

THE GUADIARO RIVER BASIN

The Guadiaro River is, together with the Genil, the largest river flowing through the province of Málaga. In addition, it bathes the shores of a good number of protected natural areas. It finishes its journey in the Mediterranean, near Sotogrande, in the municipal district of San Roque (Cádiz). The basin covers an area of 1,505 km² and the length of the watercourse is 82 km. The average flow rate is estimated at 30 m³/s, well above the rest of the rivers born in the province of Málaga.

The highest source of the Guadiaro is located in the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park, specifically in the Cañada del Cuerno, in the heart of Ronda's Spanish fir forest. Further down, it is joined by the Arroyo de la Fuenfría stream and other tributaries from the Sierra del Oreganal, including the Fuente de Malillo spring. From this point onwards it is called Río Grande. Soon it leaves the limestone mountains, carving the spectacular Cañón de Castillejos and entering Ronda's plateau under the name of Guadalevín. In the Paraje de la Indiana, the river is joined by an important tributary, the Guadalcobacín, formed among others by the Arroyo de la Ventilla, a very lively watercourse that has sculpted a beautiful and remarkably geo-diverse gorge, in the municipal district of Arriate. The confluence of the rivers Guadalevín and Guadalcobacín marks the geographical point where it takes the name Guadiaro, although some authors insist that it occurs a few kilometres further down, where it is joined by the river Gaduares after the Cueva del Gato. The next interesting landmark is the spectacular natural monument of the Cañón de las Buitreras, a canyon patiently carved through limestone rock over thousands of years. Slightly further south, in the municipal district of Cortes del la Frontera, it borders the Los Alcornocales Natural Park. From here, it leaves the Serranía de Ronda and enters the Campo de Gibraltar.

The Guadiaro has two important tributaries, the Genal and the Hozgarganta. Both rivers combined are more important in terms of flow than any other of Málaga's rivers. The official source of the Genal River is the natural monument of the Nacimiento de Igualeja, a Vauclusian spring, and it is the backbone of the Genal Valley sub-region,

a perfect example of ethnology and agroforestry in the Mediterranean forest. The Hozgarganta River arises from the confluence of the Pasadallana and Pasadablanca springs, originating from the Sierra del Aljibe, the highest mountain in Los Alcornocales. In the Paraje de las Canillas, it leaves the province of Málaga and enters the Campo de Gibraltar. The Guadiaro Valley is part of the mosaic of natural and cultural landscapes of the Serranía de Ronda, famous for its important karst, dehesas and agriculture.

Listing the line-up of natural assets of the Guadiaro river basin, according to the different ecosystems it flows through, is an arduous task, but we would like to mention some of them: the cork oak grove and its management in the three courses; the laurel forest type vegetation and Pyrenean oak groves linked to the upper course of the Hozgarganta; the presence of the Spanish fir tree in the Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja natural reserve, the home of the upper course of the river Almárchar, the Genal River's main tributary, and, in the Ronda-side of the Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park: the Havaral chestnut groves, in the upper Genal; the alder groves in the Guadiaro, Hozgarganta and Genal rivers, which are unique in the province of Málaga... Similarly, the three valleys offer their orientation and orography to the cyclical migrations of birds between the African and European continents, and create the perfect biotopes for the largest colonies of griffon vulture in Europe and for herbivores as interesting as deer, a local species of roe deer and mountain goat. The otter in these rivers never disappeared and some fish species maintain good populations, such as the Málaga chub (*Squalius malacitanus*), an endemic species of the Guadiaro river basin and some Sierra Bermeja rivers, and ray-finned fish such as the boga (*Pseudochondrostoma willkommii*) and the comilleja (*Cobitis paludica*).

In historical terms, the rivers Guadiaro and Genal have acted as natural corridors used by different civilisations to gain access from the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts to the immense natural wealth of the Serranía de Ronda. Prehistoric humans recorded their activities in the famous cave paintings of the Cueva de la Pileta. Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Berbers settled here, as well as the so-called romantic travellers of the Camino Inglés. Nowadays, touring the valley by train on the picturesque Algeciras-Ronda railway line is extremely enjoyable.





