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RIOMALO. WALKING LAS HURDES

**ROUTE 3: PORTILLO DE LAS BATUECAS -
PORTILLA BEJARANA - ARROYO DEL CABRIL
- RIOMALO DE ABAJO**

*Route 3
Type: Linear
Distance 15,6 km.
Difficulty: High
Time: All year round*





NOTE 1: If you want to do this route and you stay at our CTR or you use our service of dining room, we will bring you to the Portillo in order that you collect your vehicle without any cost.

NOTE2: The routes proposed by CTR Riomalo are ready for expert hikers, cyclists and canoeists. CTR Riomalo is not responsible for the lack of experience of travelers or if the climatic conditions complicate their difficulty. The routes are all public and if there is any restrictions in specific seasons, they are specified in the own itineraries. Hikers should take into account all the indications made in the routes, as well as be extremely careful in complicated areas and, of course, respect the natural and historical heritage of the area.

NOTE 3: This booklet is a property of Riomalo CTR and the producer, Esther de Aragón, so much in design, as in text and graphic content. Wildlife photos belong to the professional photographer David Santiago (www.davidsantiago-foto.com).



INTRODUCTION



We have always said that Riomalo de Abajo is a gateway to the region of Las Hurdes, but its proximity to the Natural Park of the Batuecas - Sierra de Francia becomes the "alquería" on an interesting point of departure or arrival to make routes, through Las Hurdes or the neighboring park.

This time, our journey ends in Riomalo de Abajo, but it begins in a high area, as it is the Puerto del Portillo, known as Portillo of the Batuecas. The route almost touch the roof of the area, climbing up to 1291 meters of the very beautiful Portilla Bejarana and surrounding some of the highest peaks, such as Orconera or Halconera, both of 1,415 meters high and contiguous.

From the Portilla Bejarana, the route begins a continuous and long descent to Riomalo de Abajo. The first section goes down about 900 meters from the Portilla to Herguijuela de la Sierra. Then, surrounding the peaks

of the Sierra del Castillo, the itinerary reaches the river Alagón and the Ladriillar and it ends at Riomalo CTR.

Few routes like this offer as wide horizons, infinite, over kilometers and kilometers of natural environment. Nothing will escape the eye of the traveler: Las Hurdes, Sierra de Béjar, Las Batuecas, La Sierra del Castillo. From the Risco de los Altares, when transposing the Portilla Bejarana, the traveler will mute by the immensity of the landscape, by the imposing nature and by the tiny thing that seems self in an environment so incomprehensible. The rocks, cliffs, help promote all those feelings, especially if we approach the Torrita, the curious rock formation in the image above.

The protection that has the territory remind us the importance of being respectful, while the weather will be a factor to consider when making the journey, because can be snowy or frozen.

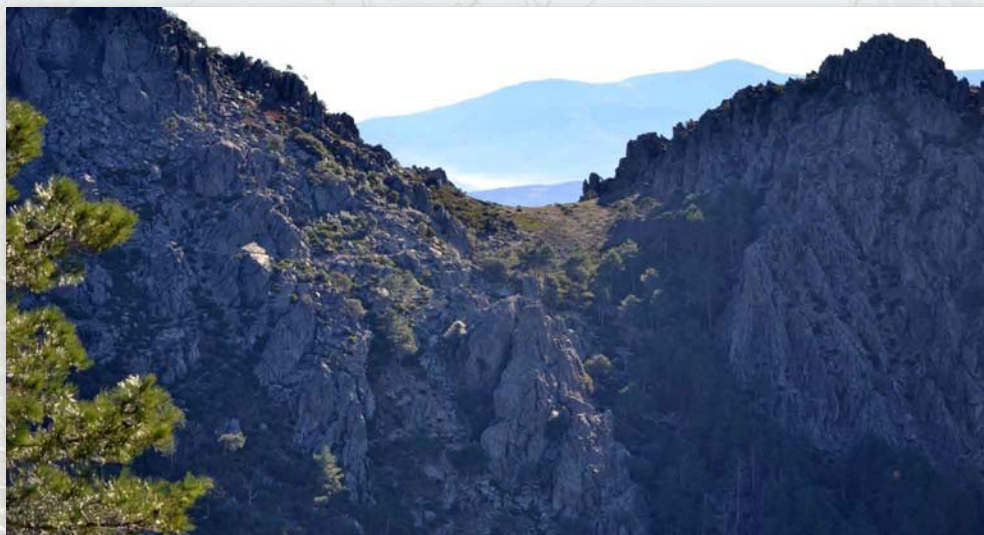
THE ITINERARY

The route begins at the Portillo de las Batuecas, to 1251 meters of altitude (1). Accessible from the parking, the small path overlooks the breathtaking panorama of Batuecas, a succession of deep valleys and mountains in distance That make us remember the fantasy that about the zone got up from the epoch of Lope de Vega, to which we will refer later. Everything seems possible from the path that runs along the first stretch of the route, as the landscape invites you to imagine what it hides, including the monastery itself and its chapels.

