

SÃO JOÃO D'ARGA TRAILS



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São João d'Arga

THE SÃO JOÃO D'ARGA PILGRIMAGE

The São João d'Arga Pilgrimage is the most exuberant and spontaneous public feast in Serra d'Arga. Its unique character comes from the relevance given to religious practices and beliefs, but mostly to ludic aspects such as gastronomy, costumes, dance and pilgrims' songs.

The pilgrimage is an unparalleled religious event and festivity not only for the people of the *serra*, but also for many living in the Neiva, Lima and Minho valleys, with pilgrimages starting from numerous places in the municipalities of Caminha, Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima and Vila Nova de Cerveira. The pilgrimage, which takes place on 28 and 29 August, commemorates the saint's martyrdom by beheading and is preceded by the São João das Cerejas [Saint John of the Cherries] feast, which commemorates his birth on 24 June. São João's birth and death are also uniquely commemorated during the processions that occur both during the feast and the pilgrimage. During the feast's procession, the image on the bier represents the saint as a child. During the pilgrimage, the saint is represented as an adult.

Before the opening of the forest road in the 1940s, which facilitated the pilgrims access to the monastery, everyone reached it on foot. Thousands of pilgrims, often organised in groups (called 'rusgas' or 'ranchos'), walked for hours on the countless trails and paths that cut through the hills to this day. The four 'São João d'Arga Trails', follow the original trails that started at Arga de Cima, Arga de Baixo, Caminha and Vila Praia de Âncora.

The pilgrims from the Viana do Castelo parishes left on the evening of the 27th and crossed the 'seven *serras*' – as they called them at the time – to reach the monastery. As they passed through Soutelo, Orbacém and



São João das Cerejas

Dem, those from Riba de Âncora were joined by more and more people. Pilgrims from Caminha, Vilarelho and Argela, joined by those from Venade, climbed up to Senhora das Neves, on their way to Dem and from there on to the monastery.

On their way to the monastery, men wore farmers' clothes or dark or black Sunday or wedding suits, with their trousers rolled up to avoid getting snagged in the bush. Women wore farmers' clothes, with woollen skirts, or festive attire, which they put on only upon arriving at the monastery to avoid ruining them on the way. Many, particularly the women, were barefoot; others wore wooden clogs. The socks, shoes and clogs were carried in their hands to avoid tearing or ruining them. These were put on only as they got closer to the monastery.

As they walked, pilgrims joyfully played concertinas, drums, tambourines, triangles and castanets, praying and pulling pranks on one another, stopping briefly here and there to rest and eat. Promise keepers wore white shrouds and prayed as they walked. As soon as they glimpsed the monastery from Chã do Guindeiro, promise keepers advanced to the temple on their knees over the steep, stony ground. Some walked in silence, carrying a carnation or an olive branch between their teeth, signalling others not to address them.

Sarapatel stew



Sweet rice



Pedro
(a type
of large
sausage)



Leg of lamb

Near the Santo Aginha Wedding Boulder, and also near the one of Arga de Baixo, young women of marrying age turned their backs to the boulder and threw a stone. If it landed on top, they could expect to be married within the year.

Pilgrims from Dem brought with them a rooster, or a chicken, boiled whole in a pot over a wood fire together with sausages and dry-cured ham. The dish [cozido, lit. 'boiled'] was placed in a pot wrapped in an embroidered towel made especially for that purpose – the 'pilgrimage towel' – and transported in a large basket – the 'fair basket' – that was carried on the head. Pilgrims from the Argas brought with them roasted legs of kid or lamb.

Sweets included milk or red wine *rabanadas*, made with sliced old, hard bread. Milk *rabanadas* were soaked in cow milk, boiled with a peel of lemon and then dipped in egg yolk batter. Red wine *rabanadas* were just soaked in cold wine sweetened with sugar. Both were dusted with cinnamon and sugar after frying in oil or olive oil.

Wine was carried in barrels drawn by cows along Caminho da Ladeira up to the monastery to be bought by the pilgrims and drunk out of *infusas* – black and red clay mugs of different sizes (half, one or two litres) –, transported in baskets and returned after drinking.



Pilgrims dancing the *vira*



Concertina player



Evening procession

Once at the monastery, pilgrims circled the chapel three times while praying. Inside the chapel, they gave alms to the saint and to the devil. As a promise to São João, healer of all evils, including hand warts, pilgrims brought along salt, rooftiles, red carnations, black roosters or chicken, onions and eggs. The offerings were noted down by the churchwardens and the rooftiles and salt (which were hard to carry up to the hills and thence scarce) were then auctioned in the yard of the parish church. Salt, which was highly coveted by hill people, was used to preserve food, particularly freshly slaughtered pork meat, which was a staple. Rooftiles were used in shelter and house maintenance.

A sermon was given on the afternoon of 28 August, followed, at 5 p.m., by a procession to the wayside cross on the south side of the monastery and back. It was joined by the faithful and a band.

A meal ensued in the middle of the *serra*. It was served on a towel laid on the ground and the first to arrive picked the best places.

The *arraial* (party) began around 6 p.m. and lasted through the night. In the olden days, light was provided by torches, candles and olive oil lamps. At midnight, there was a brief pause to watch the fireworks. The pilgrims who could afford it would rent quarters to keep their baskets

and sleep. Those who couldn't stayed up the whole night singing, dancing, playing the concertina, staff fencing, playing the rooster game, eating and drinking.

Originally, only coffee, made in so-called chocolate kettles over a stone, and wine were sold underneath the sleeping quarters. It was only later that a variety of other items began being sold, such as kid, lamb, *sarapatel* (innards stew), bread in several shapes, sandwiches and grape brandy with honey. One of the earliest food vendors was Rosa do Meijão, renowned for her kid prepared in seven ways according to the oldest secrets of the Serra d'Arga.

Music, which at first was played only by concertinas, later began to be broadcast on speakers, and people would request and dedicate songs – the so-called 'records on demand'. The speakers also announced the arrival of groups of pilgrims to the monastery. Traditionally, two bands would take turns playing, competing throughout the night; Manuel dos Pedreiros and Nelson de Vilarinho were two of the oldest and most famous concertina players.

Spanning a whole range of feelings, the stanzas that were sung covered every genre and theme: love, death, farewell, scorn. Here is an example of a farewell stanza:

Him:
Farewell, my love, farewell
Farewell I want to say.
Pray for my soul
If death takes me away.

Her:
Farewell, my love, farewell
Saying farewell takes my life away.
Harder than death to me
Is this farewell we say.

The following day, pilgrims washed in the nearby Ribeiro de São João stream and fountain and ate whatever food was still left. From 6 a.m. onwards, there were sermons held at the request of the believers as well as confessions. After the 11 a.m. mass, which was part of the procession (now shortened to just one circumambulation of the wayside cross opposite the monastery), and the presentation of the new churchwardens, who walked around the chapel followed by the band, some groups of pilgrims started to leave, going down to São Lourenço da Montaria, in Viana do Castelo, for the feast of Santa Bárbara. Others joined in at Chã das Eiras, in Santo Aginha, and danced two or three goodbye *viras* singing stanzas of farewell and longing.



Serra d'Arga traditional costumes



Pilgrimage party



São João d'Arga Monastery



The landscape context of São João d'Arga

SÃO JOÃO D'ARGA MONASTERY

Classified as a National Monument in 2013, the São João d'Arga Monastery is an ancient Benedictine religious compound turned into an enclosed mountain sanctuary. It is located in a place of great beauty on the north facing slope of Serra d'Arga, at approximately 440 metres altitude, standing on a small rocky headland rising above the right bank of the Ribeiro de São João stream offering a vast panorama towards the valleys of the Coura and Minho rivers.

The São João Chapel, which is part of the compound, is surrounded by monumental, centuries-old cork and English oaks. Despite its small size and simplicity, it is one of the most significant medieval exemplars in the region. It was from early on the seat of a pilgrimage dedicated to São João Baptista, which still takes place every year on 28 and 29 August and constitutes a unique devotional moment that brings together the numerous local pilgrimages headed to the serra. The origin of this popular pilgrimage is unknown, as is that of the chapel itself.

