

TREKKING IN MALLORCA

GR221 - THE DRYSTONE ROUTE

About the Author



Paddy Dillon is a prolific walker and guidebook writer, with over 80 guidebooks to his name and contributions to 30 other titles. He has written extensively for many different outdoor publications and has appeared on radio and television.

Paddy uses a tablet computer to write his route descriptions while walking. His descriptions are therefore precise, having been written at the very point at which the reader uses them.

Paddy is an indefatigable long-distance walker who has walked all of Britain's National Trails and several major European trails. He lives on the fringes of the Lake District and has walked, and written about walking, in every county throughout the British Isles. He has led guided walks and walked throughout Europe, as well as in Nepal, Tibet, Korea, Africa and the Rocky Mountains of Canada and the US. Paddy is a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild.

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GR221 - THE DRYSTONE ROUTE

by Paddy Dillon

CICERONE

2 POLICE SQUARE, MILNTHORPE, CUMBRIA LA7 7PY
www.cicerone.co.uk

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Second edition 2017

ISBN-13: 978 1 85284 850 7

First edition 2009

Printed by KHL Printing, Singapore

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.



Base for route maps © Editorial Alpina, SL

Additional route mapping by Lovell Johns

www.lovelljohns.com

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Front cover: La Trapa and Sa Dragonera (Stage 2)

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Warning

Mountain walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, materially affecting the seriousness of a mountain walk. Therefore, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

To call out the Mountain Rescue, ring the European emergency number 112: this will connect you via any available network. Once connected to the emergency operator, ask for the police.

(Only to be used in an emergency)

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause.

Repeat until an answer is received.

The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

Map Key

	main route		lighthouse/telecoms mast
	alternative route		church or hermitage/ cemetery/cross
	main route of GR221 on alternative start/finish maps		archaeological site
	provisional route		ruined castle/watchtower
	start point/finish point		bunker/stone cattle pen
	start/finish point		stream/gorge
	alternative finish point		lake
	dual carriageway		marshland
	main road		water source/well or drinking trough
	local road		cave
	paved track		hotel
	dirt track		restaurant
	footpath		museum
	high-tension line		information centre
	town boundary		tourist office
	limit of protected area		hospital
	parking area		viewpoint
	village centre		point of interest
	building/ruin		bus stop
	forest		picnic site
	brushwood and meadow		
	farmland/rock		

