

**STAGE 8****SANTA OLALLA DEL CALA (HUELVA)  
/REAL DE LA JARA (SEVILLA)**

This final stage of the trail will match many paths and tracks which are silent witnesses of the hard work up in the highlands. Step by step our trail will fit into a valley with an interesting history to continue ahead through pastures while passing by old farmhouses where the spirits of the highlands still prevail. The natural site known as *Rivera de Cala* is at the time the middle of this stage and the border between Seville and Huelva provinces. The trail will go through this natural site for a while and we will have a wonderful opportunity to enjoy hiking in a beautiful riparian landscape.

The trail will go through acorn-rich pastures and meadows which are also the cause of so many exquisite delicatessens at the table. Most pastures may be well protected by countryside stone walls resulting from a tiring geological life.

The direction is mainly SW-NE through a soft profile which is descending in the first half of the stage to finish with a gently climbing. This is an easy walk suitable for hiking and cycling even some sections may be hard to accomplish on the bike. The trail is well marked and hardly we will get lost. Nevertheless, we should pay attention to the direction signs especially at some points where the track changes direction.

Many are the attractive features we may come across along the trail. Perhaps the most interesting one is the peculiar geology of the area which has deeply shaped the region's history, culture, ethnography and natural world

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**Start:** Santa Olalla del Cala (Huelva)**Finish:** Real de la Jara (Seville)**Distance:** 13 km**Time:** 5 hours**Suitability:**

\*Mountain biking in some sections.

**Difficulty: MIDE evaluation****Environment:** Severity of the natural environment.

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**Track Features:** Difficulty in following the track.

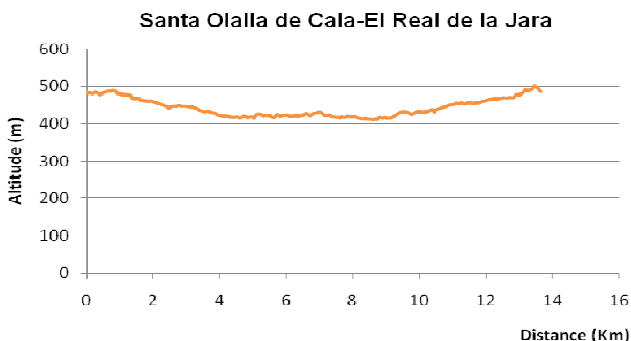
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**Orientation:** Guidance on the route directions.

2

**Struggle:** Struggle required for accomplishing the route.

2



## ROUTE GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Santa Olalla del Cala is located at the 'Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Arache' region. This small highland town is set in a strategic crossing point between Extremadura and Andalucía territories as well as between Huelva and Seville provinces.

In addition, this small town is fully located in the 'Ruta de la Plata' Route. This traditional cattle route facilitated an impressive growth of the town in the past because of the constant transit of goods and especially minerals from the nearby mining sites.

Santa Olalla del Cala Castle clearly tells us about the culture in a border region. From a time before the Romans Empire and especially throughout the Middle Ages, most pastures in the region witnessed many battles and fights. The Spanish word for pasture is 'dehesa'. Apparently the term comes from the word 'defensa' (defence) since forests were cleared in order to elude any undesirable ambushes from the enemy.

This last stage of the GR-48 Trail starts off at the stone bridge located out-



Plaza de la Constitución Square at Santa Olalla del Cala village

side the village and at the *Almadén de la Plata* Road (HU-9116 road). We will get to the bridge from *Almadén* Street which branches off from the *Ruta de la Plata* Road (N-630 road). This road is the southern access to the village and it is opposite to a factory of Iberian ham and sausages.

The trail moves away from the village and follows up the road which soon will be surrounded by the nearby large pastures of Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks. One easily imagines the close relation established between the town and some exceptional natural sites which from centuries have provided for the pantries in the region and other areas. A good example is the Iberian pig farm to the left of the road and near the *Casa de Silva* farmhouse.



Extensive livestock farming is very common in the region

The trail goes beneath the motorway known as *Autovía Ruta de la Plata* (A-66/E-803 motorway) and continues ahead until a roundabout where we will chose the *Almadén de la Plata* direction. Some 100 meters after a dirt path branches off from the left. Remove any trace of tar from your boots and forget about the bustle of the urban area before start walking on this new dirt path.

### ••• Km 0.8. Beginning of the Camino de Almadén Path and the Valle del Muchacho Valley

The dirt path is a traditional path known as '*Camino de Almadén*'. The path climbs down and between dry stone walls which are silent witnesses of the many comings and goings of thousands walkers. The dry stone walls stand up solemnly, taking pride in the highland hands for they were built. These walls constitute a particular habitat for many insects, reptiles, small birds and small mammals. They appear to be a scale representation of those massive rocky outcrops up in the highlands which are home to bigger animals.

