STAGE 4: ARRIATE • RONDA

THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

Stage 4 takes the route through the Béticas Mountains and brings the Alternative Route 249.5 between Campillos and Ronda to an end. It does so through an area of clay and sandstone, in the wide river valley of the Guadalcobacín River and its tributary, La Ventilla stream. Mirrored on both sides is a landscape of vegetable plots, cereals, olive groves and vineyards, while Holm oak and Pine woodland crowns the hills. The route runs parallel to the river, flowing to the south-west and turns south as soon as it crosses over the watercourse, to then make its way up to Ronda.

At the start and end of the Stage are two unique spots. Beginning at the narrow, winding course of La Ventilla stream, declared a Riverside Site of Environmental Interest for its natural treasures. This also cuts through and forms the backbone of the pretty village of Arriate. At the end is the Pine forest with century-old Holm oaks in the traditional pastureland of the Dehesa del Mercadillo, protected as a Semi-urban Park.

The route is fairly easy, with no steep inclines. The first part of the route climbs several times up above the Guadalcobacín River before dropping down again to the riverbank with its luscious greenery. The last section does climb to some 200 metres above the riverside, which lies at 500 metres above sea level. At one point, you must also cross this at a ford.

The main feature of the route, regarding the human influence and the landscape, is its fertile agricultural land. It characterises the whole way from Arriate onwards, through the Huertas Primeras to the Huerta Alcubillas, where it crosses the railway line. A large part of the route runs through the area of land between the well-irrigated farmland and the dry, rainfed land, belonging to hundreds of small properties. These make up a tremendously attractive mosaic and you are rewarded with panoramic views from the end of the stage.

In contrast to this anthropized environment is the large biodiversity, which is a result of the respectful and traditional way of farming and the kilometres of natural perimeter hedges, island forests and the riverside forest of the Guadalcobacín. It is a highly recommended stage for observing wildlife.

The Pine forest of the Dehesa del Mercadillo from the agricultural fields of the Guadalcobacín



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GR 249.5 STAGE 4: ARRIATE · RONDA







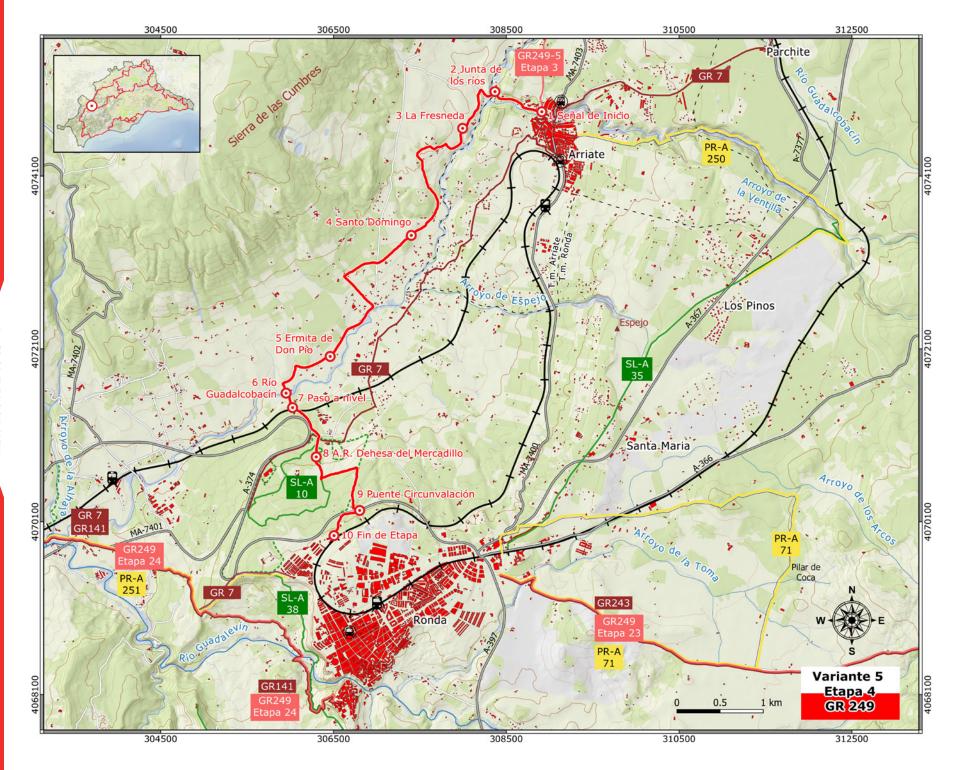
- Road traffic circulating on tarmac sections
- Wading through the River Guadalcobacín at km 6.5
- Level crossing without barriers at km 6.7



From Arriate to Ronda, link up at start Tarifa to Athens, crosses Stage 3 at km 7

