

STAGE 6:**ARROYOMOLINOS DE LEÓN/CALA**

On this stage of the route, the trail will go and come across a cross-section of the mountain range known as 'Sierra de los Gabrieles, la Nava y los Castillejos'. This will be an ideal opportunity for us to wonder at the landscape polarity between the sunny and shady hillsides of the mountain range.

Perhaps the most interesting feature on this stage of the route is the human footprint. The trail will pass by some water mills located at Arroyomolinos de León surrounding areas and at the Rivera del Hierro Natural Site which is halfway to the end of this stage. We will bump into the remains of former mining sites as well as others still in use. And of course, the continually occurring traditional paved paths with stone walls that have been used for travelling from and to any site throughout this mountain range in Huelva highlands.

The trail will go through a region clearly devoted to mining works. However, in the southern section of this stage, the flowery colour of the sunny plains and hillsides of La Nava, the Llanos de Matías and the Bermejales will remind us of other uses of the land such cattle breeding. From this area, the path will continue onwards while matching a traditional wavy track known as 'Camino de los Molinos' which connects the many water mills located along the area from the Rivera de Hierro Natural Site to Cala town.

Certainly, hikers will enjoy walking along this easy stage of the route. The effort when dealing with some steep climbing will pay off at the top with the beautiful view of the so different mountainsides of this mountain range. This is an ideal trail for hiking yet it turns to be a bit hard for biking especially when climbing up to the top of the mountain range. In addition, it will be paramount to pay attention to the direction signs when approaching the Molino de la Parra area.

Start: Arroyomolinos de León

Finish: Cala

Distance: 14 km

Time: 4 hours and 30 minutes

Suitability:



*Walking and horse riding. Not suitable for biking at some sections.

Difficulty: MIDE evaluation



Environment: Severity of the natural environment.

1



Track Features: Difficulty in following the track.

1



Orientation: Guidance on the route directions.

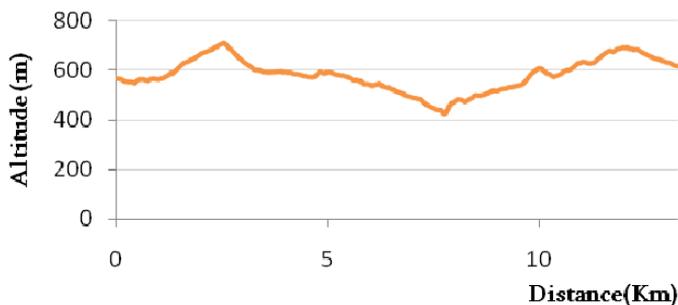
2



Struggle: Struggle required for accomplishing the route.

3

Arroyomolinos de León - Cala



ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The sixth stage of the route starts at Arroyomolinos de León, a small highland village where it is worthy to spend some time visiting the local museum devoted to the culture of water mills. The building where the museum locates is a former water mill 'de cubo'. The building and the surrounding area have recently been restored and fully equipped for interpreting the forgotten and traditional uses of water and water mills. In addition and by means of two waymarked routes which start off at the museum, visitors will have the chance to visit diverse water mills and local vegetable gardens near Arroyomolinos de León.

This stage of the route begins at the A-434 road that passes through the village from where we will come to the outside of the village and towards Cala town. Soon we will come to a junction with the A-5300 road towards Arroyomolinos de León village. At the junction there is a board of the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Natural Park which shows the head of the Sendero Sierra de los Gabrieles Path some 20 metres away. Our track will match this well marked path for about 5.8 kilometres and until it gets to the top of the Sierra de los Gabrieles mountain range. From here, we will head towards Cala town.

••• Km 0.2. Sendero Sierra de los Gabrieles Path

This section of the route starts not far away from the Rivera de los Huertos Bridge and eventually, we will move away from the road that connects to Cañaverale de León. The path bends to the left to continue ahead and parallel to a small stream that waters the Huertas de Mari Prado gardens.

To the left of this small brook and downstream we will see different family gardens and many fruit trees such as Fig trees, Pomegranates and Walnut trees which produce goods for the gardener's own family. The limy river bed presents little resistance to the stream shaping capriciously the brook.



Rivera de Mari Prado Site

Shortly after, we will get to a ford with some big concrete stones which make easier to wade across the stream. The path continues ahead and between dry stone walls while passing by some traditional houses before coming up to a junction. At the junction we will take onto the path to the left which goes downstream. A patch of Black Poplars and the remains of a former water mill can be seen from the hill.

Before we leave this site we will wade across a small brook that flows down from the Barranco de la La Fresnera ravine. Then the path continues ahead while climbing up on a former paved path which will take us to the top of the mountain range.

We will soon be entering a much humid site. This is a narrow pass where pastures of Ilex have been replaced by large specimens of Cork Oaks, Portuguese Oaks and Mediterranean shrub of Strawberry Trees and Larustinus bushes.