Gradually the path leaves the pines behind while it is going towards the Risco de los Altares. It comes near the peaks and Orconera and Halconera in its way to Portilla Bejarana, a very beautiful point of the route, as shown in the photo below. La Portilla gives way to the other slope (Point 5). Behind us, there will stay the mysterious Batuecas and the Peña de Francia, the landscape will open towards the Sierra de Béjar, the immense pit of the Alagón and Las



Hurdes. The Risco de los Altares, as it is called to the set of rocky scree that appears on the southern face, is home to vultures, so it is not strange to see them when the route goes in the direc-



tion of Torrita. Moreover, we must remember that the rocks near the Portilla hide some prehistoric paintings in the smooth walls of some of the caves of the cliffs, to which we will refer later.

The path to Torrita is complicated, because the way is not well defined, due to the vegetation and rocks make it imprecise in some sections. Any case, some monoliths mark where to continue and the path hardly changes the contour. The direction is the base of the crags.

The Torrita is a curious and spectacular rock formation. It is worth you get there, enjoy the cliffs, calmly observe the horizon and birds, and return to the previous point to start the descent to the track that it will approach to what is known as the "calzada" (point 12), a traditional way, sometimes paved, that

shortens the approximation to Herguijuela. On the way, we will see a broad representation of the vegetation of the park: oak, cork oak, rock heather, arbutus, lavender ... and the magnificent natural expression. Before arriving in Herguijuela, the path indicates two points of interest: the Beech of Herguijuela, ancient, the most southern beech of Europe (p. 16), and the remains of the Molino de la Dehesa (p. 19), next to the Camino of the Canales, one of the many mills of this type that had the area; the Cadastre of the Marqués de la Ensenada had already referred to this mill, in the mid-eighteenth.

The descent offers beautiful views of Herguijuela de la Sierra, With the tower of his church, of the 15th century, standing out of the set.





This stretch is common, in the opposite direction, with the first part of our second route. The landscape of the Valle del Cabril extends in depth, while the path runs under the cliffs of the Sierra del Castillo. Gradually it will approach the Fuente el Águila, a beautiful corner with a spring of clean water and a small reservoir (p. 27).



A little further down, the path indicates the access to the remains of the monastery of Belén (p.21), in the valley of the same name, if the traveler wants to go to this remote place.

THE LAST SECTION

The final of the route will surround the Sierra del Castillo, will go towards Fuente el Águila and will go down to the Alagón and the Ladrillar to finish in Las Hurdes, in Riomalo de Abajo.



The path narrows further between branches before an olive grove. Later, Cabaloria will appear, the depopulated village that lies next to the Alagón, in Salamanca. This is the river that twists into meanders toward the Melero. Then the route reaches the road and ends in Riomalo CTR.



ALQUERÍAS

Although from Portilla Bejarana we will see a lot of villages, our route will be close to three. The first one is Herguijuela de la Sierra, a village of traditional highland houses, of granite, with an interesting church of the fifteenth century, a former pilgrim hospital and the hermitage of the Humilladero. Threshing floors, farmhouses and remains of mills and channels added an even more traditional flavour to the place.

The other villages are “alquerías” of slate and quartzite, as Cabaloria, visible before reaching the final road. It is an abandoned alquería, located in the Sotoserrano term, from Salamanca, which owes its origins, according to some researchers, to the presence of gold and exploitation in Roman times. It was abandoned following the construction of the reservoir of Gabriel y Galán, in 1965, although it has never been flooded. Its southern orientation has always facilitated the exploitation of olive and fruit and honey.

In what refers to Riomalo de Abajo, it is located next to the confluence of the

Ladrillar and Alagón rivers. The beautiful meanders of the latter, boundary between Salamanca and Cáceres, and the natural solitude of the lands to the south, where the Sierra del Cordón rises, make Riomalo one of the most used destinations by travelers to explore the region, besides being a place from which to reach the reservoir of Gabriel y Galán on boat or canoe, even to swim in the natural pool of the Ladrillar river or to venture on foot along the southern foothills of the Natural Park of Las Batuecas, such as our path has made. No less interesting for fans is the possibility of picking mushrooms or watching and hearing the roaring of the deer in the appropriate season.



Its people retains some interesting features of traditional architecture and the Riomalo Rural Tourism Center, comprising a hostel, a camping, a set of stone and wood bungalows and a restaurant with a renowned cuisine, both creative and traditional, based on traditional products. This way, dishes as well known as the kid goat, grilled or roasted, seasonal mushrooms and desserts of honey, chestnut and so on.



