

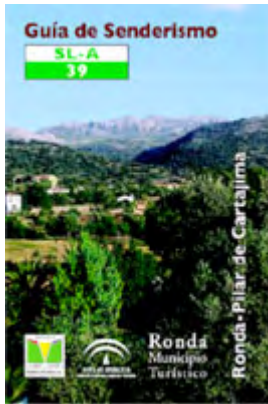
## SL-A 39 RONDA-PILAR DE CARTAJIMA

Distance: 6.1 kilometres

Level of Difficulty: Low

Type of Route: Circular

Mode: On foot or mountain bike



We start from the San Francisco district of Ronda, in the upper part of the street, or 'calle', San Francisco at the entrance to the patio of the old convent of the same name. This stands on the site where Isabel and Fernando, 'los Reyes Catolicos', set up camp during the siege of Ronda in 1485. We walk up this street and see on the right the court of the convent. Nowadays it is a public school named 'colegio Fernando de los Rios'. Walking ahead we leave the last buildings behind us, heading the hills that surround this area of Ronda. The street is narrow and we have to take good care of traffic. Soon we cross the bridge over the beltway and then we will take the asphalted track on the right. We follow this track up to the gate of the country residence 'Portal de Romero'. Right here at left sets an earthen track off which one we follow.

We head gradually downhill, allowing us to observe the Sierra Hidalga and the Sierra de las Nieves to the east. The latter is covered by dark woods of pinsapos [Spanish fir] a tree that is native to these mountains. To the south the horizon is broken by the hills of Jarastepar and Armola, which separate the tableland of Ronda from the Genal Valley.

The track levels out again and we ignore a concreted path that we see on our right. A few metres further on we arrive at a wide platform of land marked by an electric power post. On one side we see a private estate. The footpath that we now take starts at the side of the fence that surrounds it. Numerous plants and bushes are growing by the wayside including goat's leaf (*Lonicera implexa*), kermes oaks, wild olives, broom, sumach and gall oaks. The footpath eventually becomes a narrow track that soon joins a wider one leading to the Pilar de Cartajima, our destination. This junction is important for us to remember as we will use the wider track for our return journey.

We turn right and continue our walk through a peaceful zone of small fields and country houses, some with olive trees growing and others with pines or small orchards. We head downhill for a while, passing a path on our left before we climb again. Only a little further on we arrive at the Pilar de Cartajima, once the traditional resting place for muleteers and other travellers making their journey either to or from the fields and villages that surround Ronda, the city of the Tajo. This fountain is always flowing and the water is very much appreciated by the local people who fill their canisters here. The large stone trough is always full, ready to quench the thirst of livestock and beasts of burden. This place marks the end of our route, but if one wishes to keep walking we suggest that they take the following route along the side of the Culebras stream.

From this point there are two paths. The one on the left crosses the stream and the one on the right continues parallel to it, passing through the estate of Los Castaños [The Chestnuts]. To extend our route we continue along the right-hand track. We are accompanied by the dense vegetation growing by the waterside and by the constant birdsong. A little further on we ignore a concreted path on our right and continue ahead, passing a stone wall on one side of the path and a wooden fence on the other. We soon pass another entrance to the Los Castaños estate and take a footpath that leads us past a small pool in the stream which tempts one to take a dip. Unfortunately, it is often dry in the late summer months.

This footpath gives access to various estates and heads though some of the better conserved areas of the zone where Holm oaks and cork oaks proliferate. The murmur of the nearby Culebras stream gives a note of cool freshness, accompanying the whisper of the wind in the branches of the willows, oleanders and mastic trees that grow by the wayside.

We eventually reach a fence from where we can see the remains of the Fuente de la Arena aqueduct. This was built in Roman times to provide water to Ronda, or 'Arunda', as it was then known. From our observation point we can see that there are several arches still standing.

We make the return journey following the same track that leads us to the water fountain. When we reach the junction previously mentioned as a point of reference we continue along the wider, asphalted track which leads us comfortably back to our starting point, passing country houses, orchards and vegetable gardens on the way.