Traditionally, it is said that the monastery might have been founded by São Frutuoso in the year 623, the date on an epigraphic inscription

whose existence is doubtful and is nowhere to be found. It is also thought that the date could be the result of an incorrect reading of the epigraph, which instead might have featured the date 1123, more in accordance with a time when the monastery already existed.

While, on the one hand, it can be suggested that the monastery already existed in the first half of the 12th century, on the other, the extant chapel could hardly correspond to that period. Like the neighbouring temple of São Pedro de Varais, the São João d'Arga construction belongs to the later Romanic, with its absence of stylistic features, simple plan and inexistent decoration.

The still extant Romanic construction points to a similar chronology or to the late 13th century, a time when it was common to build small rural churches with a relatively short single nave and a quadrangular main chapel, very robust walls with few openings and cornices without decoration. The sole extant doorway, with a broken double arch supported by plain cornices and a tympanum devoid of artistic elements, confirms this hypothesis.



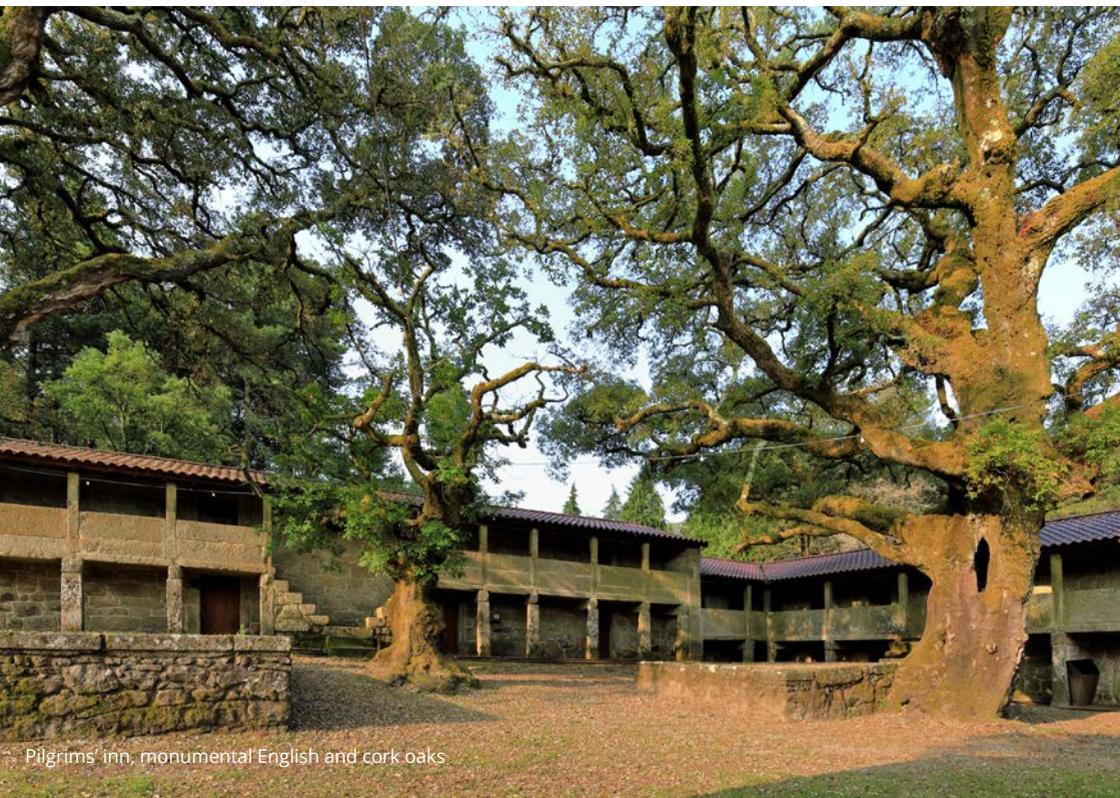
São João Chapel



Porch gallery of the pilgrims' quarters



Pilgrims' inn



Pilgrims' Inn, monumental English and cork oaks

The chapel underwent some transformations across the centuries. The enigmatic inscription '1333' on the main chapel probably alludes to one of the construction campaigns, perhaps responsible for most of its current configuration. However, the renovation works carried out in the late 18th century or early 19th century had a greater impact. At the time, due to the state of dereliction of the western side of the chapel, or the desire to update and monumentalize the main façade, that part of the temple was rebuilt, and the nave was extended. The frontispiece now included a flat arch flanked and surmounted by oculi that provided greater luminosity, and an irregular triangular gable with volutes, pinnacles at the angles and an axial cross.

Around the chapel an inn was also built (probably in the same period) to welcome the numerous pilgrims who spent the night during the feasts in honour of São João. This two-story building formed by two 'L' shaped bodies hosts the pilgrims' quarters, a linear succession of rooms under a common roof and featuring a porch gallery for shelter.

ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

- Caminha Administrative Boundaries
- Parish Administrative Boundaries
- Municipal Administrative Boundaries

SÃO JOÃO D'ARGA TRAILS

- C1 — Arga de Baixo Trail
- C2 — Arga de Cima Trail
- C3 — Coura Valley Trail
- C4 — Âncora Valley Trail
- Start of trail
- End of trail



