

## THE COASTAL VALLEYS OF THE SIERRA BERMEJA MOUNTAIN RANGE

The Sierra Bermeja mountain range runs along the area between Manilva and Marbella, along the eastern reaches of the Málaga coast, consisting of four mountain ridges of similar origin. These are, from east to west: Sierra Real, Sierra de las Apretaderas, Sierra Palmitera and Sierra Bermeja. Characterised by their short length, a considerable number of watercourses run down from this range, particularly from Sierra Bermeja, the longest of which is the Guadalmanza River at 24 km. Another characteristic of these streams is the steep topography of their headwaters, with falls of more than 1000 m in height over a mere 15 to 20 km. It is worth pointing out that the volume of water they carry is significant at any time of year, which is not unusual considering that the annual rainfall in these mountains is between 1,200 and 1,500 mm. However, the most peculiar aspect is undoubtedly the soil which originates from a strange rock known as peridotite. Peridotite is rich in olivine, iron and very toxic heavy metals, despite which the pinsapo or Spanish fir tree (*Abies pinsapo*), an endemic fir tree of the Serranía de Ronda still flourishes in the Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja natural reserve. This lithological substrate gives rise to a host of endemic species of flowers found only in the Sierra Bermeja mountain range, which are the focal point for both research and the admiration of botanists and scientists generally. It is worth noting that the generic name for this mountain range stems from its red colour: the product of oxidation following contact with water and air.

The main river basins are: the Jordana, Vaquero, de Enmedio, Monterroso and Guadalobón streams; the Padrón and Castor rivers; the Velerín and de las Cañas streams, and the rivers Guadalmanza, Guadalmina, Guadaiza and Verde. The Concepción reservoir was built on the latter river in 1971. Later,

to guarantee the Costa del Sol water supply, the Guadalmanza, Guadalmina and Guadaiza were connected by a canal connecting these rivers to the reservoir.

There can be no doubt that these wild waters bring with them the gift of life to important ecosystems that have been acknowledged by the European Union as SACs (Special Areas of Conservation), but as they reach the narrow coastal belt their waters are mercilessly stripped from them due to the intensive use of water so closely associated with the tourist industry. Despite the insatiable appetite for building in the past decades, some of the landscapes near the mouths of the rivers have retained their cultural past, with market gardens and traditional crops which are farmed using irrigation and cropping techniques that are sustainable.

The strong runoff that occurs during the months when it is likely to rain, particularly in the autumn and spring, prevents these woodlands from harbouring riverine woodland. Only oleander, redoul, sedge and some willows withstand the onslaught of the spates which, additionally, create riverbeds covered in round boulders and an enormous jumble of rocks that have been dragged down by the current and others that have fallen from the banks. Despite all this, the fauna in this environment is as extensive as it is interesting. These Sierra Bermeja streams and rivers are the ideal habitat for some species of fish of considerable ecological value, like the Guadiana cyprinid (*Chondrostoma willkommii*), the Málaga chub (*Squalius malacitanus*) of the Genal River, the eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and the freshwater blenny (*Salarias fluviatilis*). Some amphibians are also well represented, like the small spotted toad (*Discoglossus jeanae*), the Iberian parsley frog (*Pelodytes ibericus*) or the common fire salamander (*Salamandra longirostris*). The Odonata deserve a separate mention, as the riparian habitat for this family of insects is unbeatable, with the following being of particular interest: *Gomphus graslinii*, *Zygonyx torridus*, *Erythromma viridulum*, *Macromia splendens*, *Oxygastra curtisii*, etc.

### **Freshwater pools in the coastal river basins of the Sierra Bermeja range:**

*Charco del Canalón, charco de las Mozas, charca de las Nutrias and charca de la Extranjera.*

### **Other bathing areas in the coastal river basins of the Sierra Bermeja range:**

**Bañeras del Velerín. Río Velerín:** Follow the A-7 (Autovía del Mediterráneo) from Marbella to Estepona, and take the second turning on the right after passing the sign for kilometre 161. Drive up the Camino de Nicola for 3.2 km, turning right to drive under the AP-7 flyover and crossing over to the Velerín. There is a steep hill at this stage, and after 2.2 km the tarmac runs out at the entrance to a private property. Turn right at this point and drive along the dirt track. After 700 m, there is a wide enough layby for you to park. Follow the Camino de Marc Burca on the left (blocked by a gate, but with an entrance for pedestrians) until you reach the four plunge pools on the Velerín, each connected by lovely waterfalls.

**Charcas del Abrón. Río Abrón:** Go to the car park that you used to visit the Charca de la Extranjera. Walk up the track until the road ends. Take the Bosquecillo footpath along the left bank of the Abrón (the left as you face downstream) until you reach a low marshy field where you have to walk along the riverbed. First, you will see the Arroyo del Infierno on the left, and slightly further up, in the same direction, the Abrón, along the first 200 m of which lie several plunge pools with deep green waters, waterfalls and natural waterslides. The walk there and back is over 15 km long, so it is tough and demanding.



**Charcas del Arroyo del Infierno. Arroyo del Infierno:** After Estepona in the direction of Algeciras on the A-7 (Autovía del Mediterráneo), take exit 153 and on reaching the roundabout next to a petrol station (where there is another roundabout), take the road leading to Casares and the Los Pedregales Park. After 3.5 km turn right following the road leading to the ADANA facilities.



Charco del Canalón.

*Your route meets the GR-249. If you follow the GR-249, this leads you to a ford from which you can descend to two beautiful pools, although you may also do so more easily from a winding dirt track where this meets a high voltage tower. Anyway, the largest pool lies behind the ADANA building, which you should find by following a footpath running off to the right before reaching the facilities. Access is complicated and requires orienteering skills.*

Río Castor / Estepona

**CHARCA DE LAS NUTRIAS****HOW TO GET THERE**

From the A-7, the old CN-340, take exit 160 and take the exit off the roundabout by the petrol station towards Viveros Estepona following the Alberdina road. After covering 3.5 km you will reach a wide esplanade next to the AP-7. Park here and continue on foot through the Los Molinos-El Nicio Ethnological Park. The dirt track continues for another 2.5 km until it approaches the Castor River, which you will have seen earlier while walking through a delightful oak woodland. When the dirt track ends, follow the footpath towards the riverbank, which rises along the left bank of the river (when looking downstream). Over the next 750 m, make your way as best you can to overcome any obstacles in your way.

## INTERESTING FACTS

The area is surrounded by jagged hillsides covered with maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*) and light coloured limestone through which the water cascades down from a small waterfall that feeds this large pool. If we continue upstream, there are two breath-taking cauldron-shaped plunge pools. The pool's name comes, of course, from the presence of this shy mustelid. There are also some ruined lime kilns in the area.

### Coordinates:

x: 309019 / y: 4040074 / z: 142 m

**Location:** Complicada

**Access:** Cómodo

**Protected Area:** No incluido

## Please Note

*The centre of the pool is deeper than an adult. Some dare to leap from one of the rock faces on its sides, but this is seriously dangerous, not only because of the jump, but also because of how difficult it is to reach the ledge. It is well worth going down the river along the riverbed itself to enjoy the rest of the pools, particularly the one located at a weir very close to the path used to reach the first charco. The only place to sit and rest is on the edge of the pool in the centre, covered by small and medium sized round boulders. There is not much shade, and the sun reaches the pool virtually all day long.*

