

Stage 21 EL CHORRO · CARRATRACA · ARDALES

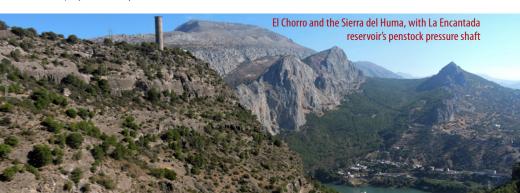
THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

The Stage travels south-west to Carratraca, with 400 metres in elevation gain in just 3 kilometres, on fairly uneven terrain. This climb takes you up to Las Mesas de Villaverde and the upper reservoir. It then descends on a tarmac track until it reaches the spur of Las Viñas, which has very sparse vegetation covering. Dotted with country houses that are connected by a network of tracks, it also has tiny pockets of primitive Holm oak forest and some shrubs occupying the ancient non-irrigated land. These ridges form the right flank of the River Guadalhorce, which flows 350 metres below and from which the path now gradually moves away, at a height of 665 metres above sea level. Entering the municipal area of Carratraca, the route dives into the Pine forest of Sierra Blanquilla, with a spectacular sandy path that brings you out at the spa town.

It then changes course to north-west as far as Ardales, dropping down to Las Cañas stream and passing under the A-357 road. The rest of the stage consists mainly of uphill tracks all the way to the Puerto de Málaga pass and then gradually coming down as you take a detour around the Cerro del Olivo hill. The route reaches its destination not far past La Torre and the Chapel of El Calvario, close to the Rock of Ardales and its castle.

Beginning in the municipality of Álora, it soon passes through that of Ardales until kilometre 13.4. From here, it is on to Carratraca territory's, before returning to Ardales at the Puerto de Málaga (km 18.5) until the finish line.

The real highlight here is the scenery as you go from one lookout point to another. You are rewarded with views over the Nature Reserve of the Gaitanes Gorge, the Guadalhorce valley, the Blanquilla and Agua hills and the Turón river valley. The Cerro San Pedro is another excellent viewpoint, but this time over a large expanse of the province of Malaga. It also links two historically and archaeologically important sites. The first is the Mozarab ruins of Bobastro castle and church, founded by the eminent Umar Ibn Hafsun and the second, the thermal baths of Carratraca, founded by Trinidad Grund, along with another of her pioneering tourism projects nearby, the Ardales Cave.