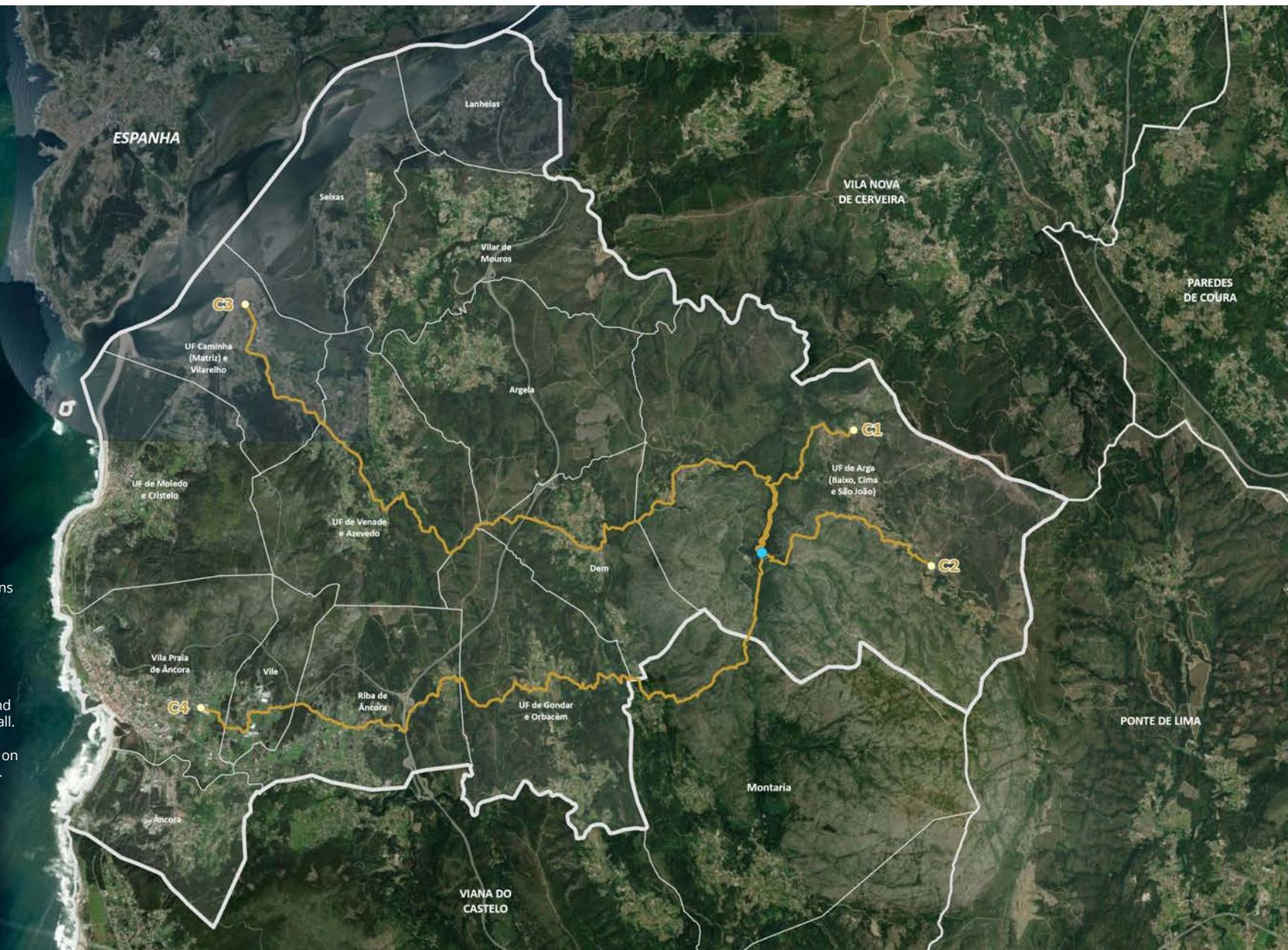
SÃO JOÃO D'ARGA TRAILS

Safety and conduct rules

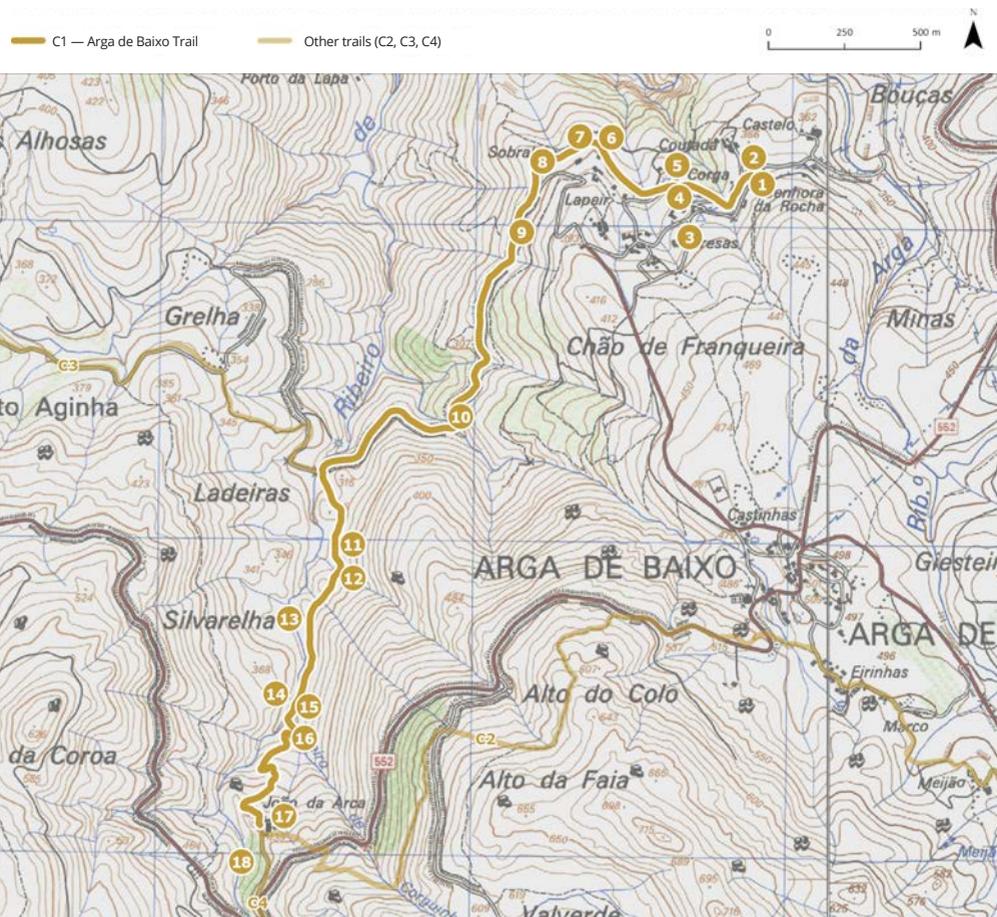
- Respect the signals and do not stray from marked paths.
- Avoid making noise or engaging in behaviour that may disturb the quiet.
- Do not damage the flora or disturb the fauna.
- Do not collect plants, animals or rocks.
- Respect the customs and traditions of the local population.
- Do not litter.
- Do not light fires.
- Avoid walking alone.
- Wear weather-appropriate clothing and shoes.
- Check the duration of the walk and make sure to finish before nightfall.
- In case of accident, use the numbers marking interest points on the map to indicate your location.
- Avoid taking risks.

Best time to go

The trail can be walked year-round. However, care should be exercised in the event of extreme (high or low) temperatures. Avoid days of fog, heavy rainfall or high winds.



ARGA DE BAIXO TRAIL



Interest points

1. Nossa Senhora da Rocha Chapel
2. View to the valley of the Ribeiro de Arga stream
3. Fuchaquinho House
4. Corga Alminhas Shrine
5. Sardão Mill
6. Panoramic view over the valley of the Ribeiro de Arga stream
7. Sobral Rural Settlement
8. Panoramic view over valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream
9. Valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream
10. Monumental cork-oak/Fauna shelter
11. Juress' bentgrass
12. Narrow buckler fern
13. Ladeira (or Clamores) Wayside Cross
14. Knickpoint giant's kettles
15. Mountain stream fauna
16. **Granitic megablock with exfoliation**
17. São João d'Arga Monastery
18. São João d'Arga Wayside Cross (Monastery)

Start
Nossa Senhora da Rocha Chapel
41°51'25.416"N 8°42'49.05"W

Finish
São João d'Arga Monastery
41°50'18.272"N 8°43'57.5"W



Altimetric profile of the trail with location of interest points



São João d'Arga procession



View towards the slopes and ridges of the Coura river valley



Isolated block displaying heavy exfoliation

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Starting in the square opposite the Nossa Senhora da Rocha Chapel, the Arga de Baixo Trail begins by following the left bank of the Ribeira de Arga stream until it joins the Ribeiro de São João stream. Human activity is more conspicuous along this section of the trail as it crosses various small rural settlements around which some of the largest and most beautiful farming terraces in Serra d'Arga can be observed, particularly on the steep slopes of the stream's valley. The sparkling Penas Waterfalls, whose roar is often audible, plummet between these slopes, hidden by a leafy patch of trees and bushes. Clearly visible along the trail are Cabeço do Meio Dia hill, also known as Alto do Crasto peak, the *serras* that define the valleys of the Coura and Minho rivers, as well as those rising up close to the Atlantic coast already in Galician territory.

After passing Sobral, on the ridgeline dividing the Ribeira de Arga and Ribeiro de São João streams, the landscape changes significantly, folding down to the majestic valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream. On the oppo-

site slope, descending along the right bank of the stream, it is possible to see the imposing, picturesque, stony, stark and almost devoid of vegetation peaks of Pedra Alçada, Alto da Coroa and Alto das Penas. Human presence diminishes at every step. The lowest point on the trail is reached very close to the stream and the pond of Poço Grande da Ladeira where, as legend has it, sorceresses occasionally came to swim. After Ladeira Bridge, the trail climbs up the slope towards the ancient walls of the São João d'Arga Monastery, from which it is possible to enjoy a memorable panorama of the valley and the lands stretching beyond it to the Minho valley and Galicia.

The Ribeiro de São João stream headwaters start at the heights of Serra d'Arga, where the watercourses draining into the Âncora and the Coura rivers basins divide. The stream is one of the main tributaries of the Coura, joining it downstream from the São João Bridge at the western boundary of Covas parish, in Vila Nova de Cerveira. Due to the fires that often rage in the valley, the riparian vegetation has changed profoundly, with native arboreal



Nossa Senhora da Rocha Chapel

vegetation replaced by invasive species of the genus *Acacia*. Fauna and flora communities in the bed of the stream are nevertheless well preserved.

The stream's flow is rather intense in winter, allowing for the formation of hydrogeomorphological structures. The final section of the trail is marked by large granite blocks that shelter several species of ferns and mosses.