Pastures of Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks will be our companion until we get to the *Valle del Muchacho Valley*. Apparently, the name of the valley comes from a terrible incident happening in the area time ago. According to the legend, in times of wolves a young man was on his way back to the village after being working all day up in the mountain. The young man and his donkey were travelling on this same path when a herd of wolves stalked and then attacked them, giving death first to the man's donkey and killing the young man after. We might say that the irreproachable wild instinct of the animals gave name to this beautiful natural site.



Rocks outcropping at the pastures in the *Valle del Muchacho Valley*

The trail continues ahead and goes across a country fence while passing by and to the right a countryside house with the name of the valley inscribed on the front. The trail continues descending and matches a dirt path that winds under Holm Oaks. We will leave behind and to the left a small farmyard with a nice well curb. The path continues parallel to a seasonal brook known as *Barranco Marín Brook* which left bank is flanked by the dry stone wall of the farmyard that we have just left behind.



Sheep herds grazing in the pasture

As the walk progresses, it will be interesting to take a look at the landscape on both sides of the track. The path itself appears to be the division line between two slightly different pastures. To the right side trees grow on a clean surface without stones whereas to the left the bulky trunks wrench in order to avoid great rocks. Those big rocks are tonalites which shape to the granite landscape and reveal the presence ahead of a massive rock outcropping known as *Plutón de Santa Olalla del Cala*. This is a geological structure formed by the solidification of the magma rocks that emerge from the bottom of the earth.

Perhaps those deep hollows created by the stone formations were the above mentioned Wolves' lairs. At present time Wolves are not longer living in the area. However, this is home to Foxes, Badgers, Mongoose, Genets and Garden Dormice; all they discreetly do their things with a great effort while looking for food in the nearby pastures.

The trail continues parallel to the brook and gets to another country fencing that must remain closed behind us preventing sheep and cattle from going into the riverbed and out of the Country Estate. At this point, the path turns into a most irregular surface due to water erosion. Some 150 meters after crossing the fencing, the stone wall which has all time been parallel to the brook makes a 90° turn yet we will carry on walking on the path which will take us to the left side of the brook. Pastures on this area appear to be regenerating the vegetation. There are many Ilex undergrowth and bushes known as 'chirpiales'. In fact, they are young Holm Oaks sprouting out from the roots of other mature specimens. The Mediterranean undergrowth on the pasture comprises Rockroses, Purple Phlomis and White Spanish Brooms all them away from the cattle cutting or lopping their lower branches.

The trail will wade across the brook again to get to the riverbank on the right. From there the trail turns into a dirt path and passes by a group of



White Rockroses are the ideal food for some species of insects, reptiles and birds

burnt trees to the left and a Country Estate gate to the right. After wading across another seasonal brook which is also tributary to the previous one, the trail will continue ahead this time on the left side while moving directly away from the brook and gently downhill.

We will continue along this new path that will pass by a small artificial pond where both farm and wild animals come to drink. This element reveals the characteristic seasonal variation of the Mediterranean climate. In autumn and winter time, brooks and other small water streams water in the pond banks. However, water flow reduces almost completely by the end of the spring time to finally impose a most aggressive thirst during the long summer.

As the walk progresses, we will leave to the South the Monte de los Cabezos Hill with its hillsides covered of great Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks shading and where still some vegetation regeneration can be perceived.

### ••• Km 3.3. Country Estate gate by the farmyard at El Berrocal Natural Site

The trail gets at another Country Estate gate located by an old country house and a farmyard. After crossing the gate and to the right, we will have an open pasture landscape which horizon is totally made of sharp angular rocks resembling a knives collection.



Stork

Some round shaped rocks are now spattering the pasture land and cropping out between the Oak trees. Those peculiar rocks are called 'berruecos'. Natural sites like this with this type of rock formations are known as 'berrocales', herein the name of the site. Berrocales are the result of the natural decomposition of the rock. The homogeneous composition of the

rock tends to transform into spherical shape as the rock itself erodes.

Continue on the same trail avoiding another path than branches off from the right and that will get to another artificial pond. The path surface will soon become a former stone pavement. The path makes its way along a pasture land of slightly thicker vegetation with many artificial ponds located by the track. The many metallic troughs scattering the place are a clear sign of bovine cattle in the area. Our walk pace will undoubtedly be determined by the sound of the animals' bells.

From this point forward, we must pay attention to the direction signs as the trail will branch off right at the artificial pond with a water tank and a small building nearby. In here, we will take on a new path that heads east while coming into flat woodland.

Without leaving the track, we will reach up to an area from where just in front of us and under the tops of the Oaks, we will be able to have a glimpse to the Rivera de Cala staggering vegetation. Next we will turn right until we get to two Country Estate gates. We will go across the one that take us by an old watermill on the river shore. This appears to be a beautiful place for breaking.

