

# THE SIERRAS OF EXTREMADURA



### About the Author

Gisela Radant Wood is a walker, writer, photographer, avid reader and passionate about Extremadura. She has lived in the Sierra de Montánchez for the past 10 years and walks there on a regular basis. Home is a finca outside the village of Almoharín with a husband, a dog, seven sheep, occasional lambs, four hens and 150 olive trees. Ten years ago Gisela set up the website [www.walkingextremadura.com](http://www.walkingextremadura.com) and is actively involved in promoting the area as a walking paradise. This is her second book about walking in Extremadura.

Gisela loves the social side of walking with friends in the Almoharín walking group, but really prefers the quiet of walking alone in the countryside she loves.

# THE SIERRAS OF EXTREMADURA

by Gisela Radant Wood

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JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL  
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While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/848/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/848/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly-available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

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*Front cover:* Trevejo Castle dominates the small village of Trevejo in the western Sierra de Gata



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










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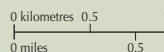
# Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	start point
	finish point
	start/finish point
	woodland
	urban areas
	international border
	regional border
	summit
	refuge
	building
	monastery/convent/cross
	castle
	water feature
	waterfall
	viewpoint
	mirador
	bridge
	picnic area
	cattle grid
	bus stop
	other feature

## Relief in metres

2400–2600	
2200–2400	
2000–2200	
1800–2000	
1600–1800	
1400–1600	
1200–1400	
1000–1200	
800–1000	
600–800	
400–600	
200–400	
0–200	

SCALE: 1:50,000



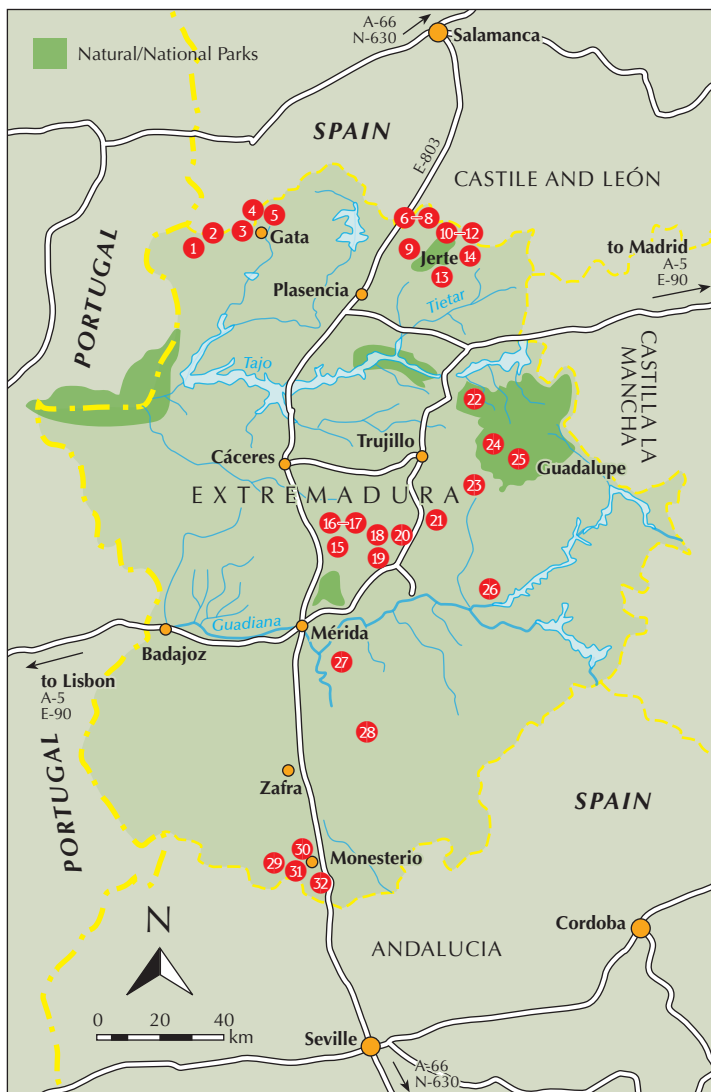
Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

## GPX files

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/848/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/848/GPX).



