

1. ALCAUDETE – BAENA (25km/ 6 hr)

Through olive groves

The pilgrim may have spent the night at the the Alcaudete municipal sports centre. To do this, book ahead with Alcaudete [Local Council](#).

Leave the town from the roundabout at the Hospital, continuing towards Cordoba along the old layout of the N-432. After a short while turn left along the Camino del Cortijo de la Vega, a path which is now tarmacked. It's worth stopping to turn and view the silhouette of Alcaudete Castle, strategically located at the Jaen-Granada crossroads, its whitewashed village spread out on the hillside below. Just over 1 km along the path, cross beneath the new road layout, and 2 kms after that, turn off the tarmac onto a path that takes you through olive groves and passes a field of solar panels on the right as you walk next to the fence. Be specially careful with this turn-off because it can often be washed away by rain.

This path leads to the ruins of two cottages, Tejera Baja and Tejera Alta, affording views of the village of Luque, which nestles on the distant hillside. Do keep straight here because the olive grove has taken over the path. After a bit, turn hard right. This perpendicular direction first takes us across a stream and then ascends, leading to a farmhouse close to the highway. Join the road to cross the Salado and San Juan rivers, which flow together at this point to form the Guadajoz, boundary between Jaen and Cordoba provinces, and a major feature for our next two days.

At a bend in the old road layout, the path starts to ascend. Pass a barn and continue through the ever-permanent olive grove, turning right at the hopper. This takes you to a lagoon called Laguna del Salobral or Laguna del Conde, a favoured winter resort for large numbers of waterbirds. Cross the old railway line, once known as the "the Olive Oil Train" (Tren del Aceite), now used as a Ramblers'Path (Vía Verde), and descend at once to a stream, to emerge again onto a narrow road. Stay on it for several metres.

Go off the road at the large farmstead, turning left onto a path bordered by olives and the occasional patch of holm oaks. It's worth stopping in to see the collection of animals- especially peacocks- at a house on the right called el Barranco, 1km after the turn-off.

The friendly owners allow pilgrims to top up their water supplies. Cross another road and keep straight, this time sticking to a track between fields of olive trees until you come to a big olive-mill. Join the new layout of the N-432 road further ahead, and you'll pass the olive oil cooperative "Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe" on your way into the town.

Luminous Baena has lain sprawling in the midst of the Cordoba's rolling lands (Campiña Alta) since antiquity. Records dating from 1555 show that near the shrine to la Virgen de la Estrella, a hospice of the Order of Charity once offered shelter to pilgrims and

travellers, and even possessed a humble canvas painted by two nameless pilgrims – a crucified Christ dated June 1668, entitled Santo Cristo de Santiago de la Palma del Valle de Tembleque. Don't fail to take a stroll through the windings of the Almedina quarter to admire the remains of the Muslim fortress, the Renaissance churches (Santa Maria la Mayor, Convento de las Dominicas) and other, non-religious, buildings.

If you visit during Holy Week -Baena's big festival- you'll experience the deafening beat of **coliblanco**s and **colinegro**s, as rival white-plumed and black-plumed religious fraternities tirelessly drum their way through the town's streets and squares.

2. BAENA- CASTRO DEL RÍO (18 km / 4½hr)

By the banks of the Guadajoz

Admittedly a short route for the pilgrim, but probably advisable as the distance to the capital (54 kms) could be excessive for one day's walk. Another recommendation: before setting out, breakfast on toast trickled with Baena's superb cold-pressed olive oil, emblem of the town, which gives its name to the oil's Denominación de Origen (PDO).

Set out on the road to Cañete de las Torres towards River Guadajoz. Once past the olive oil cooperative Jesús Nazareno, ignore a small road that forks right to Fuentidueña, and pass instead beneath the new section of the N-432, ignoring another right fork that goes to las Ermiticas. A little later turn right onto a path between gentle slopes of the ever-present olive groves. Return to the road and later cross the Guadajoz by the La Maturra bridge.

Turn left onto a narrow road used mainly by farmers. There unfolds a succession of grain fields, pasture, and some eucalyptus groves. The river twists and turns, coming close then receding, while dotted amongst the meanders stand whitewashed cottages – Izcar is an example – reminders of days gone by when these fields were tended by countless gangs of farmhands, long since replaced by machinery.

Keeping to the road while flanked on both sides by fertile farmland, you arrive in [Castro del Río](#). The town reposes serenely on banks of the Guadajoz. The ancient walls of its la Villa quarter, legacy of Roman and then Muslim occupations, bear testimony to the town's singular strategic position. Churches worth visiting: 15th century Iglesia de la Asunción with its fortified tower, as well as Iglesia de Madre de Dios and Iglesia de Jesús Nazareno.

