

WALKING ON LA PALMA



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<i>Glyndwr's Way</i>	<i>Trekking in the Alps (contributing author)</i>
<i>Mountain Walking in Mallorca</i>	<i>Walking and Trekking in Iceland</i>
<i>The Cleveland Way and the Yorkshire Wolds Way</i>	<i>Walking in County Durham</i>
<i>The GR5 Trail</i>	<i>Walking in Menorca</i>
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<i>The Reivers Way</i>	<i>Walking on La Gomera and El Hierro</i>
<i>The South West Coast Path</i>	<i>Walking on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura</i>
<i>The Teesdale Way (Martin Collins; updated by Paddy Dillon)</i>	<i>Walking on Madeira</i>
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<i>Trekking in Greenland</i>	<i>Walking on Tenerife</i>
<i>Trekking in Mallorca</i>	

WALKING ON LA PALMA

INCLUDING THE GR130 AND GR131
LONG-DISTANCE TRAILS

by Paddy Dillon

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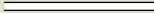
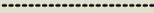
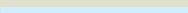
Front cover: Enjoying views across the Caldera de Taburiente from Pico de la Nieve (Walks 5, 34 and 44)

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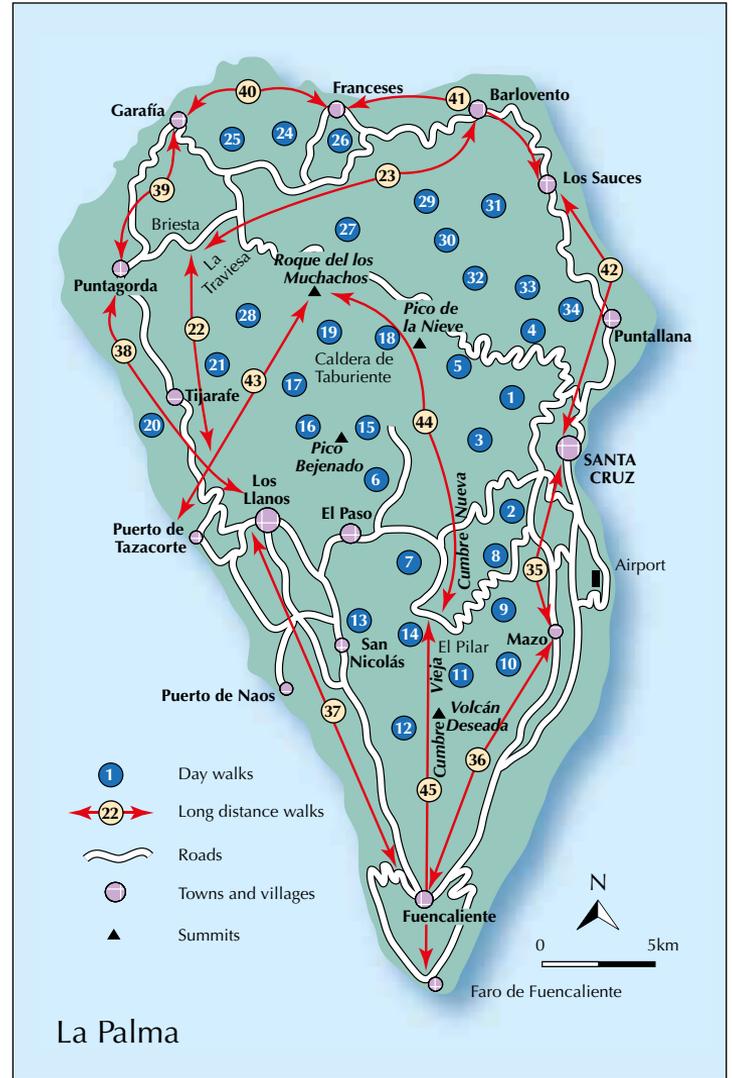
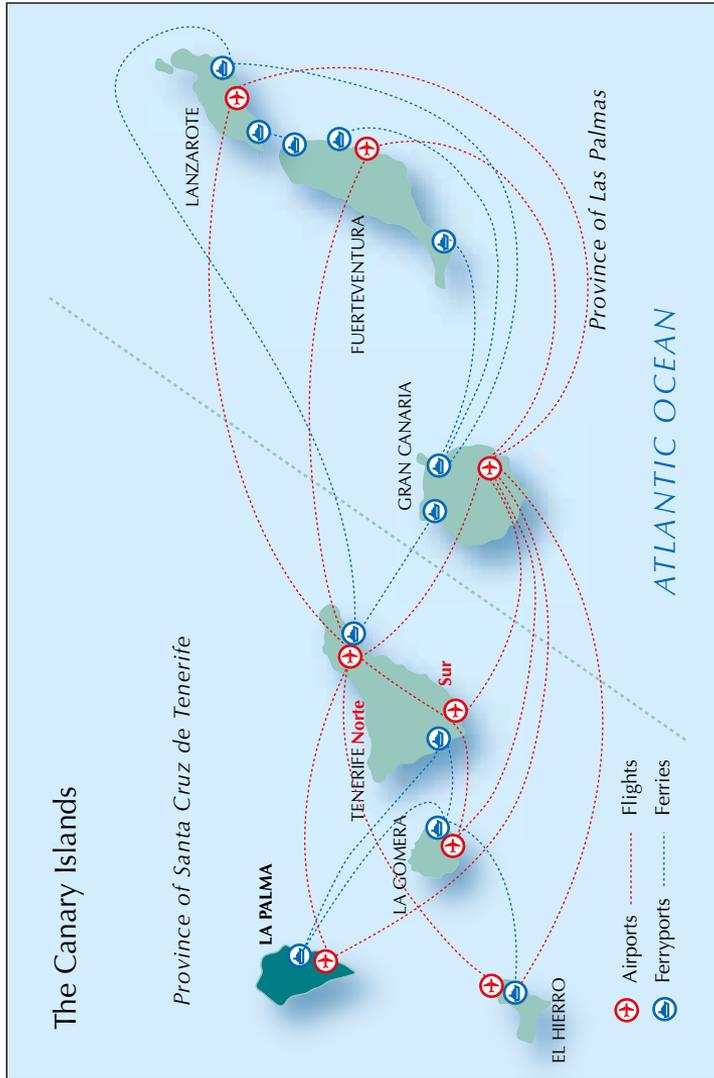
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Map Key