*Waterfall in the Sierra de Gredos*





*Chozo (traditional shepherd's hut) in the Sierra de Gredos (Walk 14)*



## INTRODUCTION

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*Walking down to Puente Sacristán (Walk 10)*



Ancient footpaths lined with yellow broom, purple lavender and white cistus lead in and out of dark pine woods that provide cool shade. High rolling pastures, bright with wildflowers, are framed by snow-capped mountains which puncture the blue sky. The white-washed, red-roofed buildings of small villages can be seen tucked into the folds of hillsides. Cows graze the lower slopes and the valley floor, their bells providing the only intermittent sound; griffon vultures circle above the peaks. There is not another person in sight.

Extremadura remains Spain's least-known and least-visited region, but very gradually, walkers, lovers of nature's beauty and seekers of peace

are finding their way there. Many arrive not knowing quite what to expect. None leave disappointed.

The region is sparsely populated in modern terms: it has only 26 residents per square kilometre, while England has 406. The largest city in Extremadura is Badajoz with a little over 150,000 inhabitants. Most people live in small towns or villages each with their distinct character and quite separate from the next. Ribbon development does not exist in Extremadura.

What does exist, in abundance, is open countryside, mountains, hills, valleys, lakes, rivers, forests, pasture and thousands of kilometres of paths criss-crossing the region. These paths are perfect for walking: some are part

*A chance meeting in the Sierra de Gredos in June*



of an ancient communication network from the days when people walked everywhere; some are delightful meanderings around the agricultural areas that surround every village. The oldest are paved with granite, others are soft earth. Many are shaded with trees and have verges profuse with flowers, in season.

The untouched countryside is a haven for wildlife and birds, and Extremadura has many protected areas. Monfragüe National Park lies at the heart of where the Tiétar and Tajo rivers meet; the area is covered in forest and is famous as a nesting site for many species of raptor. Further west, where the Tajo crosses into Portugal, the Tajo International Natural Park has been established

where the rivers Erjas and Sever join the bigger river. The oldest rocks in the peninsula sit in the middle of the Cáceres plain, and the Monumental Park of Los Barruecos has spectacular granite rocks of at least 575 million years old. Its lakes attract birds year-round.

Cornalvo Natural Park is, in reality, a huge area of *dehesa* – open parkland covered with spaced-out evergreen holm oaks. Its lake, formed by a dam built in Roman times, attracts birds and wildfowl year-round. La Garganta de los Infiernos Natural Park in the Jerte valley incorporates part of the southern slopes of the Sierra de Gredos, while as recently as 2011 a GeoPark was formed uniting the areas of Las Villuercas, Los Ibores and Jara.



All of these parks have hundreds of kilometres of designated and signed walking paths and are testimony to Extremadura's continuing commitment to preserving its natural environment.

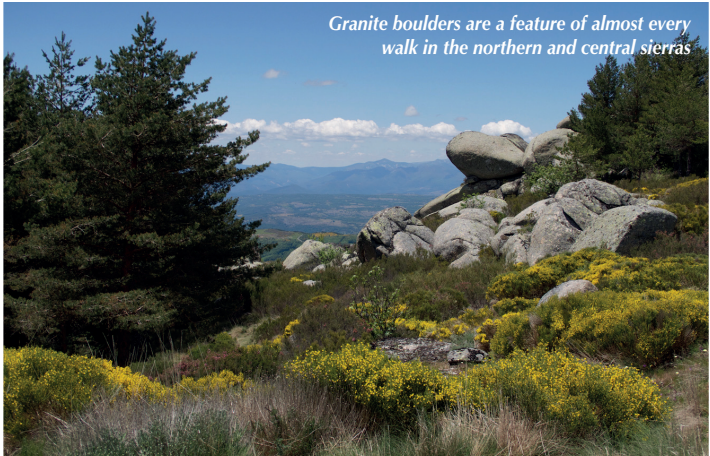
The biggest Protection Areas are, without doubt, for birds. These have the acronym ZEPA (Zona Especial de Protección para Aves); the Sierra de Pela and the Sierra Grande de Hornachos, both featured in this book, are ZEPA areas. The Sierra de San Pedro and much of the area around Cáceres are also designated ZEPA.