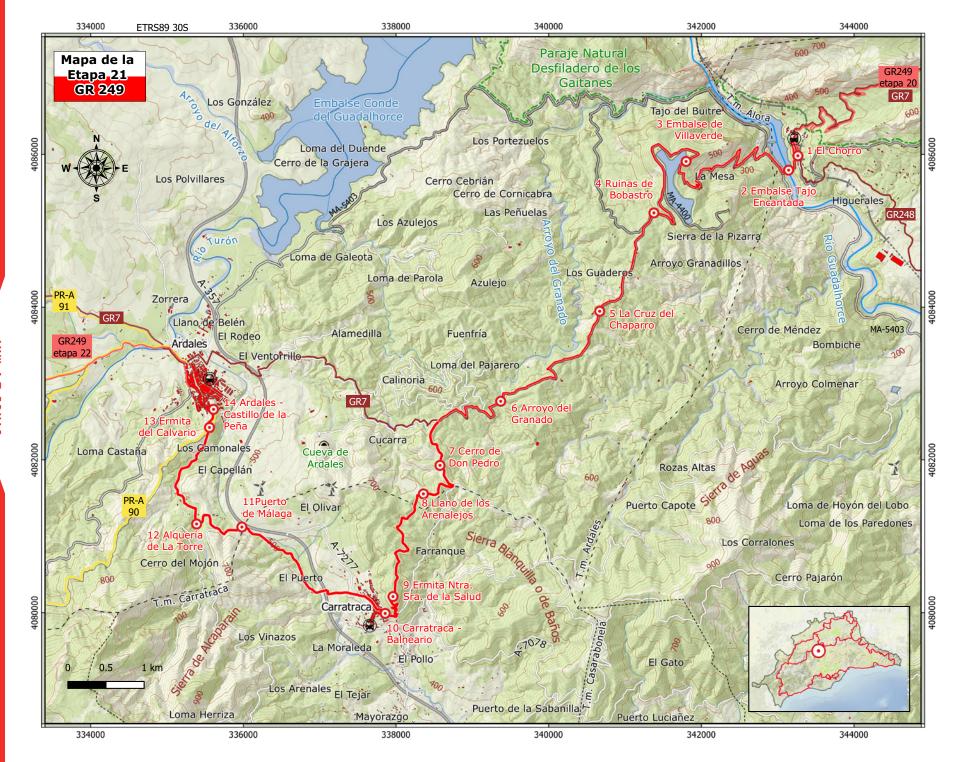


• Road traffic circulating by the reservoir and in Bobastro

GR 248 The Guadalhorce Great Path, links up at start GR7 E4 Overlaps up to km 11

PR-A 90 El Calvario Capellán Hill – Turón, links up at start

		Υ		HEIGHT ABOVE SL	DISTANCE
1. El Chorro 343265	/	4085980	/	230 m	Km 0,0
2. Tajo de la Encantada reservoir 343145	/	4085795	/	175 m	Km 0,7
3. Villaverde reservoir 341800	/	4085905	/	565 m	Km 3,8
4. Bobastro ruins 341380	/	4085235	/	480 m	Km 6,3
5. La Cruz del Chaparro 340665	/	4083945	/	515 m	Km 7,9
6. Arroyo de Granadao stream 339370	/	4082770	/	470 m	Km 10,2
7. Don Pedro hill 338575	/	4081930	/	645 m	Km 12,2
8. Los Arenalejos plains 338360	/	4081555	/	620 m	Km 13,2
9. Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Salud 337960	/	4080210	/	630 m	Km 15,1
10. Carratraca Balneario 337855	/	4079990	/	530 m	Km 16,0
11. Málaga pass 335980	/	4081120	/	550 m	Km 18,5
12. La Torre Hamlet 335385	/	4081160	/	530 m	Km 19,4
13. Chapel of El Calvario 335555	/	4082425	/	515 m	Km 21,2
14. Ardales - La Peña castle 335610	/	4082660	/	465 m	Km 21,7



ROUTE DESCRIPTION

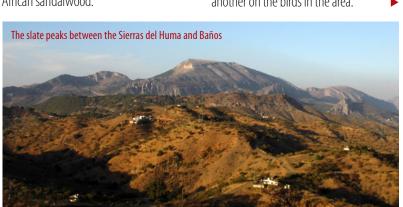


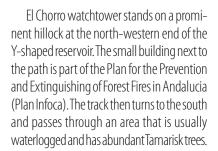
The hydroelectric power plant of the Tajo de la Encantada reservoir and the Villaverde dam are connected by a penstock (a pipeline), well worth the effort of walking its full length, from start to finish. You follow it in a westerly direction along, what was originally the service road between the lower reservoir, the upper reservoir and the penstock. The numerous bends are due to the steep incline.

The stage begins at El Chorro train station and sets off along the road that crosses the dam of the Tajo de la Encantada reservoir. Then it turns right at the T-junction and continues to a little over a kilometre from the start. At the 11-kilometre sign of the MA-5403, you turn off onto a gravel track (km 1.2) heading west. Just a couple of bends down this track, you turn off again, this time onto a footpath, very close to where the penstock comes out of the ground. Continue uphill through very sparse Pine forest. Its floor was once covered by Olive and Almond trees, but now by Mediterranean fan palms, Kidneyvetch, White broom and African sandalwood

Further on, at the base of a steep rock face, you have an excellent chance to inspect its peculiar mixture of yellowish sandstone and aggregate, predominantly calcareous but with pebbles of other rocks such as slate, schist or peridotite. In the strata higher up, there are formations as a result of erosion in the form of vaults and honeycombs, which are very typical in this area.