	major roads
	walking route
	alternative route
	long-distance (GR) route
	link
	dirt track
	seasonal river
	river
	sea
	tunnel
	town
	peak
	habitation
	mirador
	fuelle/spring
	route direction
	start point/finish point
	start/finish point
	alternative start/alternative finish
	alternative start/finish point
	800–1000m
	600–800m
	400–600m
	200–400m
	0–200m
	sea level
	2200–2400m
	2000–2200m
	1800–2000m
	1600–1800m
	1400–1600m
	1200–1400m
	1000–1200m

Map scale

0 0.5 1 km



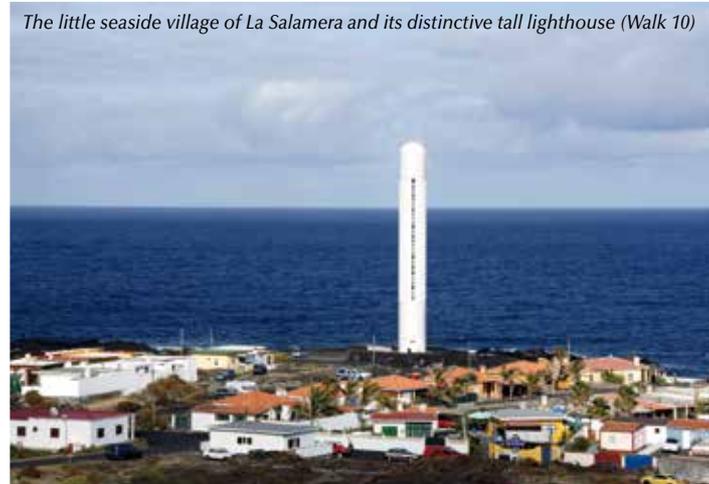
La Palma

A view of Pico Bejenado, seen from a vineyard high above San Nicolás (Walk 13)



INTRODUCTION

The little seaside village of La Salamera and its distinctive tall lighthouse (Walk 10)



The seven sub-tropical Canary Islands bask in sunny splendour off the Atlantic coast of north-west Africa. Millions of sun-starved north Europeans flock there for beach holidays, but increasingly visitors are discovering the amazing variety of landscapes throughout the archipelago. Conditions range from semi-deserts to perpetually moist *laurisilva* 'cloud forests', from rugged cliff coasts to high mountains, from fertile cultivation terraces to awesome rocky *barrancos* carved deep into multi-coloured layers of volcanic bedrock. Some areas are given the highest possible protection as national parks, but there

are many more types of protected landscapes, rural parks, natural monuments and nature reserves.