Heritage includes the eighteenth-century Nossa Senhora da Rocha Chapel, the Corga *Alminhas* [lit. 'little souls'] Shrine and the Ladeira Wayside Cross, erected in the early 18th century. Long ago, on the Day of São João Evangelista (6 May), there used to be a procession by pilgrims of the Santo Isidoro Brotherhood, who carried silver crosses and pennants, as well as



Pioneering peat bog with sphagnum and Juress' bentgrass (*Agrostis juressi*)

the image of the saint, to the wayside cross, praying for droughts, cattle diseases and other evils afflicting them to end as they clamoured for divine intervention. For this reason, the wayside cross is also known as the Clamores Wayside Cross.

Built in 1747, Fuchaquinho House was once one of the most prominent farming houses in Arga de Baixo. Despite the compound's current state of neglect, it is still possible to observe a set of constructions with schist walls and granite wall corners, jambs and lintels. Inside the compound there are still two granite ovens as well as two granaries, one of which in a good state of conservation.

The trail also crosses the Sobral Rural Settlement, formed by a group of old buildings in schist and granite which are valuable from the heritage point of view.

OUTSTANDING POINTS



View over the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream

Panoramic view over the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream

At 333 metres altitude, just outside the Sobral Rural Settlement, there is a small yard featuring a monumental common holly. The yard is already located in the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream, whose waters flow 170 metres below. This location affords a panorama over almost the entire valley, from its highest point, to the south, to its lowest point, to the north.

To the south, on the left bank of the stream, the gaze focuses on the tall, rocky, vegetation-bare peaks of Pedra Alçada, the highest point in the Caminha municipality at an altitude of 742 metres and, just slightly below it, the Coroa and Penas peaks. On the opposite side of the valley, along the same line as the conical Alto da Coroa peak and standing atop a small headland formed by the Ribeiro de São João and Ribeiro da



Francisco's House. Sobral Rural Settlement, Arga de Baixo

Corguinha streams, is the ancient São João d'Arga Monastery which, although very much hidden by the slopes of Alto do Colo and Alto da Faia peaks, can already be seen.

Further down on the slope, surrounded by pinewoods, it is possible to glimpse the Santo Aginha Rural Settlement, with its agricultural fields arranged in terraces, and dense native thickets. To the north, as far as the eye can see, the slopes and ridges of Penedo das Casinhas, Serra de Góis and the Galician *serras* hint at the valleys of the Coura and Minho rivers.

Sobral Rural Settlement

At the Sobral Rural Settlement, in Arga de Baixo, is Francisco's House, a rustic schist and granite building, and one of the most distinctive in Serra d'Arga.



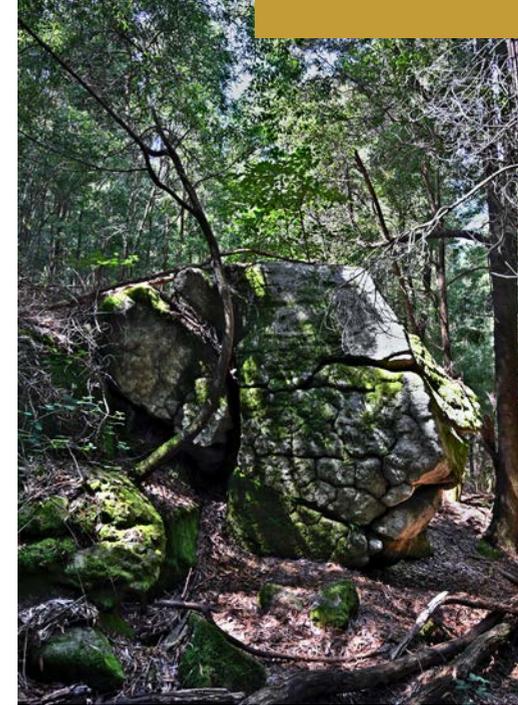
Narrow buckler fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*)

The two-story house has a rectangular plan, a gabled tile roof and rectangular spans with granite frames and lintels. Access to the upper floor is via an outer staircase, featuring seven steps made of granite blocks with different heights, that reaches a roofed porch supported by irregular square-section granite pillars.

Narrow buckler fern

The narrow buckler fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) is under grave threat due to the environmental alterations of the last decades, namely changes in rainfall patterns and biologic invasion processes that have led to the replacement of typical riparian vegetation by invasive species of the genus *Acacia*, such as silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) and blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*).

This fern is widely distributed across northern Europe, but in Portugal it occurs only in the northernmost region of Alto Minho, where it was recent-



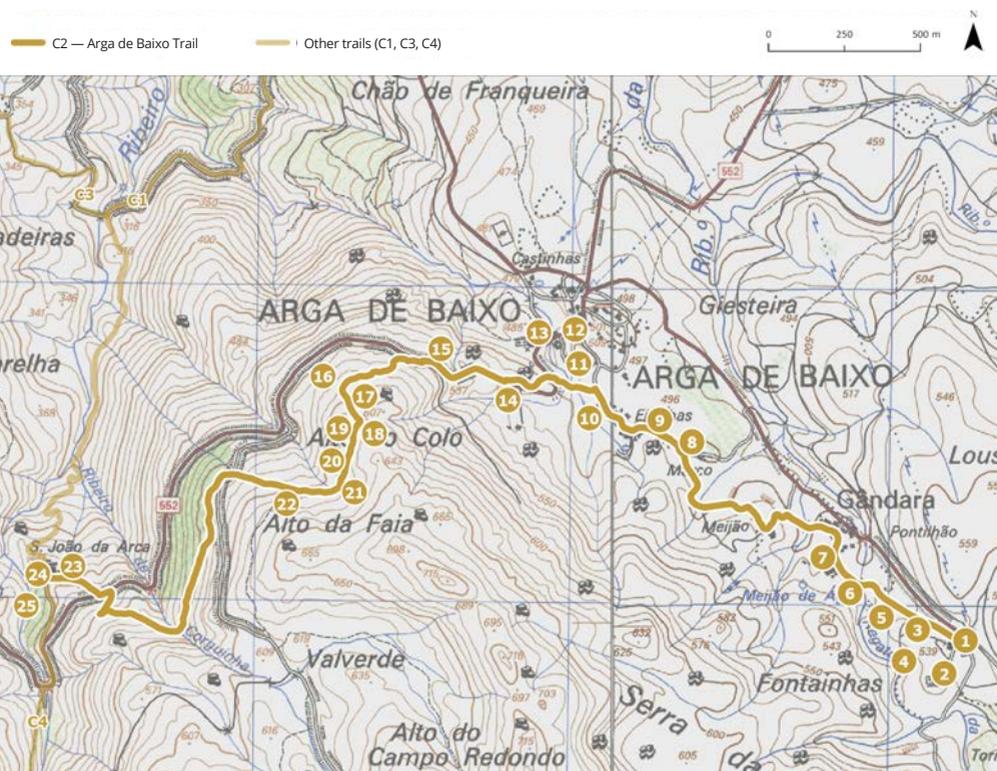
Granitic megablock with exfoliation

ly discovered in two specific nuclei: the Ribeiro de São João stream and the Âncora river (Caminha), and in Covas (Vila Nova de Cerveira), by the Ribeira das Mós stream. Its rarity, and the small size of its populations, led to its inclusion in the Red List of Vascular Plants in Mainland Portugal as 'Critically Endangered', the highest threat category.

Granitic megablock with exfoliation

Isolated blocks of various sizes and roundness proliferate on granitic substrates in Serra d'Arga. Along the trail, the megablock that stands out the most shows exfoliation fractures on a large part of its surface. These fractures are the result of lithostatic decompression ensuing from the progressive rising to the surface of these blocks due to the erosion of overlying geological material (rocks and/or layers of soils).