Quite apart from its natural heritage, Extremadura also boasts three World Heritage Sites: Roman Mérida, Renaissance Cáceres and Guadalupe. These cities, along with Trujillo, Coria, Plasencia, Badajoz and Jerez

de los Caballeros, to name but a few, are wonderful places to explore on foot and soak up the atmosphere of past centuries. However, Cáceres, Mérida and Badajoz also have their dynamic, modern sides, which can add a different dimension to a walking holiday.

### GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Extremadura sits west of Madrid and east of the Portuguese border. It is the fifth largest autonomous region in Spain and is divided into two provinces: Cáceres and Badajoz. At 41,633 square kilometres it is just larger than Switzerland. From the border with Castile and León in the north to the Andalucian border in the south is 280 kilometres. On a map the region looks like a layered cake: from



*Granite boulders are a feature of almost every walk in the northern and central sierras*

## THE SIERRAS OF EXTREMADURA

north to south are the Sistema Central mountains, the Tajo river basin, the Montes de Toledo, the Guadiana river basin and the Sierra Morena.

Across the north, within the Sistema Central, lie the Sierra de Gata, Sierra de Béjar and the Sierra de Gredos. These forested sierras contain the highest peaks in Extremadura, reaching over 2000m. They are snow-covered for up to six months of the year. Springs that well up high in the sierras are engorged with snow melt and form numerous rivers which keep the valleys permanently green.

South of these mountains lies the Tajo river basin with its main tributaries: the Tiétar, Alagón, Almonte and Ibor. The Tajo is the longest river in the Iberian peninsula.

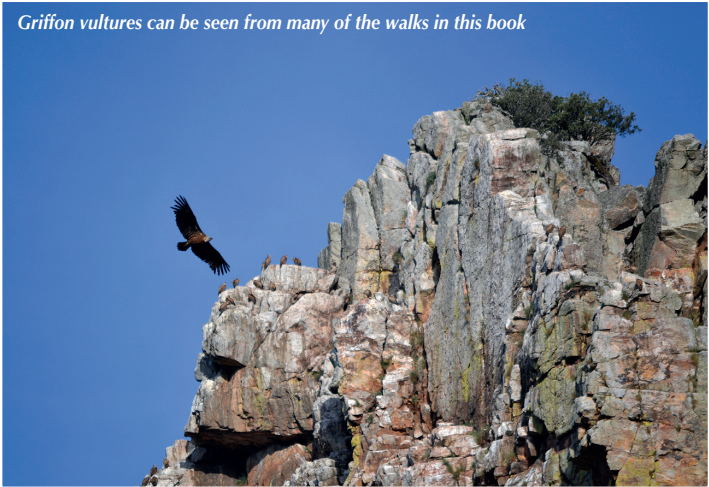
Strung across the middle of Extremadura are the Montes de Toledo with numerous smaller granite sierras. Some, such as the Sierra de San Pedro in the west, are low hills rather than mountains, but the Sierra de Montánchez reaches a respectable 994m.

The mountains in the Sierra de las Villuercas are not granite; their geological structure is mainly composed of slates and quartzites and the walking experience is very different there. The sierras run parallel to each other, largely ruling out circular walks. The Almonte and Ibor rivers, which flow north to feed the Tajo, rise in Las Villuercas while the Rucas and Guadalupe rivers are tributaries of the Guadiana river to the south.



*The Jaranda Valley near Guijo (Walk 14)*

*Griffon vultures can be seen from many of the walks in this book*



The Guadiana is also fed by the Zújar and Matagorda tributaries and forms part of the border between the two provinces. As it flows west and turns south it becomes the border with Portugal. The river feeds the Orellana canal system, which irrigates thousands of hectares of agricultural land producing maize, rice and tomatoes among other crops.