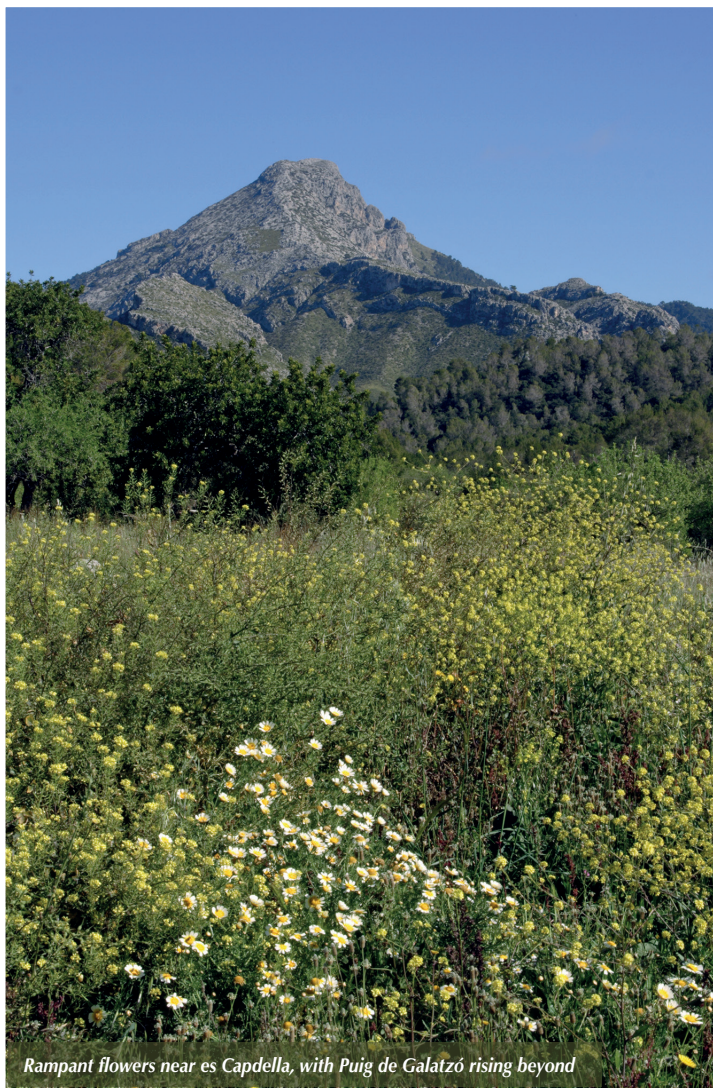


0 0.5 km



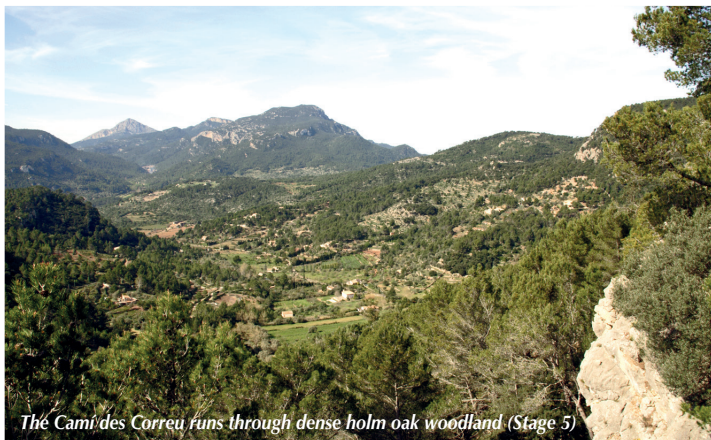
Cliffs rise above forested slopes on the descent from Coma d'en Vidal (Stage 3)





Rampant flowers near es Capdella, with Puig de Galatzó rising beyond

INTRODUCTION



Mallorca is the largest of the Balearic Islands, basking in sunny splendour in the Mediterranean between Spain and Algeria. It has been a favourite destination for sun-starved northern Europeans for many decades. While beach holidays remain popular, more and more visitors seek the quieter pleasures of rural Mallorca, especially taking opportunities to explore the island's most rugged mountain range, the Serra de Tramuntana.

In the high mountains there is more shade among the evergreen oak and pines, with cooling breezes to temper the heat of the sun. Away from the bustling resorts the pace of life in the mountain villages is more sedate and relaxing. Almond trees burst into blossom, oranges ripen in the sun

and vineyards yield heavy bunches of grapes. Kid goats bleat plaintively, often unseen among the undergrowth, while bongling bells alert shepherds to the location of their free-range sheep and cattle. Every so often, emerging from the forests, walkers discover the sun-scorched façades of palatial country mansions, wayside *ermitas* and little *casetas*. In a sense, the visitor who is prepared to walk can forget everything they've ever heard about Mallorca and start afresh by making new discoveries every day, around every corner.

As walking became more and more popular over the years and guidebooks proliferated in many languages, the island authorities began to purchase some extensive rural estates,

protecting them from development and marking paths and tracks for walkers. It was only a matter of time before they turned their attention to the creation of a long-distance walking route.

SERRA DE TRAMUNTANA

Serra de Tramuntana translates as 'Mountains of the North', and they form an incredibly rugged range stretching all the way along the northern flank of Mallorca. The *Paratge Natural de la Serra de Tramuntana*, or Nature Area of the Serra de Tramuntana, was designated in 2007, covering an area of approximately 625 square kilometres (240 square miles). Although the mountains are predominantly limestone, the coastline often features a complex mix of rock types. Pine forests and extensive holm oak woodlands abound, with cultivated areas featuring olive groves, citrus groves and nut groves. Terraced slopes near the towns and villages produce abundant crops, while bare, rocky mountainsides are colonised by tough plants that form dense *maquis*, or patchy *garigue* formations. These rugged mountains form the backdrop for trekking through Mallorca.

