








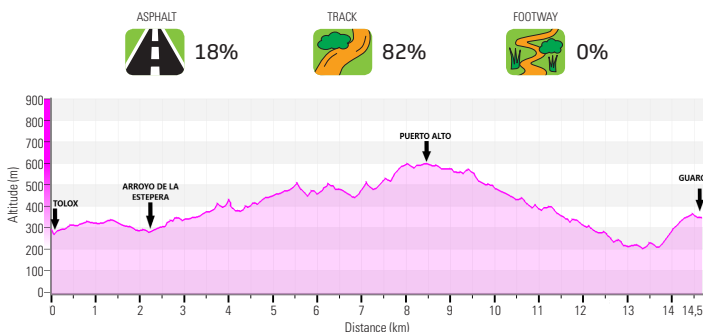


Stage 4

Tolox - Guaro

Estimated duration	5 h		 2	Environment Hazards
Cumulative elevation gain	897 m		 1	Navigation
Cumulative elevation loss	850 m		 1	Underfoot conditions
Aprox. distance	14,7 km		 3	Physical Effort
Trail type	linear		Difficulty (MIDE scale): 1 to 5	
Year-round conditions, estimated time according to MIDE criteria, without stops, 2018. Mode: On foot				



P O I N T	X	Y	ALTITUD	DISTANCE
1 Tolox	330240	4061937	271	Km 0
2 Arroyo de la Estepa	331564	4061053	319	Km 2,1
3 Puerto Alto	332805	4058905	594	Km 8,8
4 Guaro	335681	4058455	347	Km 14,7

Maps E/1:25.000 • 1051-IV. 1065-II. 1066-I

Access to the starting point. From the San Roque Avenue, the main access road to Tolox turns into Calle Erilla, where the stage begins.

Access to the finishing point. Camino del Arroyo street, next to the main road to Marbella (A-7100), at the crossing with the road that loops round Guaro to the west.

THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

This fourth stage, between Tolox and Guaro manages to maintain the bar very high in terms of the scenic beauty and environmental interest, as set by the previous stages. Both at the beginning and at the end of the route, the human influence in the surrounding countryside of these two towns is very evident. Small farmhouses and fields intermingle with second homes, in many cases built on the foundations of old farms. Olives remains among the most important crops in these parts of the Biosphere Reserve, and whose tradition goes back centuries. During the route, we will discover how the peridotites of the easternmost stretch of the Sierra Parda de Tolox give rise to Maritime pine forest. Its dominance is only interrupted by some scattered clumps of Oak and Chestnut trees, which reveal the intrusion of other geological materials. The route reaches a series of mountain passes in the slate hills, while overlooking an array of colourful mountains made up of different rock types: the limestone of the Sierras Prieta, Cabrilla and Tolox, and the reddish limestone of the Sierra Parda de Tolox. The halfway point, the Puerto Alto pass, at just over 600 m above sea level, is an attractive viewpoint overlooking the light-coloured hills covered with vineyards, Almond, Fig and Olive trees. To the south, the contrast with the brittle profiles of the Canucha and Blanca mountain ranges is very evident. From here, we descend swiftly towards the Seco stream, one of the River Grande's tributaries, the principal tributary of the Guadalhorce to the west.



▲ A Tavertine platform close to the Seco stream

▼ Access the stage's GPS data here



CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ROUTES

- **PR-A 274:** From Puerto Alto pass until Guaro.
- **PR-A 279:** For a section of 450m near Puerto Alto pass.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

The route follows forest tracks and farm lanes throughout, which usually have little traffic. This makes staying aware even more important, especially close to Tolox and Guaro. The route's profile is a typically jagged one, one of the so-called leg-breakers, climbing and descending constantly. Walking sticks and decent footwear will make it easier. Fruit should not be picked from the bushes along the route. Water can only be obtained from the Fuente de la Teja stream, as the rest of the watercourses are seasonal. The stage's different environments favour spotting numerous birds, so binoculars are a good idea to spot the smaller birds.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

We depart from Tolox along Erilla Street, past the village's last houses and several commercial premises. A short distance further on we leave this road to Coin and turn right along the branch that heads to the ford crossing of the Estepera stream, which is lined with dense vegetation. We now face the Estepera slope, surrounded by vines and enormous Olive trees that are hundreds of years old.

