

STAGE 1: LA INDIANA - MONTEJAQUE

THE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE IN SUMMARY:

The Alternative Route starts at kilometre 5.7 of Stage 24 of the Great Málaga Path, between Ronda and Benaoján. More precisely, in the area known as Hoyo de Tabares, near La Indiana, which is your reference point. It runs through the mountains of the Sierras de Líbar and the municipalities of Ronda, Montejaque, Benaoján, Cortes de la Frontera, Benalauría and Benarrabá. The Plains of La Escribana, in Genalguacil, are the finishing point after a total of 52.1 kilometres.

The route takes a south-westerly heading, through the Sierras de Líbar mountain ranges and also during the middle section along the Guadiaro valley as far as Las Buitreras. From Carboneras Gorge, it then takes a slightly more easterly course, climbing up to El Espino pass, from where it joins the River Genal valley. Passing through the town of Benarrabá, it then links up with the river and Stage 27 of the GR 249 at kilometre 9.5.

THE STAGE IN SUMMARY:

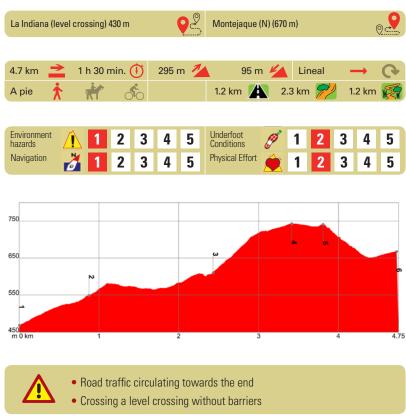
The first stage has a predominantly south-westerly course and climbs to an altitude of 740 metres in La Escarihuela area, with a significant difference in elevation between the start and finish. One can distinguish two vastly contrasting landscapes, each accounting for half of the route. The first is located in the Olive groves of La Estacá; with rainfed crops, wheat, chickpeas, sunflowers and safflowers on the slopes of the clayey hills of the Grande and La Fresneda estates. The second is that of the mountain ranges formed of Bética limestone, with excellent examples of karst formations.

The municipal boundary between Ronda and Montejaque is crossed at kilometre 2.2, just at the meeting point of the north-eastern corner of that of Benaoján, which the route does not enter. It does, however, travel within the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. The track along which the long-distance footpath runs along, forms the boundary of the protected area, parallel to the Algeciras to Bobadilla railway line.