Around 90 per cent of the Serra de Tramuntana is private property, and many regular walkers can tell tales about access problems. On the other hand, every few years extensive mountain estates come onto the market and some of these have been purchased and opened to the public.

Some of the most notable acquisitions and recreational areas, from west to east, include: Finca Galatzó, Sa Coma d'en Vidal, Son Fortuny, Planícia, Son Moragues, Cúber and Menut. There are plenty of places where walkers are welcome, or at least tolerated, and the provision of the long-distance GR221 is a splendid way to trek all the way through the Serra de Tramuntana from end to end.

GR221 – RUTA DE PEDRA EN SEC

The GR221 is also known as the *Ruta de Pedra en Sec*, or the Drystone Route. It was created by the Consell de Mallorca, or more specifically the Department de Natura i Medi Ambient, with input from local councils. While the eastern and central parts are well-signposted and fully waymarked, there is still some work to be done on the western parts, as well as on some of the alternative routes. Some old paths high in the mountains have been completely rebuilt at considerable expense, and one very popular path is protected along with its landscape as a site of cultural interest. The main route measures around 140km (87 miles) and is split into ten daily stages in this guidebook. However, there are half a dozen major variant routes, allowing several alternative start and finish points.

Most of the mountainous, well-wooded Serra de Tramuntana is made

of limestone, which has provided the raw material to build all kinds of structures from humble huts to splendid palaces and churches. The limestone readily breaks into blocks, and uses can be found even for broken chippings. It can be burnt to produce lime for mortar or whitewash. Place one lump of limestone carefully on top of another and all manner of dry-stone constructions are possible.

Trekking the GR221 involves walking on the bare limestone bedrock of Mallorca, or following old stone-paved paths through the mountains. Massive drystone buttresses, or *marges*, hold cultivation terraces in place on steep mountainsides. Stone channels, or *canaletes*, carry water to where it is needed. Strange stone

structures encountered along the way include large limekilns and igloo-like bread ovens. Circular *sitges*, or charcoal burning platforms, often have the crude stone hut of a *carboner*, or charcoal burner, alongside. There are drystone walls, cairns and stone-lined snow-pits on the high mountains, all created from limestone blocks. In effect, the GR221 is a celebration of the outdoor life and backbreaking labour of the mountains of Mallorca, as well as being a scenic and interesting route.

The GR221 visits several attractive little mountain villages, as well as passing through a couple of fine towns, often following old mule paths from one to another. The villages generally provide good accommodation and offer a selection of bars and restaurants, as well as a couple of shops stocking provisions. They also have good bus services, allowing trekkers to join or leave the route, or even commute to and from the route from a base far away. A splendid range of services is available along the route, and this guidebook contains all the details required to follow the GR221 through the mountains over a period of one or two weeks.

Looking from Puig de Maria, across Pollença, back to Calvari (Stage 10 extension)



BRIEF HISTORY OF MALLORCA

Mallorca has been inhabited for more than 6000 years, when the earliest settlers lived in caves, hunted and kept animals, made stone tools and employed certain rituals when

burying their dead. Around 4000 years ago, stone buildings and large towers, or *talaiots*, were constructed, suggesting highly organised societies working together for the common good, while clearly engaging in serious disputes with their neighbours.

The Carthaginians established trading posts and often recruited local people to defend them. Most of the ports on the island had their origins around this time. The Romans invaded Mallorca in 123BC, but much of their work was later destroyed by Vandals from North Africa. After the breakup of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine general Belisarius dealt with the Vandals, and the Balearic islands were linked with what is now Tunisia. As part of the Byzantine Empire, Mallorca again became a trading post protected by military might.

Arab raids commenced in AD707. Arab settlers profoundly influenced the development of agriculture. The legacy of these times is recalled in placenames – *Bini* means ‘house of’, as in Binibassi and Biniaraix. In the city of Palma the Moorish arches of the Almudaina palace and the Arab baths can still be seen.

In 1229 Jaume I of Aragon, ‘The Conqueror’, led a fleet of 150 ships and an army of 16,000 men to Mallorca. Their intention was to land at Port de Pollença, but they were prevented from doing so by storms so they sheltered in the lee of Sa Dragonera and later landed at Santa

Ponça. The re-conquest was completed in 1230, but this didn’t lead to peaceful times. Disputes between Jaume’s sons, passed on to their sons and heirs, led to successive invasions, but the royal line continued through Jaume II and Jaume III, the latter being killed in battle in 1349. The reign of independent kings ended, and Aragon took direct control of the island.