THE NATURE

Our route runs through the lands of the Natural Park of Las Batuecas - Peña de Francia. The park was established in 2000 by the Junta de Castilla and León, although there were some protected zones previously. Its land area extends over 15 municipalities, with a



maximum elevation in the Peña de Francia, with 1735 meters. One of the most attractive features of the park is the existence of deep valleys between its mountains, favoring a variety of climate between the northern and southern slopes. This has leads to a vegetation of Atlantic influence, in the North, and Mediterranean in the South, through which our route circulates. From the broom of the higher areas to the fruit of the lowest,

the biodiversity of the protected area is impressive.

The park has a composition of metamorphic rocks in the central and western area, especially quartzite and slate, arranged on a granite plinth of blocks caused by a system of faults, which makes deep valleys, by the collapse of the blocks, and the spectacular rock formations that appear on the peaks of the mountains.

The park has some exceptional species, as golden eagle, vulture, black and griffon, egyptian vulture, owl, hawk and black stork. Besides amphibians and reptiles, some of them endemic, it is worthy of mention the



presence of some mammals, like the wild goat, the otter and the Iberian muskrat, which you can read some information on the site of Fuente Mundo.

Our route, meanwhile, has two slopes and therefore two types of vegetation: one of Atlantic influence in the North face, with some yews, holly trees, even the beech of Herguijuela; the opposite face is warmer and has a typical vegetation of the Mediterranean influence, with oaks, some of them very beautiful specimens, and pines in some stretches. You can also see arbutus, junipers, durum, lavender, heather and rock rose, ferns in the undergrowth and twigs along the banks of streams. Many flowers decorate the route, especially in spring, and some fruits, as arbutus and olive. Of course, it is not difficult to find mushrooms in autumn among the pine.



The Sierra del Castillo is a bird nesting point in its upper area, as we said already. Between February 15 and August 1 it is prohibited to walk there. Any case, there are informational signs and barriers. Our journey does not touch the sensitive area, but we must not forget we should not disturb the wildlife anywhere.

NOTE: Remember, traveler, you are in a region of high natural sensitivity. Your step ought to be careful, in order to preserve the physical space and biodiversity. Then you can come back and look for places where you feel part of nature and at peace with that surrounds you.



FANTASY AND HISTORY OF LAS BATUECAS Y LAS HURDES

The histories that surround the place do not seem to be any more than an impossible story. The truth is that the topography of the area caused that both regions were almost isolated until the last century. And it all started when Lope de Vega spent a few days in the land of the Duke of Alba, in Alba de Tormes, and wanted to arrive in Granadilla through Batuecas, which seemed a great adventure and an equally great risk. Then the distinguished writer created "Las Batuecas del Duque de Alba"; The plot of the novel develops concerning a couple in love who hide in the area fleeing of the Duque. There are a tribe of people who live outside the influence of the state and the religion.

Then everything is complicated. The existence of a race of strange beings remained until not very distant times. At the time of Lope de Vega, in the early seventeenth, it also happened

that the Church decided to Christianize the valley and created a monastery in a deep zone of Las Batuecas. It was a Carmelite, Alonso of the Mother of God, in charge of building the monastery. The hermit life of the monks attained great fame, but was unable to remove the fable of Las Batuecas. The solitude of the region, its isolation, expandable to Las Hurdes, made to keep insulation in both areas beyond the visit of Alfonso XIII, in 1923. The myths, the legends that generated the isolation of these regions, however, have allowed the maintenance of a natural paradise, in fact, the "Paradise" has been often located in Las Batuecas.

THE TRUTH

These lines pretend to be a brief introduction of the booklet of Las Hurdes, that can be found on the web, to un-

derstand how we think about all this, perfectly expandable to Las Batuecas:

"When we heard for the first time about Las Hurdes and looked for some news about the region, we knew a multitude of opinions on a land without land, they say, about the centennial isolation and black legend that many travelers had helped to create; however, we also find some writers who gave a different view of ethnography and nature of Las Hurdes. The history, the views of other times and the today look, brought us to Las Hurdes, to verify the accuracy of the documentation collected. No one can understand the surprise and the feelings that caused us Las Hurdes, its extraordinary beauty, its magnificent natural environment, the sad past and the happy present of their "alquerías" ... At times we remained silent and felt like eagles, watching from above the infinite horizon and the closed valleys".

So are the regions of our route,

although history also left other witnesses: the paintings of the Risco de los Altares, that we talked about before, of the Bronze and Iron Ages, between the second and first millennium BC, or the petroglyphs.

The hurdana region was not really populated until the twelfth century, at the time of the Reconquista, when the kingdom of León decided to establish the repopulation with shepherds. Their first buildings were sheepfolds, since the creation of housing focused mainly to the use of cattle. Those constructions later formed the "alquerías", the name by which the people of Las Hurdes know their villages today.

And so the two regions were forgotten for the rest of the world, until the twentieth century, when some people began to arrive to see the isolation of the region and they spread it all over the world, but that's another story...