The Sierra Morena, with peaks over 1000m, lies to the south and straddles the border between Extremadura and Andalucía. The sierra is made up of granite and quartzite, as well as softer materials such as slate and gneiss. While on average 1000m lower than the peaks in the Sistema Central, the Sierra Morena is nevertheless an important mountain range within the overall

geography of Spain. It provides the watershed for two of the peninsula's five major rivers: the Guadiana to the north of the sierra and the Guadalquivir to the south.

#### ANIMALS AND BIRDS

The wildlife in Extremadura is still genuinely wild. Depending on the habitat and the time of the year that you visit, red deer, wild boar, rabbit, Iberian hare, fox, badger, wild cat, pine marten, genet, otter and mink may be seen. Lynx are much rarer.

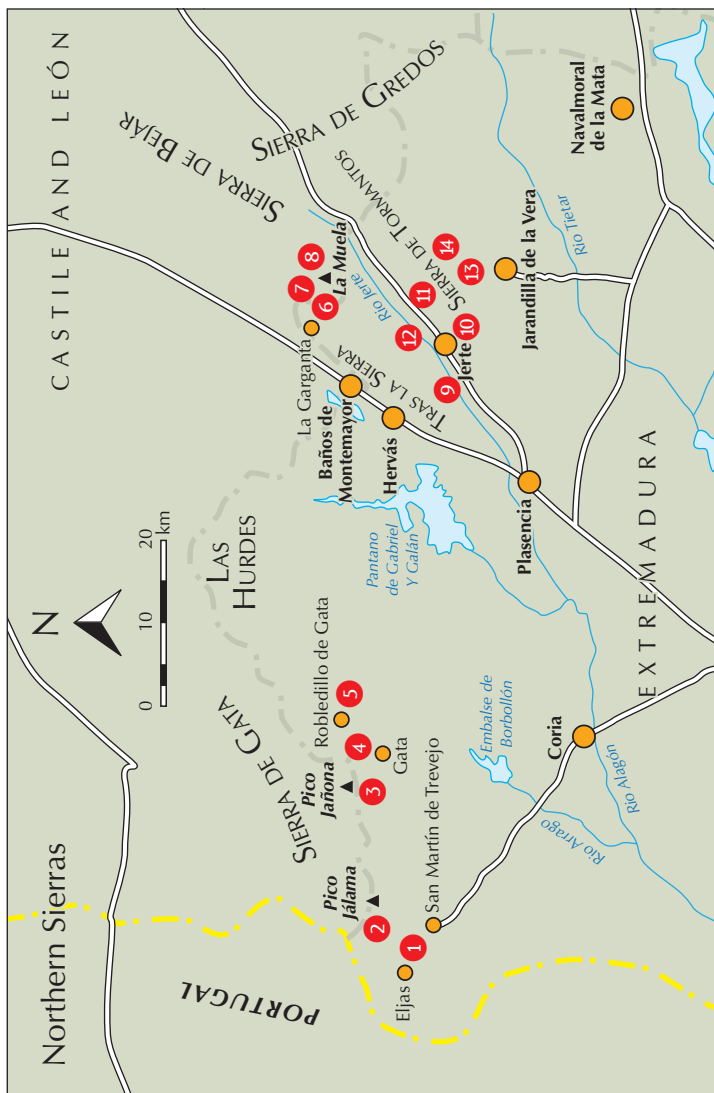
Extremadura has long been known by birdwatchers as a very special place. It is on many migratory routes, with diverse species stopping off in summer or winter. Cranes feed