Mallorca’s chequered history continued with invasions, rebellions and natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and outbreaks of cholera and bubonic plague. Watchtowers, or *talaies*, were built between 1550 and 1650 on high vantage points, so that invaders and pirates could be spotted in good time. In 1716 Mallorca finally lost the title of kingdom and became a province of Spain. Neighbouring islands had similarly convoluted histories, with Menorca spending the best part of the 18th century as a British possession. In the 20th century, the Catalan language was suppressed under Franco’s dictatorship, but has since flourished and is now very evident throughout Mallorca.

Mountain heritage

The GR221 highlights the heritage of the mountains, and especially the built heritage, which often uses nothing more basic than roughly hewn lumps of limestone. On the lower cultivated slopes, the terraces are held in place by huge drystone buttresses and watered by stone-lined channels.

Snow-pits are found on many of Mallorca's highest mountains



Water may be stored in tanks (*cister-nas*), or small underground reservoirs (*aljubs*), all built of stone.

Look out for large stone-lined pits, which are limekilns (*forns de calç*), on the lower wooded slopes, where fuel was readily available. On the highest mountainsides, larger and deeper stone-lined snow-pits (*cases de sa neu*) were used for storing snow and ice. In dense holm oak woodland look out for the dark, flat, circular, moss-grown remains of the charcoal burning platforms – trekkers sometimes use these as wild-camp sites, but it is very difficult to get pegs into the hard-baked ground. Somewhere nearby will be the low remains of the circular huts of the charcoal burner. Stone-built outdoor bread ovens are also likely to be spotted nearby, while

drystone walls and cairns abound almost everywhere.

Snow collecting

The highest paths on Mallorca were built by snow collectors (*nevaters*). Snow was collected to make ice for use in the summer and conserved in snow-pits (*cases de sa neu*). These are found scattered around Puig Major, Puig de Massanella, Puig Tomir, Es Teix and Serra d'Alfàbia, mostly above 900m (2950ft). The pits were usually circular, oval, or occasionally rectangular, partly or wholly below ground level. When the mountains were covered with snow, groups of men went up to gather it into baskets. Flat platforms were made and cleared of vegetation, where the snow was arranged in layers and trampled down hard to

STAGE 1

Port d'Andratx to Sant Elm

Start	Footbridge, Port d'Andratx – 478775
Finish	Plaça de na Caragola, Sant Elm – 442817
Distance	8.5km (5¼ miles)
Total ascent	370m (1215ft)
Total descent	370m (1215ft)
Time	3hr
Map	Alpina Serra de Tramuntana – Sud I
Refreshments	Plenty of bars and restaurants at Port d'Andratx and Sant Elm.

Tracks and paths running between Port d'Andratx and Sant Elm are in regular use, but are neither signposted nor waymarked. They traverse a range of small, rugged, forested hills, where it is worth making a detour to enjoy fine views from the summit of Pintal Vermell. A narrow path called Pas Vermell easily exploits a breach in an overhanging cliff to allow a descent. Sant Elm is reached early in the day, but until a long-delayed upland refugium is completed at La Trapa, the coastal village offers the only convenient lodgings. Despite a few rugged moments, this is an easy and pleasant start, with good views of the mountains ahead.

Leave the head of the bay at **Port d'Andratx** by crossing a humped footbridge over a river at s'Aulet. Follow a broad palm-fringed promenade past the Club de Vela boatyard and a marina. Turn right as signposted for Mon Port, up Carretera Aldea Blanca. Turn left at a crossroads along Carrer de Cala d'Egos, again signposted for Mon Port. Keep right when the road forks, as left leads to the Mon Port Hotel and a striking windmill.

