemayor* River's pristine waters flow all the way down from Extremadura region and its riverbanks support a large range of lush riparian vegetation in good conservation. This is a quite serpentine section of the trail yet it will be a very much pleasing and agreeable walk along the riverbanks.

Most time the track matches either traditional paved paths or routes that run between dry stone walls. Consequently, this is a very easy walk with a few sections of steep climbs when approaching the *Puerto de la Toba* Mountain Pass and some ups and downs at the *Montemayor* riverbanks. Nevertheless, this is a walk suitable for walking, biking and horse riding.

Start: Hinojales
Finish: Arroyomolinos de León
Distance: 21.5 km
Time: 6 hours and 40 minutes

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

Hinojales-Arroyomolinos de León



ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The first human settlements in this site of the *Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche* mountain range came to happen in the prehistory. From the Bronze Age is a burial site which locates nearby the centre of the village. The site is no matter for archaeological study; it has been plundered ruthlessly though.

64 The writings of the Roman author Plinius and the Greek historian Polybius tell about the Celtic, Vetoni and Lusitanian origins of most sites in the region. Those were cultures of a clear nomadic lifestyle whose main activity was cattle breeding. Perhaps, that is the reason why no settlements from that period have yet been discovered in the region.

After the Roman Empire disintegrated, Visigoths ruled by Walia (418 A.D) established some sites in Hinojales surrounding areas. The remains of settlements from the 568 A.D locate in the municipality. From the same year is also a Old Christian tablet which is placed at the altar room of the *Nuestra Señora de Tórtola* Hermitage. Apparently, the hermitage locates where other cultures of the past used to celebrate their religious ceremonies.



The beginning of the *Camino de la Víbora* path outside Hinojales village

It is clear that Hinojales history has been clearly marked by people migration. After the Muslims invasion and centuries of occupation, Christians conquered the southern regions in the country and people from many different regions in the Iberian Peninsula were relocated throughout the municipality.

After the Battle of La Janda, which took place in 711 (A.D), the North African Tarik troops took control and possession of the southern regions of the Iberian territory. Today, the names of some sites in the region remind of those five centuries of Islamic culture. That is the case of the *Cueva y Horno del Moro*, literally 'The Moor's Cave and Furnace'.

In the 13th century, people from León and Galicia –regions up in the north of Castile- moved to this site and it was then when the village was fully set. The new settlers brought with them much of their own traditional culture and wealth that today is part of Hinojales cultural heritage. Among other artistic expressions is the 'lanza', a traditional dance honouring the *Virgen de Tórtola* who is also the village's saint patron. The *Virgen de Tórtola* Hermitage was built at the early 15th century. However, by the end of the same century population had grown so large that a new Parish church, the *Parroquia de la Encarnación*, was built in order to accomplish the religious needs of so many new citizens.

Our next stage of the trail will start at the junction where the previous one finished. We will leave Hinojales village heading north to go across the road. We will meet the junction after some metres of gentle climbing along the *Camino de la Víbora* path.

••• Km 0.9. Camino de la Víbora path

On having come to the junction, we will choose the path to the right and head on towards Cañaveral de León. As mentioned in the previous stage, at the junction there is an information board which tells to visitors about the ethnographic value of traditional paved paths within the *Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche* Natural Park.

While ascending, the trail winds through Olive groves and pastures of Holm and Cork Oaks. Nevertheless, the stony sides of the path are fully covered of lush Mediterranean undergrowth comprising bushes of Sage, Lavender, Mastic Thyme and Flax-Leaved Daphne. Ignore the end of the *Camino de la Víbora* path and continue walking ahead to come into *Fuentes de León* municipality already in the province of Badajoz (Extremadura).

This is a very pleasant walk under the green canopy created by the tops of the trees and many climbing plants such as the Common Smilax (*Smilax aspera*). The path drops down until it gets to the ravine of the *Arroyo de la Corte* Brook which is surrounded by pastures of Cork Oaks and nearby the *Linarejos* Farmhouse. In the past, this was a very important natural

site where many vegetable gardens were set along the water course yet today just a few Fig trees remain. A small Black Poplar forest is home to many birds as the Common Nightingale whose singing can be heard in the spring.



The path under a green canopy of Cork Oaks

Soon after wading across the Arroyo de la Orden Brook, the path splits into two. Ignore the path that branches off left that goes up to Fuentes de León village and continue walking on the path to the right and towards the Colada de las Tablas Site again in Andalucía territory.

••• Km 2.7. La Colada de las Tablas Path

The track which now heads southwest is a very comfortable dirt path. On the right side of the path, an old country house will keep our attention but also a massive sample of Cork Oak. This impressive natural hallmark will mark the entry to Huelva province.



Common Mullein

This is a quite pleasant section of the track as the path surface is in good condition and the track goes down a gentle slope while winding through Olive groves and some patches of Mediterranean forest. At some point the cumulative slope is about 10% and the path turns into a concrete paved path. The path continues ahead and goes through the pasture of a private Country Estate. Among other interesting features in this pasture is a beautifully built stone made water well with a vault which locates to the left of the path.