GR 249.6 STAGE 1: LA INDIANA - MONTEJAQUE

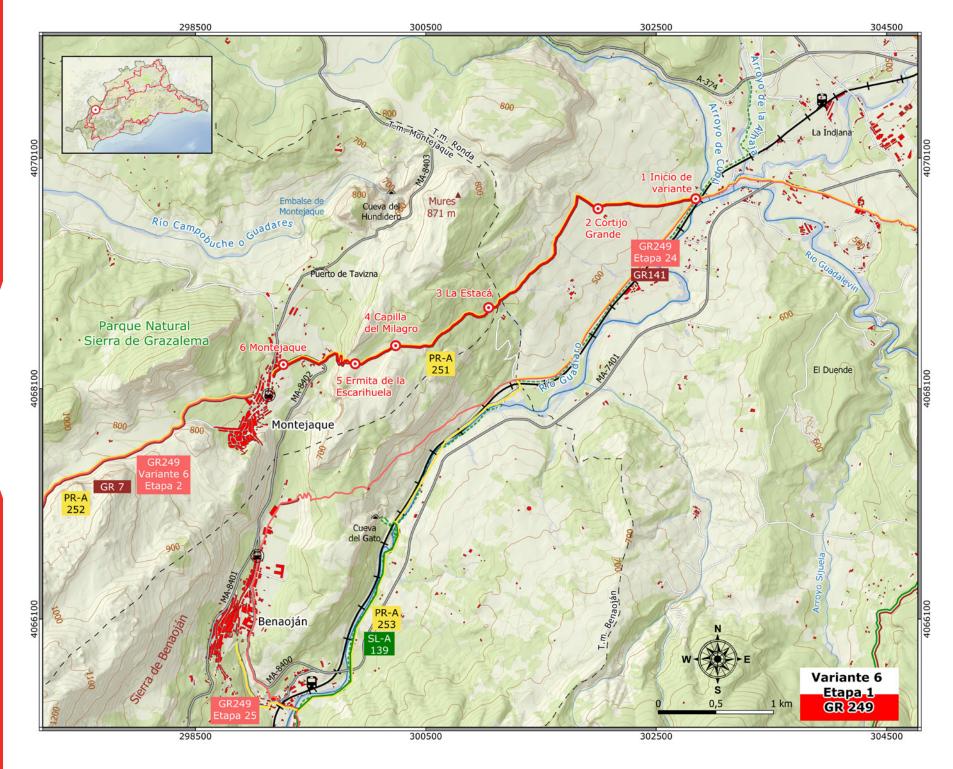








P O I N T	Х		Υ		HEIGHT ABOVE SL	DISTANCE
1.Start of Alternative Route	302845	/	4069745	/	470	Km 0,0
2.Large country estate	301995	/	4069660	/	550	Km 0,9
3. La Estacá	301045	/	4068805	/	615	Km 2,4
4.Chapel of El Milagro	300240	/	4068475	/	745	Km 3,4
5. Shrine of La Escarihuela	299890	/	4068315	/	740	Km 3,8
6.Montejaque	299265	/	4068310	/	670	Km 4,7





DESCRIPCIÓN DEL RECORRIDO



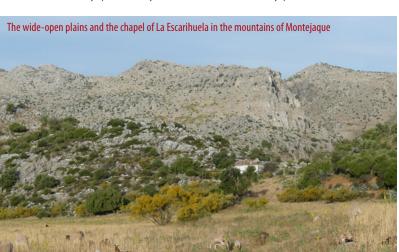
The route enters the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park at the start, and leaves the Guadiaro River behind. This is formed a short way back, at the confluence of the Guadalevín, which rises in the Sierra de las Nieves National Park, and the Guadalcobacín, which passes through Arriate. While the main Great Path route continues on to the south-west, parallel to the railway line, this Alternative Route begins its climb along an earth track that soon becomes concreted, due to the steep gradients and the terrain dominated by clay. Among arable crops and the occasional isolated Holm oak, it passes through the land of Cortijo Grande, on your left, and then turns south-west at the top, just where the concrete ends.

The path descends slightly and crosses some small streams, some of which have been concreted over, making this part of the route occasionally quite muddy. Below

you is another of the most important country estates through which the GR 249 passes, named La Fresneda. The hills of the Sierra get ever closer and some Almond trees and Gorse bushes line the path. The change of scenery can be noticed when you reach the centuries-old Olive grove of La Estacá, in an area with many springs due to the presence of the limestone and clay.



The abundance of water comes in the form of two consecutive streams that are easily crossed. These are found at the bottom of a very steep slope, which in barely 600 metres overcomes an elevation gain of 125 metres. The surroundings are perfectly mixed here, as abandoned Olive 327 328 and Almond groves intermingle with patches of younger woodland. You can even recognise the old path because of the dry-stone walls and the traditional row of Century plants.





Hay bales with the valley of the Guadiaro River in the distance

When you reach the highest point of the stage, you have covered about 3.4 kilometres, where there is a farmhouse and the chapel of the Cruz del Milagro (the Miracle Cross). It has an information panel about an interesting event that took place during an epidemic in Ronda. This is precisely the route that the group took, albeit in the opposite direction, along this very old Camino de Ronda, being the most direct and flattest route. Up ahead, an impressive panorama of grey limestone mountain ranges comes into view. However, the rugged outlines are interrupted by an extensive and sometimes very wide and cultivated plain. To the south you can see a narrow gorge, which is crossed by the aerial zip line of the Montejague via ferrata, on the other side.

On a rise at the western end is the next landmark, the Hermitage of La Escarihuela, dedicated to the Virgin de la Conception, to whom the miracle referred to above alludes. From here it is all downhill, using one of the pathways that serve as a reference point for hikers. Despite some restoration work undertaken to the former stone paving, there is still a long stretch where the extraordinary workmanship of the traditional path is visible. The name La Escarihuela refers to the water gutters and steps that line the descent, especially noticeable on each of the fan-like bends. A famous sporting event traditionally uses this same route and in the same direction as described. This section is one of the most famous images of the traditional route between Montejague and Ronda.

The descent ends near the cemetery of Montejague, and the stage ends on the access road to the village, which lies to the south-west.