# THE NORTHERN SIERRAS: THE SISTEMA CENTRAL

*Returning to Gata with the Torre de Almenara in the distance (Walk 3)*



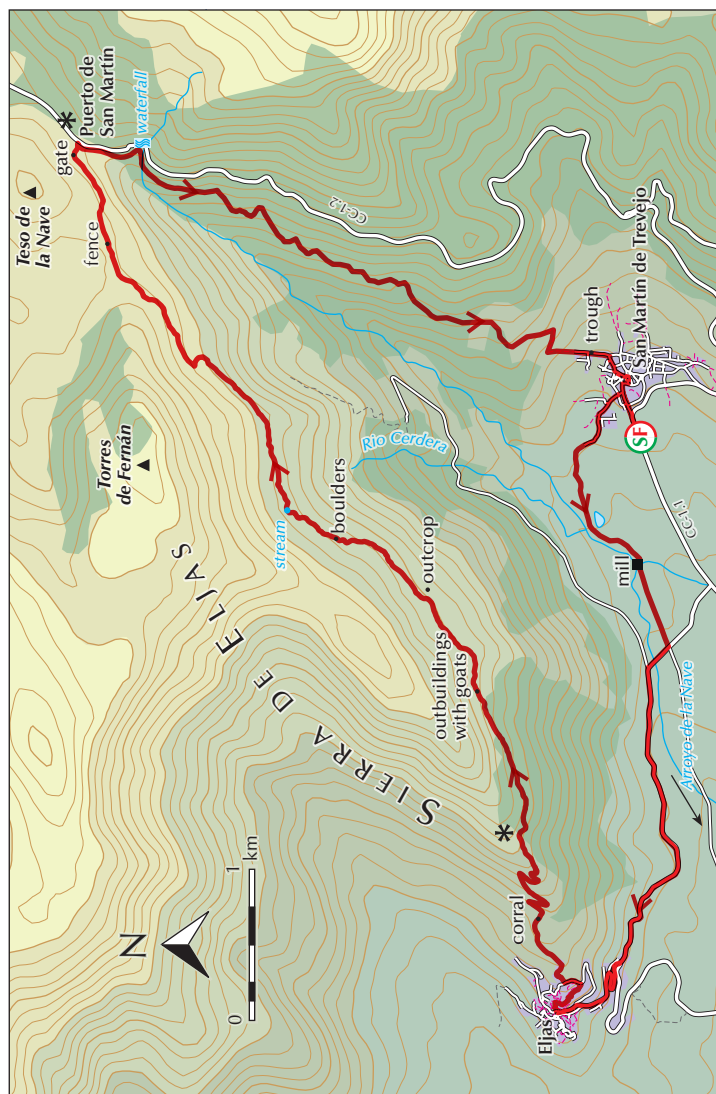
# SIERRA DE GATA

## WALK 1

*San Martín de Trevejo and the Sierra de Eljas*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	San Martín de Trevejo
<b>Distance</b>	19km
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	710m
<b>Time</b>	6hrs
<b>Terrain</b>	Village streets, rural lanes, earth tracks over moorland, footpaths occasionally paved with granite, cobbled woodland track
<b>Max altitude</b>	1058m
<b>Map</b>	IGN 573-111 Eljas 1:25,000
<b>Refreshments</b>	At San Martín de Trevejo and Eljas around the squares
<b>Access</b>	By car: reach San Martín de Trevejo via Plasencia to Coria on the EX-108, or the adjacent motorway. Then take the EX-109 to Moraleja, the CC-3.1 to Cilleros and the CC-3.2 to a junction on the EX-205. Turn left and San Martín de Trevejo is signposted on the right.
<b>Parking</b>	On the CC-1.1 in a parking area on the right opposite the café/bar 'Enigma' and before the entrance to San Martín de Trevejo.
<b>Waymarks</b>	White and yellow flashes
<b>Spring water</b>	One spring just before San Martín de Trevejo
<b>Note</b>	The footpath is vague in places; a compass may be useful. Do not walk in times of poor visibility.

A classic sierra walk. It follows an ancient communication path, the Camino de Navasfrías, over the Sierra de Gata to the Puerto de San Martín, which links Extremadura with Castile and León. The start is on a series of small lanes and a minor road. Once Eljas has been reached, the walk passes through an extensive Pyrenean oak wood followed by a long gentle ascent through wild boulder-strewn moorland to the Puerto de San Martín. Then it



is downhill all the way to San Martín de Trevejo through woods of Spanish chestnut and Pyrenean oaks.

There are many opportunities for spotting flowers and birds, especially near the many small waterfalls and water channels on the high sierra. In autumn the colours in the two woods are glorious.

