

## SL-A 38 RONDA-MOLINOS DEL TAJO

Distance: 4.6 kilometres

Level of Difficulty: Low

Type of Route: Linear

Mode: On foot or mountain bike



This route starts in the plaza de María Auxiliadora, better known locally as the plaza del Campillo. This small square is set in the historic part of the city, surrounded by beautiful buildings such as the ancient college of Santa Teresa, now the music conservatory, and the house of los Martos with its splendid gardens overlooking the edge of the cliffs. In the same plaza there is a statue of Don Bosco, in the centre of a small garden where two pinsapos, or Spanish firs, are growing. This tree is emblematic of the Serranía de Ronda. From the railings at the edge of the plaza there is a marvellous panorama of the cliffs and gorge of Ronda. In front of us we can see the mountains of the massif of Libar running parallel to the river Guadiaro. The Guadalevín, responsible for cutting the gorge which separates Ronda into two parts, flows on to join this latter river.

We start downhill following the wide, cobbled path of los Molinos [the Mills]. Our way is surrounded by almond trees and a multicoloured array of plants, especially splendid in the months of spring.

We continue down the path nicknamed the “cuesta del Cachondeo” [slope of Fun], because of its many twists and turns. We pass the house of Manolillo on our right, from which, with the owner’s permission, one can follow a steep footpath down to the bottom of the New Bridge. A little further on we come to a fork in the way. The path on our left leads to the Puerta del Viento [Pass of the Wind] and continues to the San Francisco district, passing the Picha del Moro, a stony outcrop where marine fossils can be found in abundance. We take the right-hand path, leading us to the medieval defensive walls and the Arco del Cristo [Arch of Christ], which is evidently of Arabic origin. From this natural viewing point we can admire the New Bridge, a masterpiece of engineering for its time. Finished in 1793, after forty years of building works, the bridge is 98 metres high with an interpretation centre in its interior dedicated to the history of this magnificent monument, symbol of the city of Ronda. From here we can also see the route cut by the river Guadalevín and the impressive cliffs where the city stands. The natural formation known as the Asa de la Caldera [Cauldron’s Handle] is impressive, formed by the gradual eroding away of the softer rocks. The footpath we have been following twists down towards the ruined flour mills that were abandoned following an earthquake in 1917 in which sixteen people died. Instead of following it we look for an opening in the wall from where another footpath heads steeply down towards the cobbled road that leads to the power station.

Once we reach the road we turn right and continue downhill till we meet a copse of giant walnut trees. Just past these we can see two old mills that have been restored for tourism. A few metres further on we take a concreted path on our left. It is worth the effort, however, to continue along the road we have been following as far as the power station, if only to see the surrounding landscape and the level that the waters of the Guadalevín reached on the 27th of September of 1949.

We soon cross a bridge over the river, arriving in the zone known as the Hoya del Tajo, where there are several small farmhouses. The mosaic of fruit trees, irrigation channels and vegetable plots is the legacy left by the Muslim culture in Andalucía, a legacy that can also be found in the region’s architecture, cuisine and festivities. Our next landmark is the house of Luís, or the Huerta de la Torre [Orchard of the Tower], notable for the stone tower that can be seen on the side of the house. We can also see a niche with a figure of the Virgin of la Inmaculada. Every May there is a pilgrimage to honour her.

A few metres further on we ignore a track on our left and start a gentle climb, passing vegetable plots, olive groves and fields of orange trees. There are also several orchards of ‘peros’, a delicious variety of apple that is typical of the zone. The view soon opens out. To our left we can see the rock carved hermitage of the Virgen de la Cabeza, marked by a line of pine trees of the type that give edible kernels. On the other side we can see the ancient convent of the Barefoot Carmelites, which is now the site for the wine cellars of Los Descalzos; the vineyards of which can be seen growing in the surrounding area. After a short climb, almost without realizing it, we reach the pass of las Muelas. From here we can appreciate the grandeur of the Tajo de Ronda, la Hoya del Tajo and the San Francisco district. We now look for a footpath on our left with a signpost indicating the PR-A 253, a walking route to Ronda from Benaoján, and the GR-7 E-4 from Tarifa to Athens, which we now follow. We continue uphill past a pine wood on one side and the edge of the cliffs on the other. The surrounding vegetation is dominated by rock roses, rosemary, broom, thyme and esparto grass. The footpath joins a track which we follow uphill. The well known bend at kilometre 113 of the A-374 road from Ronda to Seville indicates that we are now near the end of our route, which we reach when we arrive at the Doctor Vázquez neighbourhood. From the viewing points that we can find here we can appreciate an almost bird’s eye view of the route we have just taken.