The Profesor Paco Marín Path, partial overlap

P O I N T	Х		Υ		HEIGHT ABOVE SL	DISTANCE
1.Sign at starting point	308910	/	4074845	/	590 m	Km 0.0
2. Confluence of rivers	308370	/	4075080	/	570 m	Km 0.6
3.La Fresnada	307995	/	4074650	/	580 m	Km 1.4
4.Santo Domingo	307400	/	4073415	/	570 m	Km 3.4
5. Chapel-shrine of Don Pio	306460	/	4072015	/	520 m	Km 5.6
6. River Guadalcobacín	305950	/	4071590	/	500 m	Km 6.5
7.Level crossing	306030	/	4071420	/	520 m	Km 6.7
8.Rec. Area Dehesa del Mercadillo	306300	/	4070850	/	590 m	Km 7.4
9. Bridge over the ringroad	306800	/	4070230	/	680 m	Km 8.8
10.End of the Stage	306505	/	4069940	/	710 m	Km 9.2





ROUTE DESCRIPTION



The signpost for the start of the last stage of the Alternative 249.5 is in the La Aurora square, in the north-eastern part of Arriate. It heads west along the Ronda track (or Camino del Cortijo del Marqués) and passes a small fountain on your right. The cobbled pathway runs between the sandstone rockfaces with occasional caves and a high wall, and soon joins the tarmac. There are views towards Arriate and the first and second Huertas (agricultural fields). It then drops down to the level of La Ventilla stream with its pretty Poplar trees. At its confluence with the Guadalcobacín (km 0.650), you leave Arriate's territory and enter Ronda.

Going along a gravel track momentarily, you turn south-west at the first turn-off after crossing the Margués stream. A small pass brings the village of Arriate into view, with the striking Residence of San José and its church. Going off to the left are the tracks towards the agricultural fields of Vallecillo and Los López and you take a small path among crops called El Camino de la Fresneda.

Agricultural land of La Cruz Plains Up to km 6.5

You now continue along the paths that divide the fields of cereals, olives and other dry crops. Holm oak woodland on the left lies just before the bottom of the river valley. When the path opens up a little, you can see the city of Ronda in the background with the Armola and the Jarastepar mountain ranges behind. The river emerges from the small gorge

and is lined with vegetable gardens on both sides.

The Path goes uphill, heads towards and crosses an Olive grove and reaches a concrete track (km 1.9) which climbs up to the area of La Merced. Then it drops down past numerous country houses, some of which have been converted into tourist accommodation. Many of them have their name displayed by the entrance.

You then come to an extremely interesting area, where an irrigation channel has created productive agricultural land on the left with abundant Walnut trees. whereas on the other side, are Olive groves and cereal fields. The path flattens out until the next junction, from where it climbs slightly to pass the impressive building of Santo Domingo on the right. It then begins to loop round once again, through the area known as Los Frontones.

The Camino de los Contrabandistas (Smugglers' Way) that you now take, crosses the tarmacked Ronda track. This is a main road lined with hotels, wineries and large cattle farms near the area known as Panta. With views across to the mountain ranges in the Province of Cádiz, a bend to the south takes you down to the district of El Polvorilla, before turning south-west and accompanying the now closer Guadalcobacín. The irrigation channel is lined here with Ouince trees. just like a fence of greenery as well as outpost of the famous fruit and vegetable producer in the region. A building with religious influences, the chapel-shrine of Don Pío is on the left and a high wall in a curve leads you down to the river. You must cross this river at the ford (km 6.5), taking great care.



The riverside vegetation, rainfed crops and woodland at the start of the Stage



The riverside vegetation of the Guadalcobacín, although greatly influenced by being next to farmland, gives the landscape some extra biodiversity, with groves of Poplars and Willows. Heading uphill to the south, two major obstructions stand in the way. The first is the Algeciras to Bobadilla railway line, which you cross at a level crossing without barriers; the second, the A-374 road, which you follow round, keeping the embankment to the west of you, in among ancient Holm oaks. This brings you to the Llanos de la Cruz road and close to two important establishments; Badillo fireworks and, on the other side, the Stallion Station (a tradition that dates back to the 19th century and is currently run by the Armed Forces) with a riding school. This is also the crossing point for Stage 3 of the GR 7 E4 Tarifa to Athens Path, as it passes through the province of Malaga in a south-west to north-east direction.

A short way further on, you reach the Recreational Area of Dehesa del Mercadillo (km 8.0), where the route partially coincides with the SL-A 10, the Profesor Paco Marín route, once again passing through centuriesold Holm oaks mixed in amongst the tables with benches. The Centre for the Defence of the Forest is quite close by, and looking back from this spot you can see where the Stage has travelled. Arriate, La Cimada and Los Prados are in the background to the north east, while to the west are the peaks of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park.

The Pine forest of the Dehesa del Mercadillo was reforested in the middle of the last century, and has numerous Holm oaks. It was declared a Semi-urban Park in the year 2000, providing a forest of almost 140 hectares very close to the city of Ronda. The latter part of its name (Mercadillo, meaning small market) is probably due to it being the site of a cattle market in the past, and we know that it was partially covered by vineyards up until the phylloxera plague arrived.

The Alternative Route curves round gradually along a wide track that splits off from the Local Path (SL), while tall Stone pines are on the right and numerous small paths join it. There is a dry stone wall on the left that separates the Park from the Almond and Olive groves. A large abandoned house comes up on the right and an underpass allows you to cross under the Ronda ring road. You then ioin the Fuente de Don Pedro Way, through similar scenery and with some steep slopes to the south-west lead to the end of the stage at the bend in Sevilla street, close to the neighbourhood of La Dehesa.