3. CASTRO DEL RÍO - CÓRDOBA (DIRECT) (36 km / 9 hr)

An ocean of grain

This leg of the journey starts by the Civil Guard barracks and the path known as Camino de la Polonia and Camino de Cordoba. The olive tree may have figured prominently up till now but from here on the main feature will be vast fields of grain and sunflowers. The path rises and falls continuously during the day's walk through this great sweep of rolling land named Campiña Baja.

The road rises sharply amid olive groves and veers left to emerge onto the Bujalance road. At a crossroads 5½ km from the starting point, we take the left fork, a narrower path marked Cordoba. Carry on along this road – at times along the old road– rejoining River Guadajoz at the Cortijo de Cubas farmhouse. Awaiting further ahead on the left is the spectacular silhouette of Espejo and its castle. Stay on this right bank until you reach Castillejo de Teba farmhouse, near the hill Colina de Ategua, which is topped by the ruins of the historic Roman town Ategua.

Cross the narrow road, and a few metres later cross a track, until you come to a little bridge over the stream **arroyo Fontalba** and the remains of a Roman road, reminders that this was once the Campiña road connecting Cordoba with Jaen and Granada.

Ignoring paths that appear on both right and left, keep straight on, and continue to keep straight on at the junction where a narrow road which forks left for the village of Santa Cruz, some 6 kms off. A bridge of similar construction, though obscured by reeds, stands in the Trinitades stream. The path, sometimes flat and sometimes rolling, is flanked by fields of grain and sunflowers.

With just a few kilometres to go, [Cordoba](#) comes into view, stretched out in the foothills of Sierra Morena. In these first city streets, look out for the tiled signposts bearing the scallop shell and yellow arrow, which guide pilgrims towards the Guadalquivir, across the Roman Bridge and from there to the [Mosque](#), veritable jewel of Muslim art in Spain. Let the the Jacobean Way signposting guide you through San Francisco and San Pedro, a couple of of Cordoba's most emblematic quarters, and you'll come to the Church of Santiago, where the parish priest keeps a pilgrims' register and will stamp your Pilgrim's Passport. A swift sightseeing tour next morning will allow you to set out after lunch for Cerro Muriano, some 18 km away.

3A.CASTRO DEL RÍO - SANTA CRUZ (22 km / 4½ hr)

Rolling land and fortresses

Depart Castro del Río from the Guardia Civil barracks. As you leave behind the barracks and the petrol station, you're on a minor straight road.

Before long, you hit the regional road. For Bujalance you would veer right. Go left - and be careful whilst walking along the roadside. Not long after you cross the river

Guadajoz, a path named **Camino del Molino** appears on your right. After a steady 3½ km climb you come to a narrow road.

Turn left onto this road, and after some 4 km you'll reach the town of Espejo. Now you have a choice to make: enter this pretty, whitewashed, hill-town crowned by a splendid medieval castle; or skirt the town, keeping it on your left as you head towards the grain storage tower and take a path down to the stream **arroyo Pontanilla**, where there is a small Roman bridge and remains of a Roman road.

The road forks at Casilla de los Pavones, some 4 km ahead. Go left, crossing this secondary road beneath a power line. Continue straight for 2km and, with the **Guadajoz** now in sight, pass a well called **las Harinillas** on your left. Turn left onto another path and head towards the N-432, where you emerge near the farmstead **Cortijo del Alcaparro**.

Use caution as you walk along the roadside to get to the river. Just after crossing it, a path appears on the right. About 1 km later you find yourself walking down calle Espejo in the hamlet of Santa Cruz (a ward of Córdoba city).

3B. SANTA CRUZ -CORDOBA (24 km / 6hr)

Fields of grain

Set off from Santa Cruz at the cemetery, and walk the narrow CP-113 which runs through fields, over sloping olive groves and past farm buildings (los Valdepeñas) and further on, alongside the stream **Arroyo del Jaco** on your right.

After almost 6km you come to a path that crosses the tarmacked road from left to right. At this point the section you've just walked joins the Castro del Río path coming from the right towards Cordoba. Join the path and continue to your left, heading west.

After 1½ km, a Roman bridge to our right stands semi-obsured by reeds in the stream arroyo **de Trinidades**. The path, sometimes flat and sometimes rolling, is flanked by fields of grain and sunflowers.