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### ••• Km 4.5. Rivera de Cala Natural Site

We can imagine how important this old watermill was in other times just looking at the remains of it. Today, this magnificent building appears to collapse in front of us. However, it is easy to believe that many families were fed in the past thanks to the force of the river waters. The lush vegetation at the healthy riverbanks will change their features according to seasons yet walkers will be always delighted by a rich riverside vegetation comprising Tamujos, Oleanders, Rushes, Brambles,



The remains of a former watermill near the Rivera de Cala Natural Site

White Hawthorns, Ash-Trees and some Black Poplars which appear to be stretching up to touch the sky.

We will continue walking upstream and on the left side of this linear ecosystem. Now the path becomes more irregular and harder to follow on mountain bike. If we were riding a bike, we should now get down of it



Collecting wild Mushrooms in the Rivera de Cala Natural Site is a quite common activity

and carry on walking on this section of the track. It will keep our attention the amazing irregular shape of many stones which are in the river and the riverbanks alternating with the riparian vegetation.

We will pass by the 'cao', the channel that provided water to the watermill that we have left behind, to get to an area where the river widens and where is the mill pond from where water was diverted to the channel and then to the watermill.

In the warmer season, we may take a break and refresh ourselves at the river shores. Surrounded by this fairy riparian vegetation and river forest, we will get enough energy to negotiate the second half of the route.

We will continue walking upstream and, after passing by a picnic area we will meet a small waterfall. At this point, we will turn to the left to keep walking on the edge of the road until we get to the bridge of the former road that connects Santa Olalla del Cala and El Real de la Jara villages.

We will have a breathtaking view of the river riverbanks from the bridge. The gradient of dampness marked by the river can be easily identified by bands of vegetation which occupy different areas by the river according to their irrigation needs. So we will see Tamujos, Oleanders and Black





Scarce riparian vegetation is soon replaced by Mediterranean undergrowth

poplars by the riverbed while Oaks which are more resistant to dryness locate a few metres away from the water.

This type of ecosystem is so far a life generator in areas supporting the roughness of the Mediterranean climate. They work as green corridors where animals get shelter, food and find easy to move on their way to the highlands.

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### ••• Km 7. Rivera de Cala Bridge (former road)

This point of the route is at the time the border between Huelva and Seville provinces but also the geographical limit between the Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Natural Park in Huelva province and the Sierra Norte de Sevilla Natural Park in Seville province.

On having crossed over the bridge, we will bend to the left to continue walking upstream and along the Rivera de Cala riverbank. Bee-Eaters benefit from the irregular shape of the riverbanks. They build their nests in burrows tunneled into the side of sandy banks, such as those that have collapsed on the edges of rivers after the river flooding. These migrant birds spend their breeding period in this region yet they will fly back with their offspring to the southern winter quarters.

The trail continues ahead and by the river shore which now gently bends to the right. Dry stone walls are the borders of some Country Estates fully devoted to rainfed farming and livestock breeding in open pastures which end at the river and sustaining the right of way passes into the river. Tamujos bushing together with some scarce White Poplars at the river shores are the most significant natural element of a former gallery forest that no longer exists by this river.

The trail continues ahead and on the same riverside until it follows the same direction as the Arroyo de la Víbora Brook. Step by step, we will leave behind and to the left the impressive Rivera de Cala Natural Site and in the background the staggering view of Aguablanca mining pitch.

This section of the stage is the border between Andalucía and Extremadura regions. This border does not affect to the wild animals' behaviour. The region is home to many animal species such Herons and Storks that come to feed themselves at the meadows by the river which are also home to Frogs and Toads.

The path will wade across the river at the *Cortijo de Rufinito* farmhouse to continue ahead and in the same direction but on the opposite shore. The round-shaped stepping stones in the river will help us to reach the other riverbank though.

After some 500 metres, the path moves away from the river bank to continue on a countryside road that branches off to the right and that will lead us towards *El Real de la Jara* village. The trail then matches a section of the *Camino de Aguablanca* path which slightly climbs up until the outside of the village. From this point we will see some buildings at *La Encina Industrial Estate* as well as the first houses at *Murillo Street*. This will be the end of this last stage and therefore of the GR-48 Trail.



The Little Owl is a common bird at these pastures |

## The peculiar geology of the region. The Geological context and its meaning



••• Everything around us is influenced and determined by many other factors. Perhaps Geology and Climate are the most relevant. Geology has a great effect not only on landscape and the natural world but also on the economy dynamics and culture of a region.

This region is in the zone known as Hesperic Massif. Rocks and landscape profile were formed in a compression process known as Variscan Orogeny occurring some 350 million years ago.

resulting from the crystallization and solidification of molten magma (melted rocks and gas from inside the earth). An example of this is the *Plutón de Santa Olalla*.

Tonalite rocks in the area were formed in the Carboniferous Period some 300 million years ago when ferns first grew and reptiles were occupying the planet.

Tonalite rocks are granite rocks which went through a specific process of cooling and crystallization. Because of a high concentration of silicate, these rocks are classified as acid rocks and this acid composition also determines which type of plants will grow up in the area.

In this region we will find very old rocks formed in the Precambrian Period and igneous rocks



Rocks substrate determines the type of vegetation growing in a region