More and more walkers are finding their feet, exploring the Canary Islands using centuries-old mule tracks, rugged cliff paths and forest trails. Paths pick their way between cultivation terraces, squeeze between houses and make their way to rugged coves and hidden beaches. Some paths run from village to village, following old mule tracks once used to transport goods, while other paths are based on pilgrim trails to and from remote churches and *ermitas*. Many have been cleared, repaired,

signposted and waymarked in recent years, ready to be explored and enjoyed.

This guidebook explores the way-marked trail networks on the island of La Palma. Despite its small size, there are routes of all types – from easy strolls to hands-on scrambling, from simple day-walks to long-distance trails. As these routes are fully signposted and waymarked, walkers can follow them with confidence and enjoy the islands to the full. Almost 900km (560 miles) of trails are described in this guidebook.

LOCATION

The Canary Islands are more or less enclosed in a rectangular area from 13°30'W to 18°00'W and 27°30'N to 29°30'N. As a group, they stretch west to east over 450km (280 miles). Although administered by Spain, the mother country is 1100km (685 miles) away. The narrowest strait between the Canary Islands and Africa is a mere 110km (70 miles). The total land area is almost 7500km² (2900 square miles), but the sea they occupy is 10 times that size.

GEOLOGY

Most of the world's volcanic landscapes are formed where huge continental or oceanic 'plates' collide with each other. When continental plates collide, the Earth's crust crumples upwards to form mountains, and

when plates are torn apart, basaltic rock from deep within the Earth's mantle erupts to form mountains. The Canary Islands, however, are different, and have a complicated geological history.

The African landmass is the visible part of a continental plate that extends into the Atlantic Ocean, but the Canary Islands lie within the oceanic crust of the eastern Atlantic Ocean, close to the passive junction with the African continental plate. It is thought that the islands now lie directly above a hot-spot, or mantle plume, some 2500km (1550 miles) deep within the Earth. The mantle plume is fixed, but the oceanic and African plates are drifting very slowly eastwards. Every so often a split in the oceanic crust opens above the mantle plume, allowing molten rock to vent onto the ocean floor. As more and more material erupts, it piles higher and higher until it rises from the sea. Each of the Canary Islands was formed this way.

Lanzarote and Fuerteventura were the first Canary Islands to form, and were subsequently pulled eastwards. The next time a rift opened over the mantle plume the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife were formed, and these were in turn pulled eastwards. A further oceanic rift led to the formation of La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro. Looking forward in geological time more islands will appear as other rifts are torn open in the future.



Shepherds once used long poles to negotiate steep and rocky terrain and local walkers still use them

The forces at work deep within the Earth can scarcely be imagined. Every single piece of rock throughout the Canary Islands once existed in a molten state. Consider the energy needed to melt one small stone, and multiply that to imagine the energy required to melt everything in the island chain, as well as the immense amount of rock beneath the sea that supports them all!

Over time huge amounts of volcanic material were piled high, but erosion has led to great instability. During recent geological time vast chunks of the islands have collapsed

into the sea, creating features such as El Golfo on El Hierro, the Caldera de Taburiente on La Palma, and the Orotava valley on Tenerife. With each catastrophic collapse, tidal waves devastated places around the Atlantic Ocean. Geologists predict that similar collapses could occur in the future on the Cumbre Nueva on La Palma, or the north face of El Teide on Tenerife.

WILDLIFE

Plants and flowers

While the northern hemisphere was in the grip of an Ice Age, the Canary Islands were sluiced by rainstorms, with powerful rivers carving deep, steep-sided barrancos into unstable layers of ash and lava. As the landmasses emerged from the Ice Age the Canary Islands dried out and the vegetation had to adapt to survive. Some species are well adapted to semi-desert conditions, while on the highest parts of the islands, laurisilva cloud forests are able to trap moisture from the mists and keep themselves well watered. Laurisilva forests once spread all the way round Mediterranean and tropical regions, and one of the best remnants on La Palma is found at Los Tilos.