ARGA DE CIMA TRAIL

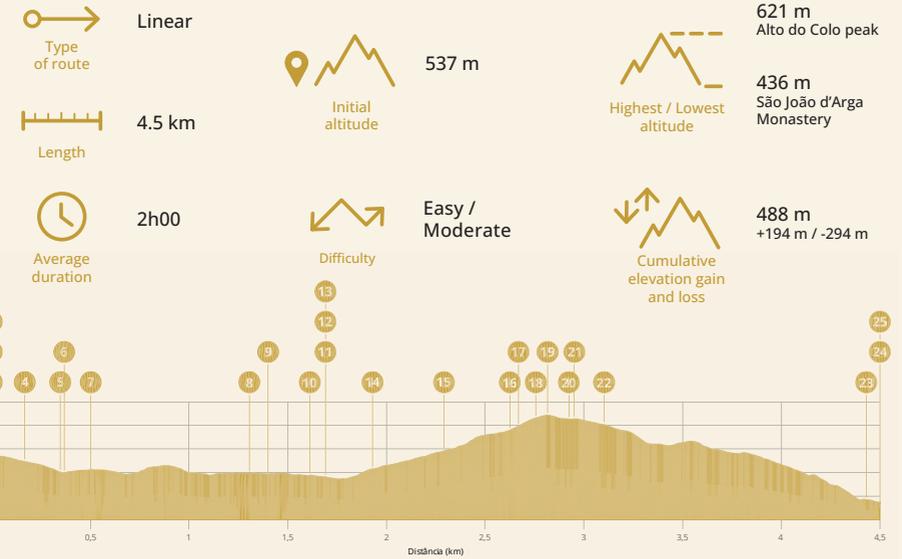


Interest points

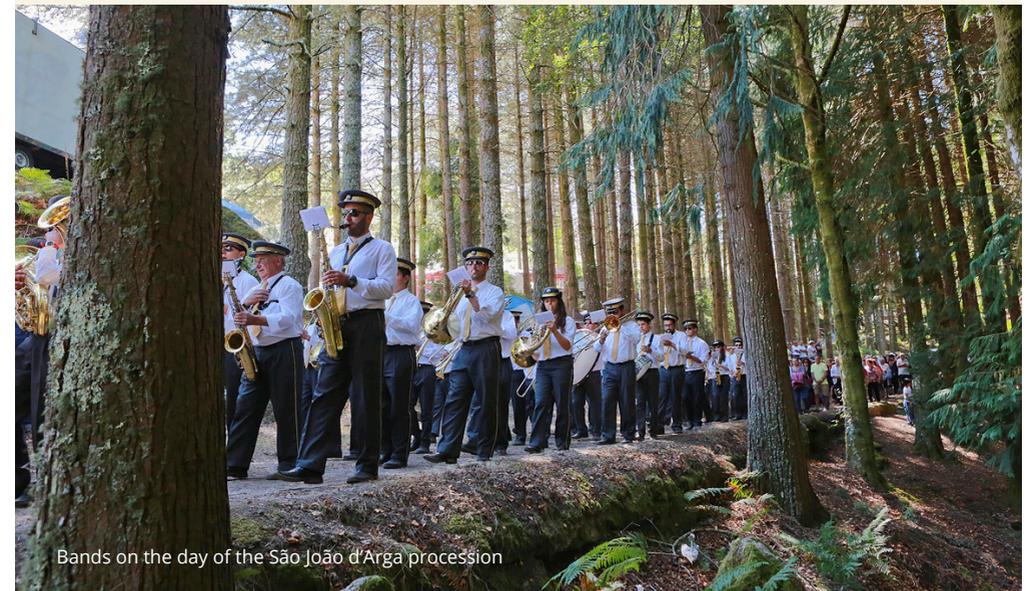
1. Santo Antão Chapel and old Calvary
2. Arga de Cima Parish Church
3. Panoramic view towards the slope of Serra d'Arga and Gandra
4. Wolf's Bridge
5. Gandra Mills
6. Gandra's production landscape
7. Gandra Rural Settlement
8. Marco hamlet
9. Arga meadow
10. Eirinha hamlet
11. Salgueira Fountain
12. Pontelhinha House
13. Arga de Baixo Parish Church
14. Serra d'Arga Interpretation Centre (CISA)
15. Panoramic view over Arga de Baixo
16. Panoramic view over the valleys of the Ribeiro de São João and Ribeira de Arga streams
17. Tafoni, pedestal rocks and lateral undulation
18. Alto do Colo peak ridge
19. Heaths (habitat 4030) and thistle (*Carduus asturicus*)
20. Rocky area fauna
21. Panoramic view over the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream
22. Alto da Faia peak slope
23. Bat shelters
24. São João d'Arga Monastery
25. São João d'Arga Wayside Cross (Monastery)

Start
Santo Antão Chapel
41°50'11.044"N 8°41'52.498"W

Finish
São João d'Arga Monastery
41°50'18.272"N 8°43'57.5"W



Asymmetric profile of the trail with location of interest points



Bands on the day of the São João d'Arga procession



Cabeço do Meio Dia hill or Alto do Castro peak

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Starting at the Santo Antão Chapel, the first section of the Arga de Cima trail crosses the terrain nesting under the eastern slope of the Serra d'Arga granitic massif. The area is crossed by the flowing waters of the Ribeira de Arga stream and its tributaries, on whose margins a fertile plain opens up, featuring an intricate geometric pattern made of a myriad of agricultural fields sometimes arranged in picturesque sets of terraces. These are accompanied by as many meadows fringed by dense and cool thickets and riparian galleries. This beautiful, and very bucolic, rural landscape mosaic features several small-scale rural settlements.

After passing Eirinha hamlet and its Wedding Boulder, the trail gradually leaves behind the more humanised, more fertile and flatter terrain to quickly enter a substantially different section, which is harsher and starker, with less tree cover, more exposed to the elements, hillier and more demanding for the walker. Around three hundred metres above the Serra d'Arga Interpretation Centre (CISA), the trail follows the old Potão Way, clim-



Thistle (*Carduus asturicus*), endemic species

bing up the slope to the highest point on the trail at one of the Alto do Colo peak ridges.

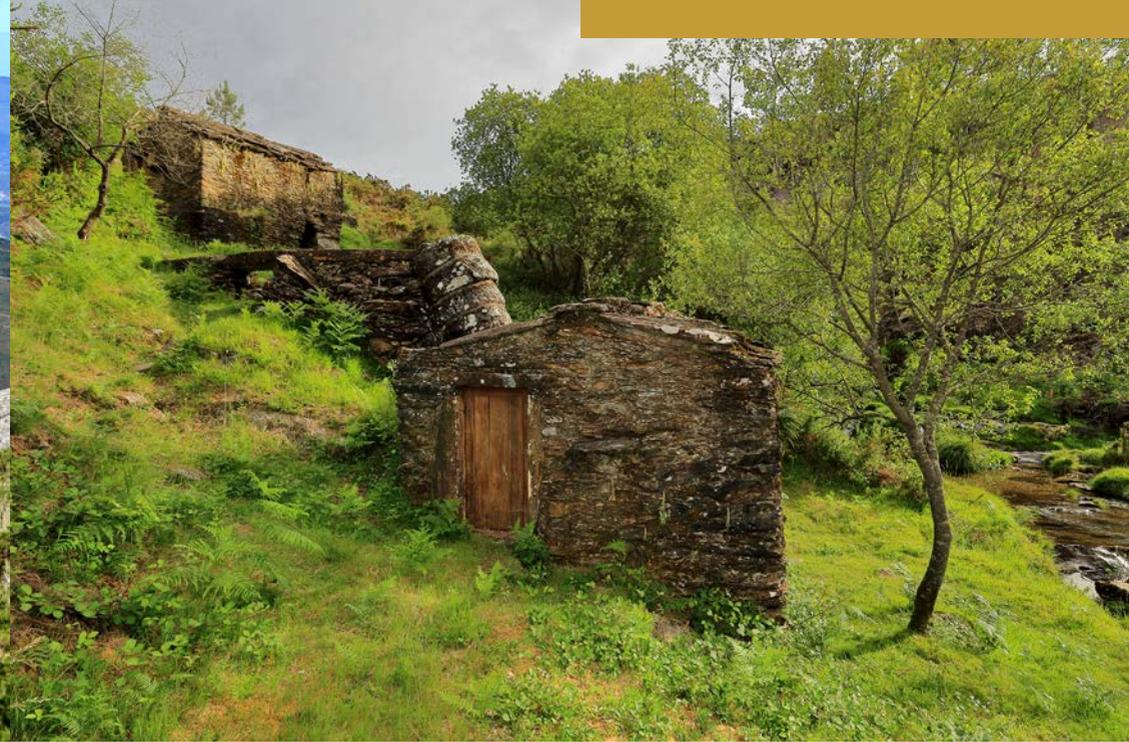
Along the climb, there are numerous points inviting a stop to restore one's stamina and admire the epic panoramas it affords. From east to west, it is possible to see the farther peaks of the Peneda-Gerês National Park, the valley of the Minho river and the *serras* that define it, Cabeço do Meio Dia hill, the territories closest to Arga de Cima, Arga de Baixo and Arga de São João, and the mouth of the Minho guarded by the iconic Monte de Santa Tecla hill, often cloaked in a diaphanous plume of mist.