Throughout this part of the route there are spectacular views over El Chorro, the Guadalhorce valley, the Castellones and the Pine forest where the previous stage ends. The footpath widens, turning into a track as it passes through a Pine forest of larger trees with a few Savin Junipers. Rather suddenly, vou come face to face with the concrete wall of the upper reservoir. Take the detour to the right here, which climbs up to the upper edge of the dam at the north-east end (km 3.8), a restricted area, and then continues along the perimeter track that follows the base of the long dam. A clearing among the pines soon offers one of the best views of Los Gaitanes Gorge and its two chasms. Over to the right is the Sierra del Huma and a little of the Sierra del Almorchón, in particular the sharp outline of the mountain of El Convento. There is an information panel about the scenery and another on the birds in the area





Bobastro and Umar Ibn Hafsun → Up to km 6.3

After 5.6 kilometres, you join the MA-4400 service road for the reservoir, precisely at a large bend in the road, offering a possible deviation. The route continues down to the right, going along the road verges until you reach the information point of the archaeological site of Bobastro. However, taking a left at this bend, takes you to a viewpoint at the Mesas de Villaverde, close to the upper archaeological areas. There is a ledge with difficult-to-access cave houses and Mozarab guarries, known as the Casa de la Reina Mora (House of the Moorish Oueen).

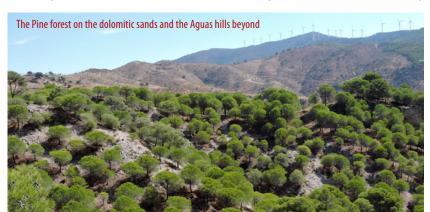
Umar Ibn Hafsun (Omar Ben Hafsun in Spanish historiography) chose Bobastro for the capital of his rebellion against the Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba. Part of the fortified settlement remains at the top of Las Mesas, but some of its outbuildings were lost during the construction of the dam in the

1970s. At the 6.6-kilometre mark, you can visit the ruins of the cave church and other remains (during opening hours). They are well located strategically, protected from the winds and facing west. The rebellion became a tug-of-war that lasted 50 years between the successive emirs and Hafsun's descendants. It finally came to an end when Abderraman III captured the site in 928.

The farmed ridges of Las Viñas and hill of Don Pedro → Un to km 11

The Aleppo pine forest ends just as you turn off the road to the left, after travelling a kilometre along it. The track you join is in good condition and runs along the watershed divide of the Granados stream and the Guadalhorce river, which flow in opposite directions here incidentally. The ridge is formed of clay soils, with underlying slate and schist rocks and dotted with country houses and farm buildings. You pass various private residences, such as El Bolero house, Las Zamarrillas and El Merchano and El Boina ranch. The ancient vineyards lost during the phylloxera epidemic were replaced by non-irrigated crops, predominantly Almond trees, while other areas were left for grazing goats and sheep with White broom and Slender broom.

There are numerous tracks going off both left and right, but make sure to continue along





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the crest of the ridge, heading south-west and with numerous water supply pipes running alongside. If you turn around, you have some excellent panoramic views of the Sierra del Huma and the Central Limestone Arc, which includes the Torcal de Antequera and the Guadalhorce Valley with the AVE high-speed train line. Up ahead, is the Sierra del Agua with its row of wind turbines. The Cruz del Chaparro, at kilometre 8 is an excellent spot to take a break.

Atkilometre 9, the path gets very close to the Granado stream, with private houses scattered on its slopes and a few small woodland areas of Holm oaks or reforested Pines. A kilometre and a half further on, you cross the stream just where it narrows and there is a string of rapids, before you climb up the other side. You now find yourself back on Monte Público (Public Upland) in Pine forest. This leads on to the Riela pass, followed by the Alamedilla area and finally to the fork where the GR 7 E4 separates from the Gran Senda de Málaga. This goes directly to Ardales, passing by its famous cave, which is open to visitors.