Soon after passing by the well the path splits into two. We will continue walking on the path to the right and towards the junction at the road that connects Hinojales and Cañaveral de León villages. At the junction, we will go across the road to continue walking a few metres ahead and again on a dirt path.

••• Km 5.9. Camino de la Dehesa de Cañaverál Path

After going across the road, and for some 150 meters we will continue walking ahead and on this new dirt path. Then we will take on a new path which branches off left and towards a brook. After wading across the stream, dry stone walls will make the borders of the path that continues ahead while starts climbing up.



A common feature along the trail: countryside paths with dry stone walls

The path turns into an abrupt slope up with sections of outcropping bedrock which make harder the use of mountain bikes. Bikers will perhaps be willing to carry their bikes a few meters though. Soon the path will get to another hill and becomes more passable. Opposite to our eyes and still in the distance is another highland village: Cañaverál de León.

As the walk progresses, the landscape fills up with smallholdings of Olive groves. We should also pay attention to changes in the lithology of the area. The soil progressively turns into a shade of ochre colours and the dry stone walls which are limiting different Country Estates are different too. It is the lime rock. Lime rock is very common in this region and especially around Cañaverál de León. The many water sources and springs in the area are also because of this type of rock.

The path gets to another private pasture near the village where meets a junction of paths and tracks. We will take on the path to the left with an interpretation board and some information about traditional Iberian pig breeding in 'montanera'. There is also a milestone with a yellow Vieira scallop (symbol of the Camino de Santiago Route) which marks the right direction



Camino de Santiago Route waymarking sign

to follow up the pilgrimage track. This traditional pilgrimage route matches some sections of the GR-48 route though. In the pasture we will admire a magnificent sample of Holm Oak whose trunk has grown biased.

••• Km 7.6. Cañaverale de León village

This town is named after the many cane plantations in the area. The town has traditionally been linked to those cane plantations but also to the many water sources and springs in the surrounding areas. As mentioned above, the greater and perhaps the more important spring locates in the middle of a street in the centre of the village.

Even the origins of the village are back in the past times, the title of 'villa' was given to the town by Felipe II, King of Castile, on December the 30th 1588. The title was granted by means of high taxes. During four years in a row every single citizen of the village paid a large sum of money to the king of Castile. As a self-governing township, the municipality was incorporated to Badajoz municipality until 1833 when the current administrative division into provinces was established and therefore Cañaverale de León was incorporated to Huelva.

The second half of this stage passes through the village's *travesía* (literally a road that passes through a village) to get to the opposite side. Here we will find a junction where we will go onto the road to the left and towards Arroyomolinos de León village. This section of the stage matches the A-5300 road until we will get to the 22 kilometre. There and after passing a curve, we will take on a dirt path that runs between dry stone fences and moves away from the road and to the left.

As the walk progresses, the path passes by a nearby pasture devoted to Iberian pig breeding in 'montanera' that means that pigs are exclusively



Casas de la Suerte del Montero former country houses and the Castillo del Cuerno Castle in the background

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GR-48 Huelva

fed on acorns in the open range. However, some areas of this private Country Estate appear to be in a state of semi-abandonment causing invasive shrub and bushes of Rockroses and Gorses (*Ulex parviflorus*). In the background is the Sierra del Bujo mountain range and to the left the Sierra del Cuerno one with the castle of the same name.

The path which now is a serpentine one starts climbing down. The dry stone walls on both sides of the path support spillways for the draining away of water from the land surface. Those spillways -locally known as 'portillos'- are also quite peculiar features of extreme beauty since their thresholds are crowned with large limestone rock. As the path comes to the end of the slope, the pastureland becomes much more opened and with fewer plants coverage. Water courses follow each other causing to grow many patches of Brambles. Those are very interesting habitat types for birds such Corn Buntings, Hoopoes and Chaffinches. Approaching to the Montemayor River we will see near the riverbanks some private country houses and farmhouses known as Casas de la Suerte del Montero which still keep the traditional archetype on building that is using blocks of stone without mortar fillings. The houses also keep traditional sheepfolds attached.

••• Km 11.5. Rivera de Montemayor Site

The Montemayor River flows down from the Extremadura region while working a series of small canyons which support very interesting and lush riparian vegetation. Ash-Trees, Willows and Poplars create a green corridor which appears to be an ideal oasis for the diverse animal species living up in the mountains. Wild Boars, and Deer come to drink from the river's pristine water; the excrements of Otters can be seen on the rocks of the riverbed and on the riverbanks since those mustelids come to the numerous ponds when searching for fish and Crayfish.

The path comes to meet the river and we will wade across to reach a pic-

nic area on the opposite riverbank. Nevertheless, before fording the river we should get back on our steps to take on another path to the right that runs downstream and parallel to the river. This is a section of the stage that may be hard for bikers because of the stony surface of the path and the lush shrubby vegetation of Brambles, and Oleanders.