Starting after crossing the highest point on the trail, the descent along the west-facing slopes of the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream, flowing almost two hundred metres below, ends at the monumental site of the São João d'Arga Monastery.

In this section, the trail crosses an area of bush punctuated by rocky outcrops, the typical landscape of the Serra d'Arga's highest points. These out-



Pedestal rock in a rock group marked by gnammas



Gandra Mills. Arga de Cima

crops are characterised by the presence of megablocks on which different types of erosion generated strange geomorphologies, such as small blocks seeming to hang from larger blocks. These blocks are a favourable habitat for reptiles, which use them as shelter, and points from which to observe birds that are typical of open areas, such as the rare blue rock thrush.

Although it is a very common type of habitat in Portugal, the bush is receding in some coastal areas of Alto Minho due to invasive acacia species, such as the golden wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) and the blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*). The dominant species in the native bush is the gorse (*Ulex europaeus* subsp. *latebracteatus*) which, despite its thorns, is consumed by numerous animals such as the *garrano* horse, whereas the shoots of the dwarf gorse (*Ulex minor*) are used as cow fodder.

Heritage includes the parish churches of Arga de Cima and Arga de Baixo, as well as the Santo Antão Chapel, a popular saint canonised by the people. In Arga de Baixo, the Eirinha House and the Pontelhinha House feature all of the more typical elements of the serra's traditional homesteads: the house, the farmyard and the animal sheds, the granary and threshing-ground, boundary walls and fertile fields crossed by countless streams.

The trail also crosses Gandra, in Arga de Cima, a rural settlement of heritage significance formed by a group of old buildings in schist and granite and by the Marco House, the residence of artist Mário Rocha, which turns into a contemporary art gallery every summer to host *Arte na Leira* [Art in the Field], a cultural event promoted by the owner since 1998.

OUTSTANDING POINTS



Wolf's Bridge. Arga de Cima

Wolf's Bridge

Built in the mid-17th-century to facilitate the crossing of Regato da Fraga creek, in Arga de Cima, Wolf's Bridge is a small arch made of vertically arranged granite slabs whose form resembles the arched back of a wolf. Damaged around six years ago by floods, the bridge was restored as much as possible to its original form in 2021.

For many years, this small structure allowed for crossing the watercourse on foot by the priests from São Lourenço da Montaria, in Viana do Castelo, coming to celebrate mass in the Argas region.

On the creek's banks, a few hundred metres upstream from the bridge, grows one of the rarest plants in Portuguese flora: the figwort (*Scrophularia bourgaeana*). An endemic species in the Iberian Peninsula, the sole known occurrence of this plant in Portugal was in the Ramiscal Valley, in Serra do Soajo; in April 2017, a small population was discovered in Serra d'Arga.



Tafoni, pedestal rocks and lateral undulation

Tafoni, pedestal rocks and lateral undulation

More or less halfway along the trail, surrounded by other granitic microforms, a prominent pedestal rock stands out. It features a curious lateral undulation, a morphologic typology that is very rare in granitic massifs, which can be explained by the concept of differential erosion.

This specific case is the result of a differential erosion process caused by the development of mechanical anisotropies that originate with magmatic solidification processes.

Alto do Colo peak ridge

A short distance from the ridgeline descending from Alto do Colo peak, at the highest point on the trail, at 621 metres, the panorama opens up in a large arc from east to west.

To the west, it is possible to see Monte de Santa Tecla hill, A Guarda, O Rosal, the *serras* facing the



View towards the Ribeiro de São João stream and the Minho river

Atlantic, the valley of the Tamuxe o Carballo river, in Galicia, and the waters of the Minho river. Closer, facing south, one sees the slopes of the Ribeiro de São João stream valley as well as those of the Coura river valley, of which those of Serra de Góis and Alto da Pena peak stand out. To the left of the latter can be glimpsed the craggy peaks of the Galician Serra do Galiñeiro and, on the right, the cities of Tui and Valença in the valley of the Minho river.

Finally, towards the east, the ever-present Cabeço do Meio Dia hill, at 550 metres, rises above Arga de Baixo, as well as Alto da Revolta peak (or Penedo dos Paus), with its slopes covered by extensive patches of pinewood, while already on the line of the horizon, appear the highest peaks of Peneda-Gerês National Park.

Rocky area fauna

Rocky outcrops, often surrounded by arboreal bush and areas of sparse vegetation, are one of

the most frequent environments in Serra d'Arga. Although these are relatively poor areas, some particular species of fauna thrive there.

Among the bird species, the most common are the European stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*), often perching on well-visible spots, on rocks or the tops of bushes. Other observable birds in these rocky areas are woodlarks (*Lullula arborrea*), Eurasian skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) or, occasionally, small groups of carrion crows (*Corvus corone*).

These rocky outcrops are also places where it is possible to sporadically observe a bird that is much rarer in this region: the blue rock thrush (*Monticola solitarius*). Particularly in spring, the males of the species acquire an intense blue coloration that makes them unmistakable (outside the mating season their bluish hue fades markedly).



Blue rock thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)

COURA VALLEY TRAIL

C3 — Coura Valley Trail

Original Trail

Other trails (C1, C2, C4)



Interest points

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Fountain at Caminha Main Square | 17. Senhora das Neves Chapel and Santo Isidoro Wayside Cross | 32. Santo Aginha Alminhas Shrine |
| 2. Pitas' House | 18. Panoramic view over the valleys and estuaries of the Coura and Minho rivers | 33. Rio Fountain |
| 3. Rocha Wayside Cross | 19. Panoramic view towards Serra d'Arga | 34. Presa Alminhas Shrine and Wayside Cross |
| 4. Vilarelho Parish Church | 20. Dem Parish Wayside Cross | 35. Nossa Senhora da Conceição Chapel |
| 5. View towards Caminha, the valley and estuary of the Coura river | 21. Dem Parish Church | 36. View towards the Ribeiro de São João stream and Cabeço do Meio Dia hill |
| 6. Archaeological Station of Alto do Coto da Pena peak | 22. Rua da Igreja Niche | 37. Knickpoint and boudinaged quartz vein |
| 7. São Roque Chapel | 23. Agricultural field mosaic of Dem and the valley of the Âncora river | 38. View towards the Wedding Boulder |
| 8. View towards the valley and estuary of the Coura river | 24. Santa Luzia Chapel and Loureiro Fountain | 39. Scabious |
| 9. São Sebastião Chapel | 25. Cubanco Mill | 40. Granitic escarpment with megablocks |
| 10. Nossa Senhora do Caminho Chapel | 26. View over Dem and the Ribeiro do Real stream valley | 41. Valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream and São João d'Arga Monastery |
| 11. Meadow of the Coura and Santo Antão slope | 27. Castanheiros House | 42. Wild boar |
| 12. Nossa Senhora do Socorro Chapel | 28. Chã de Felgueiras | 43. Ladeira (or Clamores) Wayside Cross |
| 13. Venade Parish Church | 29. Monumental cork oak with hare's-foot fern | 44. São João d'Arga Monastery |
| 14. View towards the Tinto river meadow | 30. Fauna of the habitat mosaics | 45. São João d'Arga Wayside Cross (Monastery) |
| 15. Nossa Senhora das Barracas Chapel | 31. Arga de São João Parish Church | |
| 16. View towards the valleys and estuaries of the Coura and Minho rivers | | |

Start
Caminha Yard
41°51'25.416"N 8°42'49.05"W



Finish
São João d'Arga Monastery
41°50'18.272"N 8°43'57.5"W



Linear



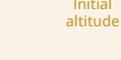
16.4 km



6h30



9 m



Highest / Lowest altitude



442 m
Lugar de Felgueiras

9 m
Terreiro de Caminha

1.321 m
+875 m / - 446 m



Altimetric profile of the trail with location of interest points



São João d'Arga Pilgrims



Western slope of Serra d'Arga



Granitic ridge with blockfield

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Starting at Caminha Main Square (Terreiro or Conselheiro da Silva Torres Square), adorned at the centre by an elegant Renaissance fountain and surrounded by a group of remarkable secular and religious buildings, the Coura Valley Trail follows along the entirety of the wide Corredoura Street up to the urban edge of the town, marked by the Minho railway.