The Blanquilla hills (also known as Sierra de Baños) Up to km 16

The route gradually bends round to the south, passing through the last area of Pine forest on this section and soon arrives at the Romero pass. A little further on, you leave the forestry track for good, making a sharp right turn onto a footpath. Going straight on would take you directly to Carratraca (to the right), whereas the other option takes you to the crossroads at El Mozal. The footpath you turn onto, is the third decent climb of the day and takes you up to the top of the San Pedro hill, a commanding ridge formed of schist with magnificent views. Geologically

The whitewashed houses of Carratraca among Pine trees and non-irrigated farmland



speaking, this area is a dividing line. Since it lacks the water supply from the reservoir that the houses before the Granado stream had. most of these other properties are abandoned and Mediterranean shrubs thrive all around as a result. At Los Arenaleios or Llano de los Pinos (Plains of the Pine trees), the vegetation changes to woodland of Stone pines, growing in the sandy soils of the dolomite rock which give the Sierra Blanquilla (Whitened Hills) its name. A rickety wire fence (km 13.2) gives way to the municipal area of Carratraca. For the next few kilometres, the charming pathway rises and falls under the cover of the Pine trees, ending up near the ruins of the Shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Salud. As a replacement, a small chapel was built a little further down with a sculpture of the Virgen inside. It is here that the village of Carratraca comes into view for the first time.

From Carratraca to Ardales, via the Málaga pass To the end of the stage

The road winds up to the eastern part of Carratraca (km 16), on Calle Glorieta street. Passing in front of the picturesque town hall and the nearby tourist information office, you come to the jewel of this whitewashed hamlet, the Balneario. The strong smell of



the sulphurous waters emanates from the mid-19th century building with wrought ironwork on its front. The baths and the village itself owe their existence to these waters and result in very attractive sites to visit. Continuing through the streets in a northerly direction, you come to the Plaza de la Constitución and the Avenida de Andalucía. Continue along this until you come to an alleyway to the west, which leads to the old road near a livestock drinking trough. You then begin a descent in a north-westerly direction through fields of non-irrigated crops. To pass under the A-357 you have to negotiate several bends and pass through a tunnel. On the other side of the road, the Cortijo del Lagar has been converted into a sheepfold on the ancient Camino del Colmenar.

This track passes areas of mountainside in the process of re-cultivation on the left, while orchards of Olive and Almond trees lie next to the Las Cañas stream on the right. The watercourse's source is at the nearby Málaga pass (km 18.5), which is located between the wind turbines and the northern slopes of the Sierra de Alcaparaín mountain range. All the springs here feed tributaries of the Guadalhorce river, but take very different routes to get there. To the north are two very dry channels, the Cantarranas and Torre streams which support some interesting patches of Oleanders. They

flow into the River Turón just before being dammed, and so contribute to the province's largest river. The Arroyo de las Cañas goes off to the south and accompanies the A-357 road for a good stretch until it also reaches the Guadalhorce, near Pizarra. In this section close to the track, Oleanders and Brambles flourish as the water flows over the clay, sandstone and slate.

You climb a little further, accompanied by two rows of trees, until we start to descend in a north-westerly direction. The hill formed of schist and covered in boulders to your right is El Olivo. Also close by is El Conejo stream, which leads to a confluence of streams in an area with numerous farmhouses. This is the hamlet of La Torre (km 19.4), which the watercourse to one side shares its name with and from where you turn slightly to the north. There are some large Eucalyptus trees and dykes to reduce soil erosion, but you soon leave the valley floor to begin the last climb of the day, near another shelter for goats. Continue to follow this main track, which leads to the small chapel of El Calvario at a crossroads with privileged views of the village of Ardales and the castle of La Peña. It is just a short way down, but when you reach the first houses of the village, stage 21 of the Great Malaga Path comes to a close.