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4. CORDOBA – CERRO MURIANO (16km / 4 hr)

The hills of Cordoba

Set off from the Iglesia de Santiago. Be guided by the Jacobean Way signpost ceramic tiles (scallop and yellow arrow) to the end of the city limits, through the quarters of **la Magdalena, San Lorenzo** and **Los Trinitarios** (former Puerta de Plasencia). Follow the 11-12th century Muslim **city wall** (Ronda del Marrubial) for a few metres, turn right into **Calle Sagunto**, and then into **calle Cinco Caballeros** (next to Clinic Los Angeles de la Noche and the church of San Juan de Avila). When you reach the thoroughfare Carlos III, notice the first of a series of granite milestones marking the route to Cerro Muriano. Cross **Avenida Carlos III** and continue down the wide **Avenida Blas Infante** (Fatima quarter), past the sports facilities and beneath the high-speed train track, until you reach the much restored **Roman bridge** over the creek **arroyo de Pedroches**. **Cross the bridge**, leaving the ruins of the old mill **Molino de los Ciegos** on the left, and following a path on the right. When you hit the tarmac again, use the underpass to get across the link road for the N-432 (last tile signpost). The high-speed rail track is on your right. By leaving this narrow tarmacked track when it curves right a little further on, you take a path that opens up on the left next to an electricity pylon and cross the **Canal del Guadalmellato**. Head towards a piece of waste ground enclosed by a wall. Passing this bricked site on the right, carry on straight uphill. When the terrain levels out at the top of the rise, look back to see a view of Cordoba town and, beyond it, the rolling Campiña, yesterday's walk. Ahead lies the Sierra, to be tackled on today's leg. All the little paths lead to a dirt track, which you join, turning left. Follow the track and pass beneath a conveyer belt used for transporting stone from a nearby quarry. The N-432 is on your left. Turning right, walk through pines and eucalyptus. From here to Cerro Muriano you will be using the medieval drover's road called **Cañada Real Soriana**, successor of the Roman **Corduba-Emerita Road**, signposted nowadays not only Mozarabic Trail but also GR-40.

This track opens onto a narrow road and travels through several housing developments before coming to the shrine of Nuestra Señora de Linares. A landscape of Mediterranean scrub and oak leaves the houses behind and then it's a gentle but continuous rise to the **Santuario de Linares** (where they'll stamp your Pilgrim's Passport), with its graceful medieval watchtower and, further ahead, a small single-arch **Roman bridge**. From here follow the steep incline up **Loma de los Escalones**, which has observable vestiges of the **Roman road** carved out of the limestone.

Moving swiftly through the excavated quarry site, you gain the old road layout of the N-432, used now as the turnoff into Cerro Muriano village. A few metres down the right shoulder, take an uphill path and cross the old railway line at the signalbox. Shortly before crowning the last summit offering a view of Cordoba, there is a **plaque** erected by **the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Córdoba** in memory of their former Chairman **D. Vicente Mora Benavente**.

The way leads through pine and thicket and over the railway tunnel. Going back to the road, stay on the right shoulder for a few yards. When you see a signpost indicating the **Camino de Santiago**, continue until you see a sharp bend right with a similar signpost. From this bend, next to a ceramic tile dedicated to the Virgin Mary, take the path sloping upwards from stream-bed on the left. The ascent is flanked by oaks and thickets. Once on the ridge, there are some buildings on the right, and behind you a path leading to the shrine, **Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Pinares**, by **Cerro Torreárboles**, the highest peak in the (Cordoba) municipality. It's worth a visit for its wonderful vistas of Cordoba, its rolling lands in the background and the hills on either side.

Back to the ridge; take the wide path through pines and oaks towards **Cerro Muriano**, ward of the municipalities of Cordoba and Obejo, less than 2 km away. It's a gradual descent into the village. Don't leave without going to **Bar H (Casa Bruno)**, opposite **Iglesia de Santa Barbara** (patron saint of miners) to get your Pilgrim's Passport stamped. If you have time to spare, there's a path next to the football field that leads to the abandoned **copper mines** and the **Museum** – legacies of the pre-Roman and Roman origins of the town once controlled by Consul Sextus Marius– and to the emblematic Piedra Horadada or "**Piedra Horá**" (**hollowed rock**).

5. CERRO MURIANO-VILLAHARTA (21 km / 5 ½ hr)

Meadowland and brush

Start on the right side of the old N-432 to Badajoz opposite **Cerro Muriano's Iglesia de Santa Bárbara**, which will be on your left. Soon afterwards go off this road at the **Guardia Civil barracks**, to cross the abandoned Almorchón railway track and walk through the **Barriada del Campamento**. From here to Villaharta the leg coincides with the drover's way **Cañada Real Soriana**, and with trails GR-40 and GR-48. Crossing the railway track again, you'll find yourself near the road once more. Use the footpath on the right to stay parallel to the road, and pass the main gate of the **military base**. Just 3½ km from the starting point you reach disused **Obejo station**, passing railway buildings on either side. To the left there's a view of the small reservoir **Embalse de Guadalupe**. A gate blocks the path some 500 metres after the last houses, near a

Ministry of Development facility. Skirt the building on its right side and head towards the road. Continue along the roadside for about 100m until the signposted path appears again on your left. The terrain is typical Mediterranean scrub composed mainly of rockrose and holm oaks, crisscrossed by the occasional stream-bed, which can make the going slightly uneven.