By the steeper sections of this paved path we will see the typical overflow channels which help to drain off any water that may produce damage on the path. The top of the hill is covered by a former Olive grove while lush Mediterranean shrub spreads over both sides of this traditional path. Large samples of Purple Phlomis bushes and Flax-Leaved Daphne plants together with Mastic Trees make a green vault over the path while refreshing the climbing.



Nava at the sunny side of the Sierra de los Gabrieles Mountain range

78

●●● **Km 2.65. Los Gabrieles Summit and the sunny hillside**

GR-48 Huelva

At the top of the hill, the path goes across a wire country fence that we must leave shut behind us. There we will be at some 700 meters altitude and a wide panoramic view of La Nava plain fields opens below us. This is a good site for breaking as nearby there is country bench where we can take a rest while trying to spot any birds of prey in the sky like the Short-Toed Snake Eagle and the Red Kite.

At this point of the stage, we will find ourselves walking on the crest of this transversal NW-SE mountain range. The differential erosion of slate rocks has given shape to the site. The landscape comprises massive slate headlands which are much easily eroded that dolomites and limestone rocks.

As the zigzag path starts climbing down, thermophile bushes become much present on the sunny hillsides. Among others, they are Steppe Rockroses, Rosemary bushes and just some scarce tree coverage of Kermes Oak trees.

Once at the lowest area of the hills, we will see a large pasture of Holm Oaks that covers up the plain fields between the hills. The path continues ahead and goes across a wooden countryside gate while approaching the *Llanos de la Nava* Farmhouse. In spring, the dominant plants of meadows like Dandelions and Blueweeds interspersed with other casual plants creating a colourful tapestry which covers the pasture.

On leaving behind and to the right the farmhouse, the path will meet

a countryside road. We will walk a little on this road and shortly after we will take on another dirt track to the left. This new track will take us through the plain fields while heading down to skirt the southern hills of the *Sierra de la Nava* mountain range.

••• **Km 3.7. Plain fields at Los Bermejales pasture**

The dirt track surface is in good conditions which facilitates an easy walking through pastures of ancient Holm Oak trees. The track will soon get to the surrounding area of *Los Bermejales* farmhouse and the *Amanecer* Country Estate. There the track will make a 90° turn to the left while starts climbing and turn gently again to the right.

The dirt track is also the border between the sunny hill and the pasture that stretches over the lower side of the mountain. We will have breathtaking views from here yet on the nearby mountains are now evident the scars left on the soil by the *Minas de Cala* Mining site.

A cluster of farmhouses known as *Casas de Barranquero* locates beneath and to the right of the track. On the opposite side, on the *Cerro de los Lobos* hill, locates the remains of *La Casa del Santo*, a former farmhouse which still keeps up some of the original rubble walls of dark stone and the ruins of a former kiln.

••• **Km 6.7. The Rivera del Hierro Valley**

The track continues ahead while winding through pastures devoted to cattle breeding. After crossing another countryside gate, the track turns to the right and towards the *Barranquero* Country Estate. At this point, we will leave the dirt track to continue walking on a less travelled path that



Local architecture features still prevail in some isolated buildings

heads directly straight forward. Shortly after, a dry stone wall indicates the point where the path branches off to the left while entering an area of lush Mediterranean undergrowth. We need to be alert to the trail signs on this section of the stage to keep on the right direction. Nevertheless, we will continue walking on the same path that now heads down the hill and between Rockroses and dry stone walls while heading down towards the river.

Finally, the trail gets to the *Rivera del Hierro* natural site. The river flows impetuously down and it is fitted into the gorge that splits the mountain range into two mountain ranges: *Sierra de la Nava* and *Sierra de los Castillejos*. At the very beginning of this stage and near Arroyomolinos de León village, the trail had run by and waded across a small brook that shapes both the *Rivera de Mari Prado* Riverside and the Huertas one. That brook has progressively increases while flowing down the mountain range and now, together with others, feeds this river at the *Rivera del Hierro* site.

The exception to the Spanish saying '*agua pasada no mueve molino*' (literally: "water that's gone past doesn't turn the waterwheel") can be found in this natural site. In the past, the headwaters at the *Rivera del Hierro* site did turn the waterwheels of the mills that were located in the Huertas surroundings. As the river flows, the same waters did turn the waterwheel of the *Molino de la Parra* Watermill which locates in this natural site and by the middle section of the river.