Pass old olive terraces and avoid a road climbing steeply on the right, rising gently into pine forest instead. Watch for a steep and stony path on the right, often worn to bedrock. The road could be followed uphill, but it is

PORT D'ANDRATX

Marina at Port d'Andratx, with Mola de s'Esclop and Galatzó beyond



Port d'Andratx is busy with tourists and has a well-stocked marina, but it still maintains a small fishing fleet, with nets and ropes strewn around. Boats unload their catches and fish are sold from a shop on the harbourside. The village lies at the head of a bay surrounded by forested hills, with the distant peaks of Mola de s'Esclop and Puig

de Galatzó in sight. Head inland to find old buildings and narrow streets clustered around the church of Nostra Senyora del Carme.

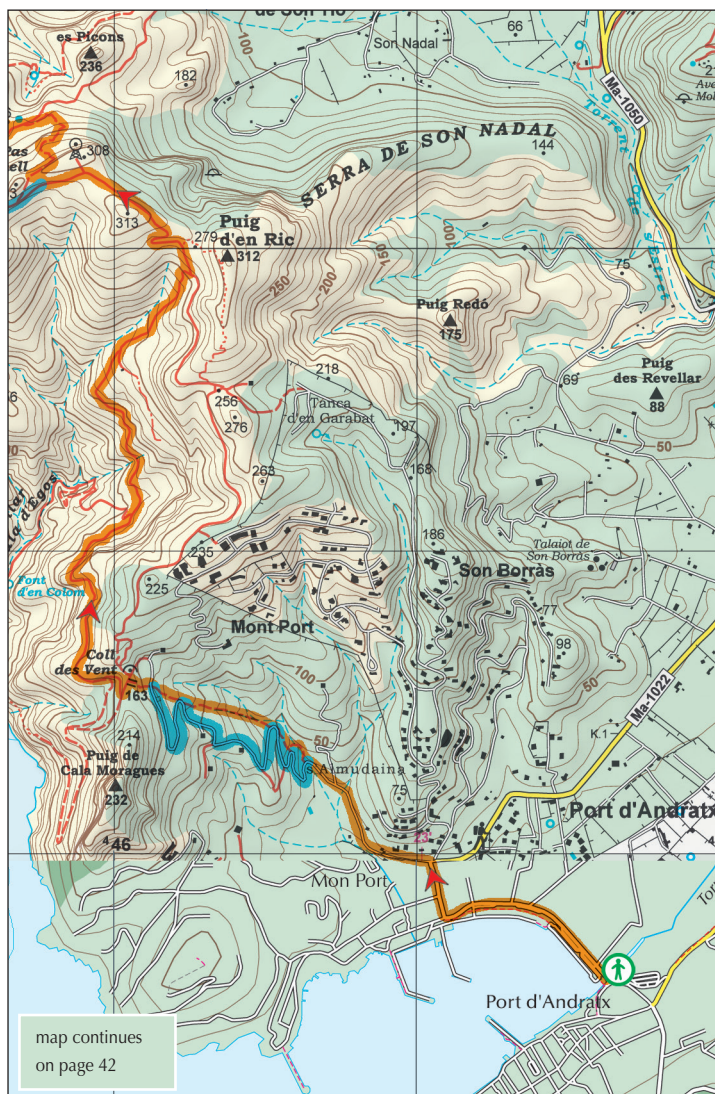
A good range of services includes hotels, banks with ATMs, a post office, plenty of shops and far too many estate agents. The sea front boasts a long line of busy bars and restaurants, naturally featuring fish dishes, along with plenty of cosmopolitan choices. Bus 102 links Port d'Andratx with Palma, while bus 100 runs ahead to s'Arracó and Sant Elm. Taxis are also available. Ferries occasionally sail between Port d'Andratx and Sant Elm, offering visits to the island of sa Dragonera. A tourist information office stands on the harbourside, tel 971 671300.

very convoluted. The path climbs straight uphill, clipping three bends on the road. ► It is possible to switch between the road and the path at all three bends, as well as one more time where the path and road cross each other. The path finally reaches a track junction on the gap of **Coll des Vent**, at 163m (535ft). There are a couple of ruined limekilns nearby and views back to Port d'Andratx.

Turn left to follow a track away from the gap, keeping right at two junctions that appear soon afterwards. The track runs gradually downhill on a forested slope, reaching another junction around 110m (360ft). Keep right again, but note that a left turn leads down to a rugged little beach at Cala d'Egos. Follow the track uphill, climbing

Take care at weekends, when mountain bikers tend to hurtle down the path, making the road a safer option.