After 1½ km you've reached the eastern limit of the the Guadiato Valley, and the landscape changes significantly. Ahead lie oak-dotted pastures used as grazing for sheep and cattle. Cross the new highway by the underpass. The main road will accompany you on your right, while the railway line will gradually move to your left. Six kilometres from the underpass, as you walk parallel to the old road (which will be on the right), you come to tiny **El Vacar**, hamlet of Espiel. Its Muslim **castle**, visible from over 1km away, guards the roads to Extremadura and Castile.

Under the watchful gaze of the fortress positioned on the hill on the left, keep the old road on your right while following the path that runs parallel to it. Notice the reappearance of the holm oaks together with rockrose and other species typical of the Mediterranean scrub. This means that you're out of the Guadiato Valley and back in Sierra Morena. You are still on the drover's way **Cañada Real Soriana** and the GR-40 and GR-48 trails.

With the approach road into El Vacar always on your right, (*except for a small section when it will be on your left after crossing it once at a housing development, and again at a filling station*) the path leads to the main road's service lane, which you follow as far as the **Cuesta de la Matanza**, 4½ km after the exit road from El Vacar, where there are several information boards about the Camino de Santiago. To your right, the hills of Obejo in the distance.

When the old road starts to descend, a path marked **Ruta Mozárabe** appears on the right. On the way down you'll pass **Fuente del Cordel**, the first of two ferruginous springs. After 1½ km, cross beneath the N-432, also marked with Jacobean Way signposting. You won't be returning to this highway again, because today and tomorrow your path heads northwest. On the other side of the highway the view to the left is **Villaharta** (pop. 600), its whitewashed houses reclining on the foothills of the **Sierra del Enjambradero**, while further ahead stand several disused pavilions. Walk towards these, veering right and following the GR signs. After a short while the second spring, **Fuente de Malos Pasos**, appears in the middle of a bend.

Below the pavilions now, and after some 500m, you join the dirt track. The right fork would take you to **Pedrique**, home of sculptor Aurelio Teno's residence-museum. But you take the left fork, to pass a handsome stone cross a little further ahead. Another 500m on, before you reach the road (and Restaurant Santa Elisa, which houses the valves of those ferruginous springs) that ascends towards the village, take a little path

marked GR to the right. Not long after passing a house on your left, cross the road and follow a path flanked by boulders. Two kilometres later you've arrived.

6. VILLAHARTA-ALCARACEJOS (38 km / 10 hr)

Traversing Sierra Morena

This uphill departure from **Villaharta** by the B-road to Pozoblanco coincides with GR-40, GR-48 and the drover's way, Cañada Real Soriana. After the climb, avoid a sharp bend just over 1 km down the road by turning right into a path that drops down through a **recreational area**. This is where the two GR routes diverge. Stay on the GR-40 and Cañada Real, cross the creek **Arroyo de las Serranas**, and return to the road. About 500m further on, leave the tarmac and take a path that forks left, leaving the farmhouse **Cortijo del Lopillo** (also known as Cortijo de San Isidro) on your right.

This easy dirt track bordered by Mediterranean scrub, holm oaks and olive groves is the start of a slow descent to River **Guadalbarbo**, which you reach just over 5km from the fork. Before the river, 500m past Casa de los Narváez, take the right path. Cross the river (no trouble except in very wet weather, when it can be negotiated barefoot or by the footbridge about 200m upstream) and later pass the **Cortijo del Paguillo**. After 2km you'll come to a wide track which you enter, turning left. Follow the granite milestones marked with the yellow arrow, and for 4½ km the track guides you through a flat expanse flanked by olive trees, holm oaks and the occasional labourers' hut. Then cross a small bridge at the creek Arroyo del Lorito. Be careful when going off this track: you must turn right onto a path among olive trees which initially is not very clearly marked. The creek should be on your right. Now you begin your last hill in Sierra Morena, to emerge near the pass called **Puerto de Calatraveño**.

A gated path leading to the pass appears on your left. Ignore it and stay right. A small abandoned mine appears 2½ km from the fork in the olive grove, and the inn **Ventorro del Cachorro** stands at the wayside. One kilometre later, you've reached the pass (the road accessible by a path on your left). Go straight on, keeping the fence on your right. Increasingly visible up ahead is a vast plain, **Valle de los Pedroches**, its grazing lands dotted with patches of holm oak. Descending steadily, you leave behind the foothills of Sierra Morena, which gradually give way to level pastureland, this area's distinctive feature. Just under 2½ km ahead, cross a track and keep straight on the drover's way, la Cañada Soriana.

Follow the wayposts. Now the landscape is fairly level and almost devoid of vegetation. The official minimum width of the drover's way (90 'varas', or 75m) is even adhered to on occasion. After the **Cortijo de la Hoyariza** (the water from the tap is fine for

consumption) take the right fork, leaving the fence and the house on your left. The distance between this fork and the previous one is slightly over 2½ km. A sharp drop over a distance of 1 km takes you to **River Cuzna**, which, like the Guadalbarbo, is awkward to ford only in rainy weather. If you opt to wade across, the ford is just behind the house. Next to it are the ruins of the mill, **Molino Horadado**.