Canary pines flourish on high, dry mountainsides, sometimes in places where nothing else grows. Almost every pine you see will have a scorched trunk, but they regenerate surprisingly well after forest fires. Beware of the long pine needles on

WALK 1

Santa Cruz and Lomo de las Nieves

Distance	8, 11 or 19km (5, 7 or 12 miles)
Start/Finish	Santa Cruz or Santuario de las Nieves
Total Ascent/Descent	410, 1180 or 1590m (1345, 3870 or 5215ft)
Time	2hr 30min, 4hr or 6hr 30min
Terrain	Roads, tracks and paths at lower levels. Narrow forest paths and rocky tunnels at a higher level. Some stretches unsuitable for vertigo sufferers.
Refreshment	Plenty of choice in Santa Cruz. Bar at Las Nieves.
Transport	Buses run regularly between Santa Cruz and Santuario de las Nieves.

This figure-of-eight route naturally offers a choice between a short circuit from Santa Cruz to Santuario de las Nieves and back, a longer walk from the Santuario, up the Barranco de la Madera, through tunnels and back downhill, or an even longer walk that uses both options.

Route includes PR LP 2.2 and PR LP 2.3

Start at the **Barco** (ship) on Avenida de las Nieves in Santa Cruz. Walk straight up the road and bear left up steps. Turn left at the top then right as marked up Calle A Rodríguez López. Turn left at a crossroads along Calle Tabaiba then climb steps as marked, past a tangled mass of mixed scrub. Turn right up a road then quickly right up more steps. Climb a road, turn left along Calle Olén, then right up a narrow path signposted PR LP 2.2.

A level path, based on an old water channel, crosses a steep and scrubby slope overlooking the town centre. It is fenced as it crosses cliffs, looking down into a barranco full of high-rise buildings. Step down to a path junction and turn right uphill for the PR LP 2.2. Climb between old **sugar mills** piled on top of each other. After zigzagging up past them, follow the path further up the old water

channel along a scrub-covered ridge, passing a tangled mass of pipes.

Climb a concrete road past a few houses, curving right to reach a junction. Turn left up a concrete road and walk straight ahead to a tarmac road bend.

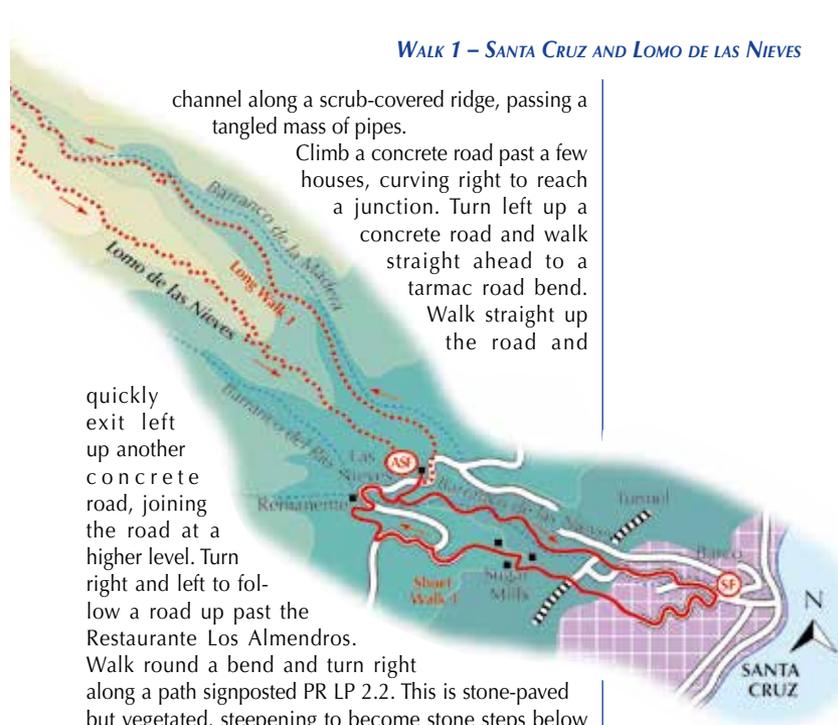
Walk straight up the road and

quickly exit left up another concrete road, joining the road at a higher level. Turn right and left to follow a road up past the Restaurante Los Almendros.