There is no shade on the exposed sierra between two distinct woods, and the Calzado Romano is uneven in places and can be slippery when wet.

Face the 'Enigma' café/bar and turn right to walk towards San Martín de Trevejo. At the Y-junction the main road bends to the right; do not go that way, but walk straight on down Calle Entrada al Fuente.

Take the second left turning at a small square. This is Camino del Convento. Cross over a crossroads and walk all the way down. The lane bends right past an outbuilding with a waymark, on the right. Just after a utility post with a waymark on the left is a junction before the Convent of San Miguel, now a hospedería. At this junction, turn left.

Walk on this wide concrete lane with generous verges dotted with trees. ► After 1km, turn right at a junction to cross a stream by a concrete bridge with crenelated sides and wooden railings. (Over the bridge, on the right, is a **mill** restored as a modern dwelling.) Continue for another 600m to make another right turn at a crossroads with agricultural buildings to the left. Within 200m of this there is a T-junction.

Turn left onto the Carretera de Eljas de San Martín de Trevejo, CCV-61: a quiet back road that does take occasional local traffic. It winds steadily up to Eljas but is shaded by trees, with views to the left becoming extensive as the lane ascends. Come to a Y-junction on the edge of the village of **Eljas**; turn right and follow the main road as it hairpins up to the Plaza de la Constitución. ►

From the square, with the town hall on your right and the church on your left, walk ahead. At the T-junction, turn left up the ramp, then immediately right up Calle

The Sierra de Eljas is on the right, and to the left are meadow views across a wide shallow valley to the Sierra de Cachaza beyond.

Take on more water from one of the bars, if needed.



On the left are views  
of the valley and  
Valverde del Fresno.  
The sierra lies ahead.

*On the Camino  
de Navasfrías*

de Emigrante. At the T-junction with Calle Folnu turn left, then right. Look ahead for a sign saying 'Calle Cantonis'. Go straight up this tiny road to the right of the sign and turn first right into Calle Orienti – another tiny road but with picturesque, ancient houses. Go straight up this road, ignoring all junctions.

At the end of the road is a T-junction with Calle Forca; turn left onto a wider road. Walk ahead to reach the top of village, still with houses on the left. Reach a Y-junction, to the right of which is a map of walking routes in the area.

Turn right onto a concrete track as it goes up and bends left. ◀ The track becomes rougher but continues to ascend. Pass a white and yellow waymark on a rock to the right. At a small open space, ignore the gate on the right. Turn left to a gate with a notice in Spanish: 'cierre gracias' (shut thanks). A waymark on the right pillar by the gate reinforces your direction.

Beyond the gate is a granite-paved path going straight ahead. This continues, with long grassy and earth breaks, all the way to the Puerto de San Martín. This path is the ancient Camino de Navasfrías; it is a wild, uncultivated





part of the sierra but it is not barren. Walk straight ahead on the paved path and pass a small stone-built **corral** on the right. At a large boulder there is a definite bend, right, to start the zig-zags upwards, steadily but not steeply, with views over the valley on the right becoming more extensive. ▶ As the path reaches a summit, take one last look behind at the **view** of Eljas and Valverde.

The path goes over the top to the other side of the sierra and enters a wooded area. Pass granite boulders, reassuring waymarks and glimpses of the Sierra de Cachaza through the trees on the right. As the path narrows and becomes a bit rough, come to and go through a gate.

The walk enters the thickest part of the wood with trees on both sides of the path. Pass a gate on the left but do not go through it. Ahead, on a big boulder on the left, is a waymark. Pass another gate tucked in on the left but don't go through it. Continue on the path to come to yet another gate, which opens on the right side. Go through this one.

Reach a Y-junction but ignore the tiny path, right, that plunges into the wood. The trees start to thin; reach a gate

*Granite boulders with  
Pico Jálama behind*

*Already there are  
birds and hawks to be  
spotted – depending  
on the time of day.*

with a waymark on its right gatepost and go through it. The trees end on the left and the view is of granite boulders and low-growing shrubs. Trees continue on the right and the path is now rough and boulder-strewn.