After the river, the cattle track runs parallel to the wire fence, flanked by gorse and boulders. The barrier should be on your left. At a crossroads, close by the **granite cross** of unequal arms called "La Quemá", leave the Cañada Soriana and GR-40, both of which continue on the right towards Pozoblanco. The distance from the river to this point is 1½km. Turn left along the path marked Camino de Alcaracejos. The terrain is virtually flat, holm oaks on both sides and Casa del Coto on the left. After 2km you come to a small country road that goes left to the N-502, and right to Pozoblanco.

Cross it, continuing straight on through holm oaks and pastures. Gradually, small villas start appearing on either side of the path, a sign that Alcaracejos is not far away. Shortly before reaching a wide tarmacked track there is a hermitage with fountains and a picnic area ("El Pozo de Benita"), used for the village's pilgrimage festivities. From the N-502 road to this point the distance is 3½ km.

Keep left, staying on the tarmacked track, with the granite milestones and the crosses marking the way. Just before arriving at the town's first houses, notice the shrine to San Sebastián (14th C.) and a granite cross on a ridge on the left. Some 4km from the picnic area, you enter Alcaracejos (pop. c. 1,400), continuing along calle San Sebastián and past the church of San Andrés, rebuilt after its destruction in 1936. The route ends in the square Plaza de los Pedroches, at the Municipal Buildings.

7. ALCARACEJOS-HINOJOSA DEL DUQUE (25km / 6½hr)

Castilian Andalusia

The starting point in **Alcaracejos** is the intersection of a national and a regional highway. Begin on the Córdoba road on the pavement of calle Alférez Fernández Pérez. Between the derelict house at N°20 and the warehouse at N°22, turn right towards Villanueva del Duque, along a path bordered by stone dykes. Soon after the start there's a **granite cross**, and then the path proceeds among cottages, barns and farm buildings. At a junction 500m further on, ignore the power transformer on the right and keep straight ahead. Villanueva soon comes into view midst pasturelands and fields of crops. Once again, at the next crossroads several metres further ahead, keep straight on. Four kilometres from the starting point is the cattle farming community of **Villanueva del Duque**. **La Cruz de la Fuente Vieja**, a metal cross on a granite column and

pedestal, stands at the entrance. Walk down calle Reyes Católicos with its striking lintels, and you'll come to the square of the 15th C. church **San Mateo**. Carry on towards the Town Hall square (opposite is the museum **El Camino de Santiago**) and then down calle **Camino de Santiago** to exit the town at **el Calvario**, where you'll see a pedestal similar to the one at the entrance to the village. It should be on your left, and the bar El Rancho Grande on the right. Cross the Peñarroya road and keep straight on.

A few metres later Fuente la Lancha comes into view. Yet again the route leads you past farms and cottages set in pastures and cropfields, the characteristic Pedroches Valley holm oaks, with their wide crowns and thick, twisted trunks scattered here and there. One kilometre out of Villanueva, there is a break in the continuous walled path, a possible left turn. Keep straight on. After a few metres, pass a farm with livestock and an ancient bread-oven. The path pushes straight ahead, accompanied after a while by a small creek on the left, which carries water in the rainy season. Two kilometres after the fork, take care not to follow the main path to the right, which leads the road; instead follow another less well-marked path to the left in order to ford the creek, **arroyo del Lanchar**. The poplar grove on the right is a useful reference.

Over the creek, the road continues amongst broom and holm oaks, both sides bordered by granite dykes. No buildings now, giving the traveller an unaccustomed sense of isolation. Look right for the vista of Villaralto village and the hills of Sierra de Santa Eufemia in the distance. After 3½ km you arrive in one of the tiniest hamlets in the province, **Fuente la Lancha**. Go along calle Calvario and calle Maria Auxiliadora to get to the square opposite **Iglesia de Santa Catalina**. Calle Nueva leads to a handsome **granite cross**, which you pass on the right as you carry straight on, along a path with its stone dyke on the left-hand side.

The path joins the road 1½ km later. Use the hard shoulder for 200m. Then cross the road at the old house, to continue on the path that opens up in front of you and passes a small granite quarry on the right. At the next junction take the left fork. You'll see that the right fork goes to a farm. Surrounded by flat crop-fields, stay for the next 1½ km close to the road, which will now be on your left, and descend to **River Guadamatilla**. This is easy to ford even in the rainy season, although if in doubt, simply go back up to the road and then return to the path. This will pass through crop fields and grazing land, flanked on both sides by the occasional farm or a labourer's hut.