In the region, watermills located at the river banks are known as '*Rodezno*' Watermill. In a '*rodezno*' watermill, the water was diverted from the river to the waterwheel, along a vertical channel known as '*cubo*' which was a sort of stone made tower. The remains of this tower still can be seen here. Through the tower the water fell down vertically which in turn rotated a horizontal wheel -the '*rodezno*'- that drove the mill's other machinery. Today the former millstones can be seen by the ruins of the tower of the '*cubo*'. Our trail continues ahead and passes beneath the remains of the



Remains of the '*cubo*' at the *Molino de la Parra* Watermill

Molino de la Parra Watermill to wade across the river's stepping stones. Once on the opposite riverside, the path will soon be entering Cala municipality. Shortly after wading across the river, the path starts climbing while zigzagging along a countryside alley with a gate on the left. After the 'Z' described, the path crosses a countryside wire fencing that it must be left shut behind us to continue ahead with a dry stone wall on the left side. The path will then get to the main access of another Country Estate. Here, we will take on the path that enters the Country Estate from its main entrance and that turns right.

Some 300 meters ahead we will leave this path that heads south in a gentle turn to take on a dirt path that continues straight ahead. To the left of the path there is a dry stone wall with a former door with pillars. Some meters ahead we will see a whitish stone embedded into the dry stone wall which is facing to the southern hills of the mountain range opposite to it. This is a trail's sign which indicates that some meters ahead we should turn right and look for a difficult-to-spot dirt track which will become a path as it heads straight forwards while skirting the hillside.

••• Km 9. The climbing up to the Castillejos Mountain Range

At some point and as the walk progresses, we will spot three small Holm Oaks together. This is also where different mountain paths and tracks meet and we will continue walking on the path that branches off to the left. Another track that leads to a country estate comes closer to our track although it runs on the opposite side of a dry stone wall. We should continue walking ahead and along the left side of the dry stone wall.



The Iberian pig: an exemplary case of perfect livestock breeding

The path comes to an area of thermophile vegetation. Depending on which season we are hiking, we may get confused about the trail because of the many occasional cattle routes in the area. If that is the case, we should follow the dry stone wall direction. As the path continues ahead, we will come to another country estate main access where there is interpretation board with some information about the landscape surrounding Minas de Cala Mining Site. As

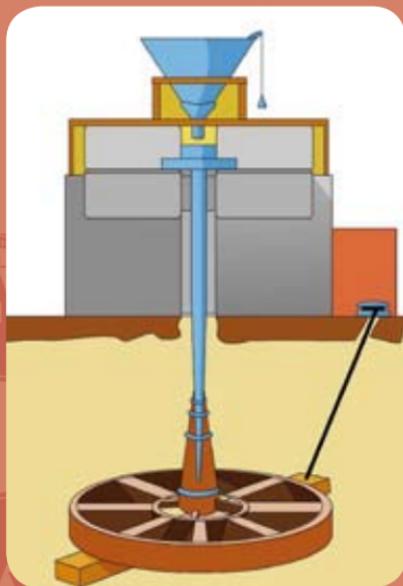
the path climbs up, we may turn around and have a better look to the opposite side of the valley where still are visible the scars left on the soil by the open-pit mine. As the path continues climbing up the ravine the Mediterranean undergrowth thickens. Along the track we will see many hiking signs on the nearby rocks which may sometimes happen together with those used for marking other short distance routes in the area. The path matches a countryside alley which is well protected by dry stone walls on both sides. At the top of the ravine, the path comes to a junction where we will take on the track to the right.

The path climbs down now through a more cleared area. A rubble wall marks the boundary of a country estate to the left of the path while the opposite one uses knotted grid fencing. We will spot some Iberian pigs wondering freely in a pasture of Holm Oaks at the Álamo Country Estate. The path continues descending the northern hillsides and meets a dirt track. We will continue walking on this dirt track and to the right. Ignoring any other paths and tracks that join the dirt track, we will continue walking straight ahead until coming to Cala's Industrial Estate. There we will bend left and walk on a countryside road that goes up to Minas de Cala Mining Site. After some 400 meters this countryside road meets the A-434 road that connects Arroyomolinos de León and Cala villages. This is the end of this stage of the route.

The 'Rodezno' Watermill

••• Former 'rodezno' watermills distribute along most riverbanks in Arroyomolinos de León municipality. They can be seen at the Huertas de Mari Prado site and on the riverbanks of the Rivera de las Huertas and at the Rivera del Hierro Site. The water from the river was diverted to a channel or ditch known as 'cavuceras' and then into a peculiar inverted conical tower or 'cubo'. The unusual shape of the tower dramatically increased the water pressure which was enough to make the 'rodezno' to spin around at the lower level of the mill.

The 'rodezno' itself was also connected to a main driveshaft or 'parahuso' which made the runner stone rotates on the 'solera' stone which was fixed to the floor. Grain was ground by means of the friction between the two rounded stones. The grain and the flour both were carried by pack animals from and to different sites in the region.



Hence, many traditional tracks and paths met and joined near those former watermills. An example of this is the traditional path that we will follow most time on this stage of the route and that connects the Molino de la Parra Watermill and Cala village.