Come to an old gatepost with no gate, followed by a gate made of bedsprings, usually open. Go through these. There are two little gates, right, and some small outbuildings. Usually there are **goats** here, and occasionally the goatherd.

Ignoring the two gates, emerge at an open meadow. The path is clearly defined by granite paving, and ahead is the summit of Pico Jálama (Walk 2). Occasionally the path becomes compacted earth but it is clear as no grass grows on it. Keep Pico Jálama as a vague point of orientation – it should be ahead and sometimes a bit right. Ahead and slightly to the left are jagged outcrops called the Torres de Fermán Centeno.

Many legends surround **Fermán Centeno**, who was a knight from Ciudad Rodrigo to the north of the Sierra de Eljas. He was involved in local power struggles between various factions and seized the defensive castles of Eljas and Trevejo in 1474. He then aspired to take over the western part of the region, which was vital to the defence of Spain against the Portuguese. Today he is known as a legendary bandit who terrorised the local people and hid out in these ‘towers’.

Just after a distinctive **outcrop** of granite on the right, cross a water channel, with glimpses of San Martín in the valley below. Come to a strange but distinctive area of giant rounded granite **boulders**, possibly tumbled from the sierra on the left and eroded over centuries. The path bends left to go through the middle of the boulders and then bends left again. ◀

Reach a **stream** with stepping-stones, after which it becomes hard to pick the way and the path disappears. Veer left; the path appears again and climbs towards the jagged outcrops once more. This is an isolated and

This part of the sierra has a wild, primitive aura but is pretty in spring with colourful flowering bushes.

solitary place although cattle may be chewing contentedly on the higher slopes.

The path, now very rocky, crosses more water channels. (If walking after a lot of rain, it may be boggy in places.) The ground becomes grassier with boulders strewn around randomly. The path becomes a tiny dirt line with a few granite slabs; it comes and goes but keep Pico Jálama slightly to your right to be sure of staying in the correct direction.

Over to the right the minor road, CC-193/CCV-12, comes into view. The Puerto de San Martín is not far away. The path comes to an inverted Y-junction where it is joined by a path from the left. Continue right on the joined path, which now makes a track.

Walk through a very open area with rounded rocks, pasture, ferns and flowering bushes. Reach a **fence**, turn right and follow the track, with the fence on the left. The fence goes off to the left as the track bends right and goes towards the tree-covered hillside ahead. It narrows and becomes granite-paved and winds its way down between the flowered, but rocky, side of the sierra, left.

*On the Calzado Romano*



The next part of the walk is waymarked with white and yellow.

Come to the head of the valley with impressive **views** down. Reach a **gate** and go through it: this is the area of the **Puerto de San Martín** and there are information boards and signposts. ◀ Facing the main road, turn right to find the track to San Martín, which for the next 4km runs through beautiful Spanish chestnut and Pyrenean oak wood.

The granite-paved track is ancient and had the name **Calzado Romano**, literally meaning 'Roman Shoes'. It is a communication route that links San Martín de Trevejo with towns and villages in Castile and León. Considering its age, it is remarkably well preserved with thousands of original granite paving stones. However, it is thought that it is unlikely to have been laid during Roman times but is more a medieval construction.

Ten minutes into the wood there is a cascading **waterfall** on the left. The path becomes a bridge here as the water flows under the track down to the right and the valley below. Further on, occasional water channels cross the track but these are easily negotiated.

As the track descends, the woods thin and you come to an open rural landscape with San Martín visible below and right. At a T-junction turn right, then turn left to drop down into the outskirts of the village. Pass a **water trough** on the left with clear running water; a good place to 'wash up' before seeking refreshments in San Martín.

To get to the Plaza Mayor, walk ahead and at a Y-junction turn right. (There is an information board here about the Calzada Romano.) Follow this street, Calle del Puerto, as it becomes Calle de la Iglesia and reaches the main square of **San Martín de Trevejo**.

To get back to the start point, walk down Calle el Concejo, turn right down Calle Cordero and turn left into Calle del Fuente, which becomes Calle Entrada al Fuente and goes straight back to the car parking area.