Seven kilometres later you arrive at a picnic area and a little shrine to **la Virgen de Guía**. Walk on the hard shoulder for 500m before turning off the road onto a path on the left. You'll pass some commercial warehouses and after 3½km you'll see the first houses of **Hinojosa del Duque**, the biggest town in the west of the valley, with over 7,000 inhabitants.

At the entrance stands the beautifully constructed **Fuente del Pilar de los Llanos**, dating from 1570. Carry on along Paseo de la Constitución and pass the local park on your right, to arrive at the Plaza de San Juan Bautista, where there is an interesting church of the same name, aptly dubbed **Catedral de la Sierra**.

Both the Municipal Library and the multipurpose building next to the sports centre offer free Internet connection, although only after 3pm.

8. HINOJOSA DEL DUQUE-MONTEERRUBIO DE LA SERENA (32 km / 8 hr)

Farewell to Andalucía

Leave **Hinojosa** from the Town Hall square. Pass the mediaeval west door of church **Iglesia San Juan Bautista** to enter the square of the same name. Heading towards the Tourist Office, walk down calle Jesús to the Plaza del Duque de Béjar, with **Convento de la Concepción** on the left. Once in calle de las Monjas, turn left into calle Isabel la Católica and then right into Ramón y Cajal. Finally turn left again on Juan XXIII and Pío XII, and past the **Matadero Municipal** (the abattoir). You find yourself opposite the town's narrow ring road. Continue straight onto this road, and on a 90° bend to the left, go straight onto a dirt track. After about 500 metres down the path you'll be 1km from the road to the old railway station, **Estación del Mármol**.

Ignore a right fork that appears a little later, and stay on the path for 2 km. After that, turn right onto a path that takes you past a building supplies depot on the left. Leaving a farmhouse with stone dyke on the left, after 2km from the last fork you come to the creek, **arroyo Dehesa de las Viñas**, visible from afar thanks to the fringe of trees on its banks. The virtually flat terrain is mainly for sheep grazing and cereal crops. The first clusters of holm oak come into sight 2km down the path.

At a point almost 1½ km on, take special care not to deviate from the route. When you come to the livestock farm **Coto Chico**, pass the first building on the left and ignore the paths that appear on both sides until you come to another farm building. Then fork left at the electricity post, turning onto a narrower path bordered by reeds. You'll pass a granite structure on the left and another barn on the right. Some 200m later, **arroyo del Cohete** is easy to ford even in the rainy season. From the elevation of Altos de la Gutierrez there's a view of Belalcázar far away to the right, its castle keep rising proudly above the whitewashed houses.

Almost 2km after the creek ignore a narrow road veering right towards Belalcázar, and go straight. For the next 5km the view on each side of the way is holm oaks, crop fields and the occasional farmstead. Three kilometres into this section, Monterrubio comes into view in the foothills of the sierra.

Now you come to another narrow road. It has little traffic. If you're cycling you may prefer to join this road, travelling right till you come to a wider road which you also join, this time travelling left towards Monterrubio. Cross river Zújar by the bridge next to the beautiful late-medieval hermitage, **ermita de la Virgen de las Alcantarillas**. The distance from this point to the village is 8 km. On the other hand, if you're walking, you should cross that same quiet, narrow road and keep straight through the meadow of holm oaks, taking the right fork at each of two consecutive bifurcations.

Three kilometres after the road you hit the Almorchón railway line, which is still in use. Straight ahead, cross the old railway halt, turn right after the gate and walk for about 500m next to the wire fence along a semi-observed path, until you get to the main path. Enter it and go right, past a house with sheep. Some 2km after the railway line, you'll emerge next to a derelict house on the Belalcázar-Monterrubio road.

Here there are two options for the wayfaring pilgrim. Those who want to cross the **Zújar** by the bridge should go left and continue along the road into Monterrubio (which means 4km of tarmac until you reach the hermitage of Las Alcantarillas). If you keep going straight ahead however, the path takes you past the old **Zújar station** and across the river at its natural shallows. Forging should present no problem - just take off your boots- except in very wet weather, which might necessitate using the road, as described above. On the other side, the path ascends. Pass a ramshackle house and ignore a path out to the left, continuing to the right on the cobbled path.

When you reach a second gate, be careful not to go right. Instead, take the left path over some slaty path. Soon you come to a simple Way of the Cross and a granite altar. There's a superb view from this high spot surrounded by meadows, with the meandering **River Zújar** at our feet and the hermitage **ermita de Nuestra Señora de las Alcantarillas** perched on a hillock further off. Descend to the hermitage.

It's often possible to use paths on the left side of the road as you walk the final 8km and finally arrive in **Monterrubio de la Serena**, the first town of Extremadura on your journey. The streets lead us up to the 15th century church **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Consolación**.