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steeply at times, and keep left at a junction where there is a sitja. When a higher junction is reached below **Puig d'en Ric**, turn left to climb further, passing back and forth beneath a pylon line. Cross a high crest where there is a view north-east to Mola de s'Esclop; the mountain rising beyond the village of s'Arracó.

Follow the track towards a prominent red and white **mast**, but pass below it, rather than climbing to it. Watch carefully for a series of vague paths on the right, mostly marked with little cairns. All of these lead up to a rocky crest touching 300m (985ft).

Ascent of Pintal Vermell

1km (½ mile) there-and-back – 30m (100ft) ascent/descent – 30min

It is worth staying on the track, descending gently then climbing steeply a short way. It ends just below a trig point on **Pintal Vermell**, at 312m (1024ft). Enjoy splendid views to the island of sa Dragonera, Sant Elm and the mountains beyond, then double back along the track and turn left up one of the cairned paths to cross the rocky crest.

View from Pintal Vermell to sa Dragonera and Sant Elm



TREKKING IN MALLORCA



Scout around to find a fine mountain path called **Pas Vermell**, which cuts across a natural breach, easily avoiding fearsome overhanging cliffs. The path then drops through a well-worn groove, passing pines and càrritx to reach a track. ▶

Turn left and follow the bendy track down into a forest. Stay on the main track, passing a junction on a pronounced hairpin bend. When another junction is reached, spot 'S Elm' painted on a rock, indicating a right turn. After a steeper descent among taller pines, there are three opportunities to turn right in close succession. Take the last of these, which should be marked by a small cairn and paint marks. Quickly turn left and a cable should be stretched across the track to exclude vehicles. Rise gently along the track to reach a little house called sa Pineta.

Continue down past small fields, and the track is later patched with concrete, with fine views of sa Dragonera and Sant Elm. Pass a chain, continue down to a junction and turn right along a forest track. Emerge into a field and turn left along a path, then go through a gap in a wall, briefly back into forest. Cross a road at the gateway to **Castell de Sant Elm**, also known as the Torre de Sant Elm. Continue along a track and turn left down a flight of 50 concrete steps. Turn right along a road, passing the Hotel Aquamarin to reach a road junction and bus stop beside a sandy beach. ▶

Turn left and follow the pedestrianised, brick-paved Avinguda Jaume I all the way through **Sant Elm**. Either continue straight to a bus stop on Plaça de na Caragola, or keep left towards the end, passing above the ferry landing before reaching the bus stop.

This popular little village of **Sant Elm** might have become a large resort but for its proximity to sa Dragonera. When the island was given special protection in 1995, the coastline north of Sant Elm was protected from development. The Torre de Sant Elm stands above the village and is floodlit at night. There is a small range of services, including a hotel, *hostal*, bank with ATM, bars, restaurants and

Turning right down the track leads to a road, which in turn leads to the village of s'Arracó.

Look out to the little island of Pantaleu, with the larger sa Dragonera beyond.

shops. A tourist information office is available, tel 971 239205. Bus 100 links with s'Arracó and Port d'Andratx, and there are also taxis.

SA DRAGONERA

This rugged island is historically important, being where Jaume I prepared for the Conquest of Mallorca in 1229. The Parc Natural de sa Dragonera is a strictly controlled nature reserve, with special emphasis on the bird-life and endemic plants of the island. The information centre in Sant Elm offers advice in advance of a visit. La Margarita ferry, tel 639 617545 or 696 423933, runs daily for most of the year, but not always on Sundays or in bad weather. Other options include Bergantin, tel 627 966264 or 600 520503; the Water Taxi, tel 667 592657; or Jumbo II, tel 971 686849 or 687 800400. Access on sa Dragonera is limited to a track running the length of the island, where light-houses stand at Cap des Llebeig and Cap de Tramuntana. A winding path climbs to the highest point, na Pòpia at 349m (1145ft), which is crowned with a disused lighthouse. See www.conselldemallorca.net/dragonera.



*Sant Elm, the
Hostal Dragonera
and the island of
sa Dragonera*