From Vilarelho to Venade and Azevedo, the trail crosses flat or quasi-flat terrain that begins along the left bank of the vast and verdant estuary of the Coura river. Together with the Minho river estuary, this site is part of Rede Natura 2000, given the ecological significance of its wet habitats, which shelter a large diversity of avifauna.

This territory encompasses a complex landscape mosaic, typical of the Minho region, in which a dense, albeit scattered, settlement system is interspersed with fertile agricultural, sometimes terraced, fields for grain and horticultural products, including trellised vines and fruit trees. Completing this intricate mosaic, protected from the Atlantic winds by Monte de Santo Antão hill, are meandering riparian galleries along the watercourses, as well as leafy and seasonally diverse woods and native vegetation thickets.

Leaving behind the plains of the Coura, the long climb up to the Senhora das Neves, or Senhora da Serra, Chapel begins, affording a wide, dazzling panorama over the estuaries and valleys of the Coura and Minho rivers, Galicia and the Atlantic. From Senhora das Neves onwards, the trail crosses the Dem parish until it meets the majestic granitic batholite of Serra d'Arga.

Between Dem and São d'Arga Monastery, the hilly terrain, much harsher and barren, with a landscape diversity accentuated by the marked existing geological differences, transitions from metamorphic rocks to plutonic rocks. At Felgueiras hamlet, in the parish of Arga de São João, the trail reaches 442 metres altitude, its highest point, continuing to Santo Aginha, the last rural settlement before arriving at the monastery. Standing out along the way are English and cork oak woods featuring large old trees with communities of ferns and mosses growing on the massive branches. These trees shelter several species of vertebrate fauna, from birds to bats. At the edge of these woods are small bay laurel and common holly thickets, followed by pine and Tasmanian

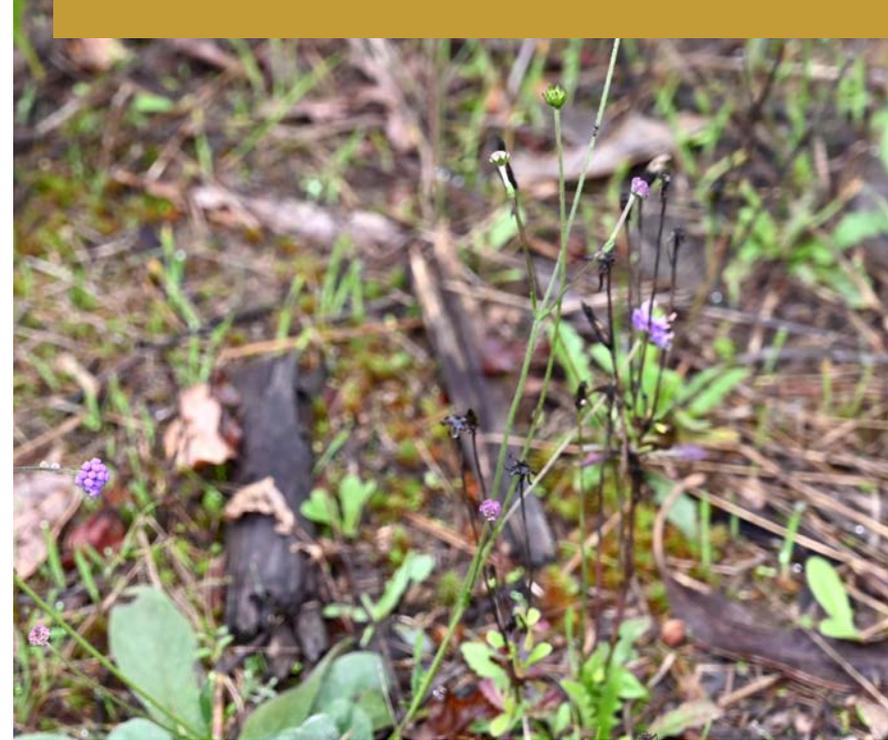


Nossa Senhora do Caminho Chapel. Venade

blue gum forests, under which rare species and invasive exotic species can be observed, such as the bushy needlewood (*Hakea decurrens* subsp. *physocarpa*).

Built heritage includes the Vilarelho, Venade, Dem and Arga de São João parish churches, as well as all the rural chapels along the pilgrimage route from the town of Caminha to the São João d'Arga Monastery, i.e., São Roque, São Sebastião, Nossa Senhora do Caminho, Nossa Senhora do Socorro, Nossa Senhora das Barracas, Senhora das Neves, Santa Luzia and Nossa Senhora da Conceição.

Exiting Dem, the trail passes by the Cubanco Mill, located by an irrigation tank. In winter, the mill was moved by the waters of the Cubanco creek as well as the abundant waters coming down from the slope of the serra. The source of this creek is at Furada de Barco and it feeds



Scabious (*Succisa pinnatifida*), endangered endemic species

the eponymous weir located at a higher elevation. The small bridge at Cubanco, located downstream, was used by the locals to cross this watercourse. Carts and cattle forded the creek's bed.

In Arga de São João there is also the Presa Wayside Cross, named after its location by a weir (presa), which features an interesting way of measuring out the irrigation water in Serra d'Arga. At the base of the cross there is a slit turned to the southwest and, as the sun hit it, the weir was closed. Around 4 p.m., it was opened again, and the water allocated to each farmer (marked on a wooden board) was deviated along each individual irrigation channel or trench. Less than 15 metres away, the Presa (or Cruzeiro) *Alminhas* [lit. 'little souls'] Shrine contains, behind a small iron gate, a painted panel with an image of the crucified Christ flanked by Saint Michael and Our Lady of Mercy.

OUTSTANDING POINTS



Fountain at Caminha Main Square



View towards the estuaries of the Coura and Minho rivers



Nossa Senhora das Barracas Chapel. Azevedo

Fountain at Caminha Main Square

Classified as a National Monument in 2010, the Main Square, or *Terreiro*, Fountain has supplied water to the population of Caminha town since the 15th century; it was built so that the people did not need to fetch their water from farther away.

Designed and built by master mason João Lopes, the Elder (Arcos de Valdevez, 1480–Viana do Castelo, 1556), the fountain's design follows a structural programme that the author had previously applied in other fountains in Porto and Pontevedra, i.e., a pyramidal model consisting of a large pool on a platform accessed via four sets of stairs, at the centre of which stands a pillar supporting the three-tier bowls. Atop a shorter column, the larger bowl is decorated with six head spouts and the one above it with four. At the centre of the top bowl stands the local coat of arms amidst sculpted zoomorphic figures.

View towards the valley and estuary of the Coura river

At around 50 metres altitude, it is possible to admire a wide panorama over the stunning estuary of the Coura river, whose path towards the Minho river is easily traceable, as well as that of some of the secondary channels, with their riparian galleries meandering through the vast estuarine marsh.

Enveloping this rich and luminous basin of biodiversity are the fertile agricultural fields of the Coura meadow, extending, sometimes in terraces, to the surrounding slopes.