9.MONTERRUBIO-CAMPANARIO (36km / 9hr)

Andalusian Extremadura

The pilgrim sets off on a tarmacked track that leaves **Oli disco-bar** and the road to Puerto Hurraco and Castuera on the left. A bit further on, the local authority of La Serena district has an information board indicating Camino Mozarabe as PR-BA-56. The path runs through newly planted olive groves, and on reaching the creek arroyo de Ballesteros 5 km later, it enters the nature reserve **los Berciales**, a beautiful meadow of holm oaks.

The tarmac stops, and you pass through a zone of scattered houses and vegetable gardens. Eighteen kilometres from Monterrubio you arrive in **Castuera**, capital of La Serena district, and famed for its nougat. *Artigi*, a Roman town on the *Corduba-Emerita* road, may have been located in the vicinity. The facade of the 18th century temple **Iglesia de Santa María Magdalena** bears the coat of arms of the Orden de Alcántara. Also of architectural interest are the Baroque altarpieces in the shrines *ermita del Santo* (16th C.) and *ermita de San Benito* (17th C.), as well as various mansion houses. The town's gala day is July 25th, feast of Santiago. At the office of the Mancomunidad de Municipios de La Serena next to the Town Hall, pilgrims can have their Passport stamped and get information.

The way out of town takes you down Paseo de Santa Ana, calle Zurbarán and the road to Campanario. After the Aviation monument, turn left onto the path called **Senda del Rey** (or **Puente de Hierro**), which coincides with the GR-115 to Campanario. This path goes from the Salón Ovino to the spot where **arroyo Guadalefra** meets the railway line. Pass the old station **Quintana de la Serena**, now a youth hostel. The otherwise flat terrain is altered by slight undulations. Turn right at a pillar and stay on the GR. Observe the granite outcrops which, though a hindrance to farmers, make for an excellent building material, quarried at the mine you pass on the right a few miles before the entrance into Campanario and after crossing the railway track.

Walk a few miles down a path parallel to the road, then for a while on the hard shoulder. Cross the road to enter **Campanario** by calle Calvario, continue along calle Seville and calle Reyes Huertas before arriving in Plaza de España, where you'll see the Town Hall and the 15th century church, **Nuestra Señora de la Asunción**.

10. CAMPANARIO-MEDELLÍN (32 km / 8 hr)

Land of the Conquistadors

Set off towards the **railway station** on the road to Quintana de la Serena. About 200m past the **sports centre** and 1½ km before the station, there's a wide path on the right with a GR-115 information board. Amid cottages, vegetable gardens and vineyards, the path crosses the railway line near the ruins of a mill and **arroyo del Paredón**. This creek has been dammed up ahead as you will see on your right, once across the tracks. Here again the scene is grazing land and crops. You may even encounter flocks of sheep moving from one pasture to another. Soon, on the left side of the path you'll see a metal structure shielding the ruins of **archaeological site "La Mata"**, of Tartessian origin. Guided tours are available. After the creek **arroyo del Torvizco**, the wide track veers to

the right and then quickly to the left, passing entrances to abandoned mines, and ending at a tarmacked track.

Continue now on the tarmac through crop fields speckled here and there with tumbledown buildings. **Magacela** emerges on the horizon, its white houses lying on the slope of a hill crowned by the ruins of a Moorish castle built on the site of a Roman hill-fort. Within the castle, **Santa Ana** church stands on the foundations of a former mosque. The Order of Alcántara established its Priory here before moving to nearby Villanueva de la Serena. This is a good place to replenish supplies before resuming the journey.

In the quarter of **Sobrante del Berrocal** before the first houses in Magacela, you'll see a **water-trough** where you can refill water-bottles. A **dolmen** stands a few metres ahead, on the road to the old railway station and the hermitage, **ermita de los Remedios**.

Once past all these buildings, many of which are in ruins, turn left along the narrow country road that goes to La Guarda. Go off this road almost at once, turning right to take an indistinct stony path up to the right, leaving Magacela and its castle on the right. The views are superb. When you reach a coll, follow the GR-115, and the path descends to terminate at the B-road to **La Haba**.

Walk along the hard shoulder for 2km and turn left onto a path between some houses. Cross a small stream and then pass a pig farm. You reach another road, and opposite is **El Pantanillo**, a fine spot for birdwatching. Continue walking next to the road, then cross it passing the swimming-pools and a handsome granite-based cross.

On reaching La Haba, head towards the Town Buildings. Turn left down the street opposite the Town Buildings. Observe the coats of arms that adorn several of the houses, before coming to the church dedicated to **San Juan Bautista**. The Order of Santiago received a share of these lands after the Reconquest. Leaving the church on the right, you arrive at the abbatoir. Leave the town from joinery Carpintería Pajuelo, situated next to a granite well-mouth.