Río Guadiaro, on its way through Jimera de Líbar.

Freshwater pools in the Guadiaro river basin: Charco Frío, charco de la Barranca, charca de la Ermita, charca de la Llana, charca de la Zúia, charco del Moro, charco del Chalet, charco de las Pepas, charco Azul, charco de Moclón, charco Esteban, charco Puente de San Juan, charco de la Escribana, charco de Pontoco and charco del Tajo Molino.

Other bathing areas in the Guadiaro river basin:

Plozillo del Puente de la Ventilla. Río Guadalcobacín: a short distance from Ronda. Take the exit signposted between km 36 and 35 on the A-367 (Ronda-Ardales). Access is from the bridge on the old road. A path on one side of the bridge leads down to the Manantial de la Ventilla, and the swimming hole or Plozillo, as it is called in Arriate, is only a stone's throw away downstream.

Charco Azul de Castillejos. Río Guadalevín: Following the Puerta Verde de Ronda to Marbella route, vehicular access is available to the Guadalevín ford. Up ahead, after 2.5 km, leave the dirt track and continue along the river bank. After 4 km, you will reach the two spectacular pools, of which the top pool, preceded by a waterfall, is the smallest. This was a much frequented location by the people of Ronda in years gone by.



Pozas del Tajo. Río Guadalevín: Walking down the Camino de los Molinos starting from the Plaza de María Auxiliadora, along twisting footpaths with views of the impressive Puente Nuevo, eventually you will reach the Guadalevín River. There is a small irrigation dam here where you can swim. The largest pool lies upriver under a 30 m high waterfall. This place is not recommended for people that are not physically fit or that suffer from vertigo.

Charco de la Cal. Río Seco: On the outskirts of Igualeja, following the MA-7300 road towards Pujerra, take the dirt track leading off to the left just after crossing the bridge over the Río Seco. 2.3 km later you will reach the Cortijo Algarca. You can reach this spot in

a four-wheel drive vehicle. On foot, walk downhill to the left down a steep slope to the river. Walk upstream for another 100 m or so to reach the pool, where sheep were also washed after sheering in years gone by.



Arroyuela.

Río Guadiaro / Jimera de Líbar

CHARCA DE LA ERMITA**HOW TO GET THERE**

From Jimera de Líbar, follow the MA-8307 road towards Cortes de la Frontera and Benaoján. Before reaching the junction, take the lane from km 6.5 leading to the Estación de Jimera de Líbar district. Park your car on the main road and cross the tunnel that takes you to the other side of the railway line. The bathing area can be found above the RENFE station, outside the hamlet, by walking along the GR-141 (Gran Senda de la Serranía de Ronda) towards Benaoján. You can also get there by car by taking the viaduct over the railway line to the station building. The only inconvenience is that there are not many parking spaces.

INTERESTING FACTS

In all likelihood, this is the first river pool used as a tourist attraction in the province of Málaga. There is a wooden walkway along the riverbank above the breakwater to help canoeists access the river. The surroundings are rather uneven and the recreational area is large and shaded by ash trees (*Fraxinus angustifolia*). Some blocks of carved stones have been installed, which are used as seats or tables. The pool is large and you can just about touch the bottom. Grey herons (*Ardea cinerea*), cattle egrets and even cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) are often seen among the trees of the riverside forest. The **Charca de la Cura** is upstream, among eucalyptus trees.

Please Note

We ask that you do not jump into the water from the wooden walkway, as the height is considerable. The pool, as we have pointed out, is rarely very deep, although this could change from one year to another. Care should also be taken with the current which, though not strong, may pose some difficulty for the younger members of the family. The pool is rather long and, upstream, it is hidden from view by the vegetation, so it is important to keep children within sight at all times.

Coordinates:

x: 296167 / y: 4059997 / z: 397 m

Location: easy

Access: convenient

Protected Area: Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park