▼ Sierra Parda,
Tolox



“ In the municipality of Tolox, the Santana Olive tree is famous for its size and age, estimated at some 800 years old. By this measure, it must have been planted in the period of Almoravid or Almohad rule. We cannot be sure, however oral tradition states that under its shade rested the troops of D. Luis Ponce de León, the peacemaker of the Moorish rebellion of 1570 in the Ronda Mountains, during the War of the Alpujarras. Tolox and Istán were important strongholds against the Christian power. From this turbulent period in Tolox's history, we have inherited the festivity 'Day of Las Mozas' which commemorates the dispute that took place at Christmas 1539 between a Moorish woman and a Christian woman over the use of an oven. This led to a major altercation between the two communities. The Christians of Tolox called for help from the villagers of nearby villages, who chased the Moors away by clanging cowbells and conch shells. Since then, it has been a deep-rooted tradition in the festive calendar. ”

Once at the top of the Albarejo hill, the track runs along the interfluvial ridge between Las Viñas and El Negro streams, both tributaries of the Estepera stream. In view from this stretch, one of the route's few flat sections, above the pine-covered Cerro Redondo ridge is the imposing massif of the Tolox mountain range. Its highest summit, Torrecilla (1,919 m) stands out high above. The panoramic view to the north is equally as pleasing to the eye and is rounded off by the Cabrilla and Prieta mountain ranges, and the town of Yunquera sitting just below. Its whitish tint reveals its sedimentary origin, just the same as the Sierra de Tolox.

Shortly before crossing the Viñas stream, the same track doubles as the border of the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. The Maritime pine stands out as the undisputed king of the forest. It is accompanied by magnificent shrubs such as Mastic, Juniper and Mediterranean fan palm. The Puerto del Rey pass signifies the first contact with the catchment area of the Fuente de la Teja stream, which flows all year round. While crossing this stream, it is possible to replenish our water supply from the

▼ The Teja Spring





▲ Panoramic view of the whitish Sierra de Tolox mountains

stream-bed itself. It flows between huge slabs of peridotite rock, and in just over 5 km it flows from Aranda hill (1051 m) to its confluence with the Estepera stream, at 200 m above sea level.

The next point of interest is the Puerto de Chiribenítez pass (**5.6km**), an important crossroads and border between Tolox and Monda municipalities. The boundary of the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park makes a sharp turn here, taking us further away from the protected area. From a bird's eye view of the landscape, there are three very different natural environments: the gentle slate hills covered in Olive trees, Vines and Almond trees; Pine forest on peridotites and the Mediterranean scrubland, with Holm oaks, Cork oaks and patches of Chestnut trees occupying the less accessible areas. For a short section, our route coincides with the PR-A 279 (Guaro - Chiribenítez), to then turn eastwards, around an elongated ridge with various peaks over 600m above sea level. This rise divides the catchment areas of the Estepera and Seco streams, both of which belong to the Río Grande basin. We soon come to the Puerto Alto pass, the route's highest point. A stop-off here is much recommended, to take in the extensive views in the immense Guadalhorce Valley and the rugged profiles of the Canucha and Blanca mountain ranges. In their north-facing valleys, you can almost make out the silhouettes of some clumps of Pinsapo Spanish firs that, quite incredibly survived the forest fires. Just as miraculous, are the Cork oaks along the path edges, accompanied by Laurel-leaf



rockroses and Spiny broom. This serves as an example of the mixed forest that once occupied these parts. The PR-A 274 pathway (Guaro-Puerto Alto) joins us from the south and stays with us until the end of the stage.

When the GR-243 route turns south (**11 km**), a steep slope takes us down to the Arroyo Seco stream, which as its name in Spanish indicates, dries up in summer. Up ahead are splendid views of the villages of Yunquera, Alozaina and Guaro, or the iconic Sierra Alpujata formed of peridotite rock. The slopes adjacent to the Arroyo Seco stream have recently seen a growth in the cultivation of tropical produce, particularly avocados. Some traditional arable farmland remains however, on the river meadows. The systematic abandonment of farmland of all types has led to a certain recovery of the riverside vegetation. There is an increasing number of Willow, Basket willow, African tamarisk, Oleanders and, above all the Cane reed, which is not autochthonous to these parts and clogs up some stretches of the riverbed. On the earthy banks, several nesting bee-eaters have been sighted.

▲ On the horizon:
Sierra Canucha &
Sierra Blanca

“ Andalusian historians have often written about the qualities of Gauro’s agricultural landscape, where vineyards, Fig trees and Blackberry bushes flourish. From 1485, both the Mudejar population and the new Christian settlers maintained these traditional crops, although with the definitive expulsion of the Moors, the cultivation of Mulberry trees would eventually disappear. Almost the same fate fell on the vineyards, which were massacred by the phylloxera plague in the mid-19th century. It was from then on, that Olive trees were introduced on a massive scale, as well as the Almond tree, which would become one of the mainstays of this beautiful village. Its fruit, the almond, is an essential ingredient in the region’s highly acclaimed pastries and deserts. The village identifies so strongly with the Almond tree, that events are organised to appreciate the flowering period. ”

For a stretch, we walk alongside the Arroyo Seco stream, between fallow fields and arable land or citrus cultivation. The final kilometre of Stage 4 opens out into terraced fields and groves of a variety of trees, as a clear reward for the effort of the ascent. We enter Guaro from the northern part, where the town has spread along the road to Monda.

▼ The Valley
of the Arroyo
Seco stream