Walk round a bend and turn right along a path signposted PR LP 2.2. This is stone-paved but vegetated, steepening to become stone steps below a cliff. Reach the **Molino del Remanente** beside a complex road junction and tunnel. Walk towards the tunnel and turn right down a steep bit of road underneath the main road. Turn left to walk parallel to the main road up to a church and tree-shaded plaza at **Santuario de las Nieves**. ▶

For the longer route, walk behind the church and down steps between it and a bar restaurant. Walk down a road and cross the main road near a tunnel mouth. A narrow road climbs from a car park into **Barranco de la Madera**. A concrete path and track climbs past bananas then turn left up a stony track. Stay on it and avoid turnings, climbing higher into forest, often with a pipeline alongside. Pass beneath a very high pylon line, walk beside an overhanging cliff and enter the Parque Natural Las Nieves.

See below for a short route back to town.



Walkers high in the Barranco de la Madera, on their way up to a tunnel through a sheer cliff face



There is no mistaking the way ahead, past patchy laurisilva among pines and scrub, and another overhanging cliff. At a higher level the track makes a sweeping zigzag and ends at a building. Keep climbing beside a pipe or water channel in dense laurisilva. Walk along a rocky ledge beneath another overhanging cliff, unsuitable for vertigo sufferers. Climb again and go through a hole in a rocky buttress. Climb past a tunnel mouth and the path crosses the barranco and climbs a densely forested slope. Cross a scrubby slope and drop, then climb again and cross the barranco between sheer rock walls, around 1000m (3280ft).



Enter a **tunnel** to follow a water channel. A torch is useful, but isn't essential as there are lots of rock 'windows'. A narrow, fenced path leads to another tunnel, which is longer and has more windows. Another narrow, fenced path leads to another tunnel with windows. The next stretch out in the open is quite long, then there is a little rock arch, followed by another long stretch of path. The last tunnel is fairly short, but watch for boulders inside.

The path emerges and leads to a water regulator, then drops and zigzags steeply on a forested slope. First it overlooks Barranco de la Madera, then **Barranco del Río**, as it switches side to side down the Lomo de las Nieves. Pine forest has a laurisilva understorey, giving way to cistus and rock rose further down. Pass a pylon and leave the forest to pass a little house beside big eucalyptus trees. Cross a concrete track and go down a path veering away from it, leading back down to the Santuario de las Nieves. ▶

Just across the road from the church, a cobbled path is signposted as the PR LP 2.2 Ruta de los Molinos. This

Following a water channel through a tunnel, peeping through a 'window' into the Barranco de la Madera

The short walk continues from here.

was followed earlier, parallel to the main road, so follow it back to where a bit of road runs beneath the main road. Turn left as signposted for Santa Cruz, following a track down the **Barranco de las Nieves**. Cross the barranco again and again as marked and signposted, past a smelly farm. A patchy road crosses later and is followed to a main road. Turn left down the main road towards a tunnel then left down a slip road as marked, under the main road and tunnel mouth. Simply walk straight down Calle Leocricia Pestana, down Avenida M Gonzalez Mendez, turning right to cross a bridge over the barranco, then left down the other side. Pass a wider bridge to return to the Barco in **Santa Cruz**.

WALK 2

Fuentes de Las Breñas

Distance	10km (6¼ miles)
Start/Finish	Breña Alta
Total Ascent/Descent	550m (1805ft)
Time	2hr 45min
Terrain	Roads and tracks at lower levels. Steep, rugged, winding forest paths at higher levels.
Refreshment	Plenty of choice in Breña Alta. Bar at El Llanito.
Transport	Buses serve Breña Alta from Santa Cruz and Los Llanos.

This interesting circuit climbs forested slopes above Breña Alta, visiting a series of old water sources, or *fuentes*. People used to obtain fresh water from them, which is now piped to their properties. In its lower parts, the route passes 17th-century gateways onto old estates.

Start at the church of San Pedro in **Breña Alta**, around 360m (1180ft). Cross to the police station and go to the far end of a car park, leaving it by road. Turn right up steps to reach another road and turn left to leave town. Cross a bridge over **Barranco de Aguasencio** and turn right as signposted for Fuentes de Las Breñas. Climb the concrete road and avoid all turnings to properties, continuing straight up a tarmac road with fruit to the right, scrub on the left and laurisilva forest rising higher.

Route uses PR LP 19, PR LP 18.2 and GR130.