On a path through cereal fields where signposting is virtually impossible, keep straight, advancing towards the big white splotch soon visible on the horizon. **Don Benito** (pop. 30,000), the biggest town on the fertile plain of la Vega after Mérida, is named after its 15th century founder and benefactor. The church of Santiago Apóstol dates from the early 16th century and has three naves. Other churches are **San Juan** and **Nuestra Señora del Consuelo**

Leaving behind the region of La Serena, you now enter the district called la **Vega del Guadiana**. A straight walkway on the roadside goes all the way into **Medellin**, the Roman *Metellinum*, situated on the left bank of the Guadiana. Its mediaeval castle, still guarding movement in and out of the Guadiana valley, can be devised on the hilltop from several kilometres off. Paradoxically, its two most interesting churches -both 13th century- are either closed (**Santiago**) or in ruins (**San Martín**). Birthplace of Hernán

Cortés, conqueror of the Aztec empire, it still boasts remarkable emblazoned houses such as the 16th century palace of the Dukes of Medinaceli. The church **Iglesia de Santa Cecilia** also dates from that time.

11. MEDELLIN- SAN PEDRO DE MERIDA (28 km / 7 hr)

The fertile Guadiana valley

Close to the foundations of a Roman bridge, the pilgrim's departure point **the Guadiana Bridge**, majestic feat of 17th century engineering with 20 arches and a 400-metre span. To the left of this bridge take a road marked "Cañada Real Leonesa". It leads onto a narrow road, on which you turn left towards Yelbes and soon afterwards pass the **medieval bridge** spanning **arroyo Cagánchez**. Along this road, just over 500m from the bridge there is a path to the right signposted Cañada Real Leonesa. You have a choice now: follow it to Santa Amalia, or continue towards Yelbes.

The Santa Amalia option takes you along the path with an irrigation ditch on either side, Sierra de Troya to the right and crop fields to the left. The occasional holm oak stands near the path. Go right at the fork further ahead to follow the Cañada path, which becomes sandy and a bit narrower. Leaving behind farm cooperative buildings, you come into **Santa Amalia**, with its grid street layout dating from 1827. By taking Calle de los Madroñeros, you come to Plaza de España, the heart of the town and place of the Municipal Buildings. Leave the square and walk to the end of Calle de la Reina. Turn right into a narrow road that steers past farm buildings and crop fields. You'll come to a wider road. Cross it and head towards river **Búrdalo**, some 2km from the town. With the river course on your right and fields on your left, you come to the N-430 bridge over the river about 2km further on.

The other option is to keep straight on towards the little colonization village of **Yelbes**, turn right opposite the church, cross the irrigation canal and a narrow road, continuing straight ahead on a path through crop fields. When you come to another ditch turn right, and then left at the next fork. It now remains to continue straight ahead until you come to river **Búrdalo**, when you turn right to join the road and the other route from Santa Amalia.

Cross the bridge. Be very careful – you'll be on the hard shoulder for 2km before turning left off the road onto a service lane. Two kilometres after that, you arrive in **Torrefresneda**, a typical village of the repopulation period, set up with the characteristic grid street layout and irrigation systems in the surrounding fields. Take time to refuel in one of the bars. The stone cross in front of the church is worth a look.

From here onwards keep to the service lane along the dual carriageway, first on the left-hand side then on the right, then left again and finally right again until you arrive in **San Pedro de Mérida**. The town may have its origins in a Visigothic basilica, site of the present parish church.

The distance from Torrefresneda to this point is 10km.

12. SAN PEDRO DE M - MÉRIDA (15 km / 3 hr)

Within reach of la Vía de la Plata

The Guardia Civil barracks is your reference point. Walk past the barracks. Up ahead a narrow road leads to the dual carriageway. Stay parallel to the main road, which you'll keep to your left. On your right you have a charming vista of meadowland and holm oaks.

Stay on this service lane until you arrive at Trujillanos 7km further on. At the first houses, turn right and walk into the town along calle San Isidro to visit the lovely 16th C. church **la Santísima Trinidad**. The village was founded in 1327 under the town charter "Carta Puebla" granted by Maestre Vasco Rodriguez Cornago, Master of the Order of Santiago, as part of a major repopulation scheme. From Trujillanos, cross the road by the flyover, leaving the dual carriageway service-lane on your right.

Once across this main highway, walk a few metres down the former N-V. Take the first turning to the left and then follow a wide path to the right. For 8km it travels through fields and olive groves, eventually bringing you into **Mérida**, close to an industrial estate. Enter the nearby square Plaza Díaz Ambrona, where you'll find the Renaissance hermitage **Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Antigua**. Now you have two options: either continue onto Avenida Juan Carlos I, Avenida de Extremadura and calle Santa Eulalia, past the Visigothic **Basilica de Santa Eulalia** to the **Roman bridge** (which is the start point for the Vía de la Plata route to Cáceres); alternatively, turn left into Avenida Reina Sofía to explore the town's magnificent Roman monuments: circus, theatre, amphitheatre and museum.