

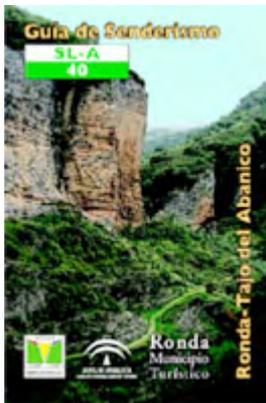
## SL-A 40 RONDA - TAJO DEL ABANICO

Distance: 3.8 kilometres (linear)

Difficulty: low

Type of route: Linear

Mode: On foot



This route starts in the attractive neighbourhood of San Francisco, next to the medieval defensive city walls and the gates of Carlos V and the 'Almocabar'. Fresh drinking water can be found in the fountain beside the old entrance to the city. We leave the spacious plaza of the Ruedo Alameda, with its gall oaks and statue of San Francisco, to our left, and make our way up the street (or calle) Torrejones, which passes the 'Torre del Predicadorio' [Preacher's Tower] at its highest point. This is where people once gathered to hear the sermons of the beatified friar Diego José de Cadiz, whose remains are now to be found in an urn at the foot of the statue of the Virgin de la Paz, patroness of Ronda, in the sanctuary 'de la Paz'. The remains of the tower that one can see here now once formed part of the Roman aqueduct that brought water from the spring of La Arena to Arunda (as Ronda was then known). It is worth stopping to take a closer look at the remains of the water channels and to admire the magnificent view of Ronda that one gets from this spot.

We continue on and soon find ourselves at the very edge of the built up area of Ronda. At the second roundabout that we come to we find a signpost indicating that the way to the 'iglesia rupestre de la Virgen de la Cabeza' is to the right. Of the two tracks that we can now see before us, we take the second, left-hand, one.

The path we now find ourselves on is asphalted and runs between stone walls that mark the boundaries of the lands on either side, where we can see olive and almond trees growing. The terrain is reasonably level and easy to walk and we pass the entrances to several estates, one of which bears the name of 'La Hoya de los Frailes'. New views appear before us as we advance, dominated by a line of white-grey peaks that cap the horizon. This is the most eastern range of those found in the Natural Park of the Sierra de Grazalema. The highlands we can see before us, known as the Sierra de Libar, are formed of permeable limestone, giving rise to the existence of numerous underground lakes. These waters, gathered during the rainy season, flow out in spectacular springs such as the 'Nacimiento' [Birthplace] in the 'Estación de Benaoján' or the river Gadaures that flows out of the 'Cueva del Gato' [Cave of the Cat]. In this section of our walk the path is at its widest and we are following a public right of way known as the 'colada del camino de Ronda a Cortes de la Frontera'.

The path now leads downhill and we come to a fork. The right-hand option is the continuation of the 'colada' to Cortes de la Frontera, whilst the left-hand one, which we follow, is the path of the 'Sijuela' which is signalled with blue paint marks. It now starts to narrow as the terrain becomes rougher and we notice a change in the vegetation. We leave the cultivated fields behind us and enter a zone of authentic Mediterranean vegetation, dominated by magnificent holm oaks with an undergrowth of broom, sumac, mastic, rock roses etc. From where we are we can see the rectangular form of the Mures hill on our right. At the top of this hill, and visible on the sky-line, is a wood of mastic trees which has been included in a catalogue of notable woods and trees in Andalucía. A little to the left of this we see the twin, pointed peaks of the cerro Hacho. We leave the entrance to the Santa Rita estate behind us on our right.

On the left hand side of the way we see the first of the cliffs which will accompany us for the rest of our route. A little further on we pass a 'corral natural de tajos', an opening in the cliffs where the small and difficult to reach cave of 'los Aviones' can be found. On the other side of the path there is a field with a water storage tank where cows, horses and chickens can often be seen. We continue and come to another junction, next to a post carrying power lines, where a narrow, concrete track leads away to the right. We ignore it and continue ahead, surrounded by holm oaks and gall oaks. One small holm oak is outstanding, growing atop a mound of rocks on our right.

We continue downhill, passing an abandoned house next to a stone tower, a typical local feature, that it seems once served to store grain and keep it safe from wild animals and humidity. We next cross a stream that, though it is often dry, is flanked by enormous poplar trees. After we have left the entrance to the hotel 'La Cazalla' behind us we come to clearing where the wider track ends. We ignore another track that continues on to a private house on the right and follow the narrower footpath through the metal gateway that we must remember to close behind us.

This is the most beautiful part of the walk, as a spectacular landscape of cliffs and gorges reveals itself before us, covered with profuse and varied vegetation. The footpath we are on is cobbled in parts. Some claim that this paving dates from Roman times, but it is most probably of Medieval origin.

We soon reach a high ledge of land where we can see the remains of an old threshing ground, cobbled with wide and flat stones. From here we can see how the path leads into the ravine where the stream of the 'Sijuela' flows. After we have descended a few metres we can