The path continues parallel to the river and soon we will see the remains of a former transversal irrigation dam and water mill which locate at the



Wild Boar

riverbed while keeping the semi-stagnant water. This is an ideal site for birdwatching since Herons come e to these backwaters when looking for food. In addition, big specimens of Black Poplars enrich the ecological value of the riparian vegetation.

Finally, the path comes to an open vega (plain field) with a large patch of Poplars and where locates another board with some information about riparian vegetation. The path meets a countryside road and goes over a bridge. After crossing the bridge, we will take onto a dirt path to the left that runs parallel to the river on the left riverbank.

••• Km 13.5. Ascending to the Alto de la Toba Mountain Pass

The path eventually moves away from the riverbank and we will not see the Montemayor River again. The path swings left and soon after will have dry stone walls on its borders. As the path continues ahead, we observe clear signs of shepherding in the surrounding pasture. In the pasture we will see scattering Holm Oaks together with lush shrub of Brooms and

Gorse in the hills. To the right, the impressive *Cortijo de Marivázquez* farmhouse will keep our attention because of its large size.

The path meets a junction of tracks and paths. We will take on the path to the left to make a 90° turn. This new dirt path passes between the *Capellania* country houses and by a pig pen which locates under a large Holm Oak. Despite of being semi-ruined, the pig pen still keeps up some of the stone walls and the threshold loading which were built with thick trunks of oaks. The hospitality of this deserted



Barn Swallow

GR-48 Huev

building is such that birds like Barn Swallows use it for nesting.

We will be then entering Arroyomolinos de León municipality. There we will see many small water streams draining the area. In summer time, the colourful flowers of Oleanders will decorate those small streams. In addition, this is an ideal home to birds such the Woodchat Shrike and the Hoopoe since in the pasture and between the cattle and pigs they search for insects, their favourite food.

After fording a small water stream that flows on both sides, the path will start climbing up towards the road and the La Toba Mountain Pass. Modest smallholdings surrounded by stone fences support rich vegetable gardens and fruit trees such beautiful Orange trees together with Poplars that give shelter and shade to the cattle.

As the path goes up, the slope steepens and typical highland farmhouses and country houses follow each other. To the right and on a small hill locates the *Cortijada de Los Ejidos* farmhouse and shortly after yet on the opposite side the *Casa del Organista* country house which still keeps the traditional architecture made of rough stone.

••• Km 19. La Toba Mountain Pass and paved path towards Arroyomolinos de León

After such a steep climbing, the path gets to the top of the hill and meets a mountain road. There we will turn left and continue walking on the side of the road for just a few metres. Go across the road and continue walking onto a shortcut until the junction with the A-5300 road. From the junction the trail continues ahead and on the road.

This section of the road matches the natural mountain pass between the Sierra del Búho and the Sierra de los Gabrieles mountain ranges. This is a narrow valley where are located the Casas del Valle Hondo farms fully devoted to Iberian pig breeding. Pastures are clearly eroded because of the large number of pigs in it.

As the number of Cork Oaks increases, we will pay close attention to the road since we will soon go onto a traditional paved path that branches off left. The dry stone walls appear to be fully covered on Mediterranean bushes of both Strawberry Trees and Turpentine Trees.

The path starts descending towards Arroyomolinos de León on this last section of the stage. This is a pleasant walk along a paved path which also



Climbing down towards Arroyomolinos de León

includes sections of outcropping bedrock on the pavement. The path continues descending on the shady side of the hill and winds through different smallholdings covered by a lush forest of Cork Oaks. The size and shape of the Cork Oaks which are located along the path is such that the tops interlock above creating a green and fresh vaulted ceiling which also provides a much agreeable shade to walkers.

As the path continues ahead, a beautiful picture of Arroyomolinos de León emerges in front of us. As we approach to this highland village, the number of smallholdings with stone walls increases. After wading across the Arroyo del Manzanito Brook, the path goes across a bridge over a wider riverbed. This is the Rivera de Mari Prado Brook which waters the nearby vegetable gardens.

Eventually, the GR-48 trail gets into the streets and alleys of Arroyomolinos de León. The path continues ahead and along the narrow and picturesque Aracena Street to finally come to the junction at the road which is also the end of this stage of the route.

Water sources at Cañaverál de León



●●● A massive aquifer known as *Fuente Redonda* is located at the very heart of Cañaverál de León village. A layer of calcareous rock in the ground causes the water from the nearby massif -*Macizo de Jacaco*- to be borne. Eventually, the excess of water will spring from beneath in one of the village's main streets. Local women with water pitches used to collect from this water source until quite recently while pack animals used to drink from a water trough in *Pantano* Street. In addition, Cañaverál de León surrounding area is drained by many small water streams and springs causing many fertile ve-

getable gardens to spread over.

Finally, the excess of water is collected in a large water reservoir known as *La Laguna* which is also one of the village's symbols. From here, the water is delivered to the many gardens by means of a large network of ditches and water channels.

La Laguna, literally The Pond, has traditionally been used as a social gathering place and where locals come for breaking. In the summertime, it is also used as a swimming pool.