Around this landscape mosaic – and greatly contributing to its beauty – are the high granite and schist walls rising from the banks of the Coura and Minho rivers. On the right bank of the Minho, one glimpses the Atlantic-facing hills, Serra de Argallo and its viewpoint at O Niño

do Corvo (Raven's Nest) and further inland, announcing the Valença-Tui Eurocity, the peaks of Monte Alóia hill, the first natural park in Galicia. On the Portuguese side, looking east, one finds Serra de Góis and Alto da Pena peak, with the craggy peaks of the Gávea and Salgosa *serras* rising between the two and completing this impressive scenery.

Capela de Nossa Senhora das Barracas

Some authors attribute the name of this small temple in Azevedo to the *barrocal* (an area usually on a steep slope, alternately composed of depressions and hills); others claim it comes from its earlier construction in wood.

The reconstruction of the Nossa Senhora das Barracas (or Barrocas, as the locals call it) Chapel was commissioned in 1764 to Gonçalo Lourenço

do Frade, his son Pedro Lourenço da Devesa and his brother-in-law, Priest Francisco Pires, and was completed in 1786. A fine example of a rural chapel in the baroque style, the main façade has a rectangular door with a slightly arched lintel, surmounted by a broken pediment. In the middle of the frontispiece there is a quatrefoil window. Over the triangular top of the façade there is a 16th-century cross.

To the south, the chapel is framed by a partly walled, small, dense wood of English oak and maritime pine.



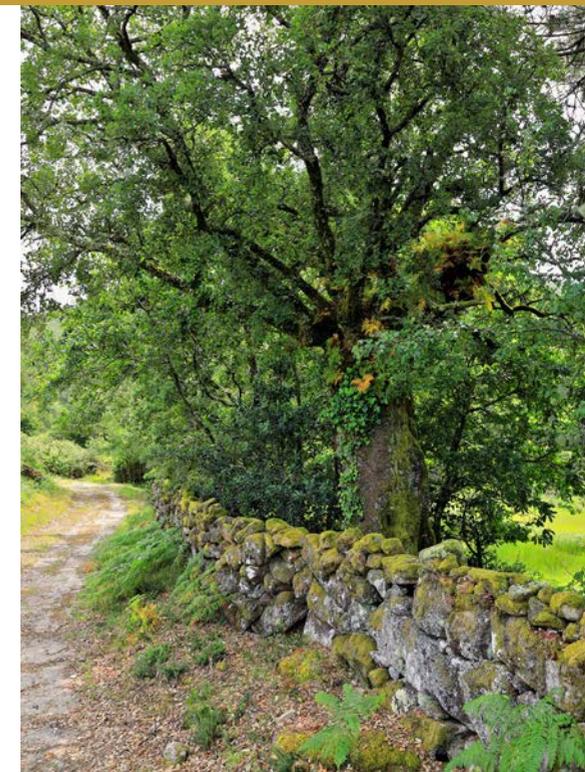
Caminha, Monte de Santa Tecla hill and the estuaries of the Coura and Minho



Santo Isidoro Wayside Cross. Dem



Hare's-foot fern (*Davallia canariensis*)



Monumental cork oak (*Quercus suber*) with hare'-foot fern (*Davallia canariensis*)

Panoramic view over the valleys and estuaries of the Coura and Minho rivers

From the wooded compound of the Senhora das Neves Chapel, at around 350 metres altitude, the vistas open up almost entirely to the west towards the Atlantic in a superb panorama over the wide, fertile and luminous lands around the banks of the Coura and Minho estuaries.

To the north, outlined against the estuarine and Atlantic waters, stand the town of Caminha, with its bridges over the Coura estuary, and the iconic Monte de Santa Tecla hill, often shrouded in a picturesque plume of fog.

To the west, the panorama is filled by the wooded slope of Monte de Santo Antão hill, on whose ridge standouts the Santo Antão Chapel, with commanding views over the mouth of the Minho, as well as Alto da Espiga peak and its windfarm. At a lower level can be seen the houses of Azevedo and its terraces set on the slope. In the distance, to the south of Alto da Espiga peak, between

the smoothed peak of Penizes and the slopes of Serra de Santa Luzia – announcing the valley of the Âncora, which flows between the two – it is possible to glimpse three floating wind turbines in the Atlantic, the first offshore windfarm in Portugal, which began operating in 2020.

Santo Isidoro Wayside Cross

Not long ago, the Senhora das Neves Chapel, in Dem, was one of the stations of Clamor da Irmandade de Santo Isidoro (the *Clamour* of the Santo Isidoro Brotherhood, whose seat is in the Moledo parish but includes parishes in the municipalities of Caminha and Viana do Castelo).

Near the Santo Isidoro Wayside Cross, located 300 metres to the southeast of the chapel, the processional crosses of the parishes of Dem, Venade, Azevedo and Gondar gathered, accompanied by the parish priest and the population. Next to the wayside cross was a table with four benches for

each of the parishes' four abbots. Here, the delegates from Dem reported to the Brotherhood. The Clamor [outcry] proceeded onwards to the chapel only after this ritual to celebrate mass.

Erected in 1684, the Santo Isidoro Wayside Cross was originally composed of a prismatic shaft over two juxtaposed granite cubes, featuring a sphere on top surmounted by a crucifix with a stone Christ in the vernacular style. The base featured an inscription reading 'SANTO ISIDORO. 1684'.

Restored in 1922 – a date that can still be seen on the upper base –, the wayside cross was once again subject to a more recent intervention, and the crucifix was replaced by a simpler Latin cross.

Monumental cork-oak with hare's-foot fern

The most singular feature of this site is the presence of an old, large cork-oak (*Quercus suber*) with very developed epiphytic communities and

a predominance of mosses and some ferns, such as the southern polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) and the hare's-foot fern (*Davallia canariensis*).

These trees have a high ecological value and a crucial role in nature conservation due to their cavities and dead branches, which offer shelter and nutrition to numerous animals and plants.

The hare's-foot fern grows in temperate climates from the Cape Verde Archipelago to the Canary Islands, Madeira and even Morocco and the west of the Iberian Peninsula. It grows on tree trunks and mossy rocks in cool and humid places, always with an oceanic influence since it cannot withstand temperatures below 5 °C. In Serra d'Arga it grows on the foothills and always on older trees.



Common firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*)



Granitic escarpment with megablocks



View towards the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream

Fauna of the habitat mosaics

This area features an extraordinary wealth of birds that thrive on its habitat mosaics.

The dozens of easily observed species are mostly common birds, some of them very abundant here, such as the serin (*Serinus serinus*), the goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), the coal tit (*Periparus ater*), the blackbird (*Turdus merula*), the wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) and the Eurasian blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*).

One of the smallest and most colourful birds found here is the common firecrest (*Regulus ignicapilla*), a species that is relatively common in the region, although it is usually not well-known. Despite its flamboyant plumage (greenish-yellow back, striped head and a yellowish erectile cap in females that is orangish in males), its small size (it is one of the smallest birds in Europe) and behaviour (individuals are usually seen alone or in pairs) make it a

very discreet species. Nevertheless, they are relatively easy to observe here throughout the year, particularly on relatively isolated trees along the banks of the stream.

Granitic escarpment with megablocks

Along the granitic massifs of Serra d'Arga, there are several examples of steep and craggy areas on slope sides and ridges. This specific case consists of a compact tor-derived group of megablocks forming a granitic escarpment on the top of the slope.

The natural fracturing of the rocky blocks, together with erosive atmospheric processes, shaped these granitic geo-forms.

Valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream and São João d'Arga Monastery

A short distance from the Ribeiro de São João stream, its valley appears almost unexpectedly to the walker at this point, displaying all its magnificence and splendour, rocky and verdant.

It develops more or less along a south-north axis and its western slope features the Alto do Colo and Alto da Faia peaks, which are reference points on the walk towards the São João d'Arga Monastery from Arga de Cima. Visible on the eastern side are the iconic Alto da Coroa peak and, further in the distance, the Curros Grandes slope, almost at the top of the Pedra Alçada massif.

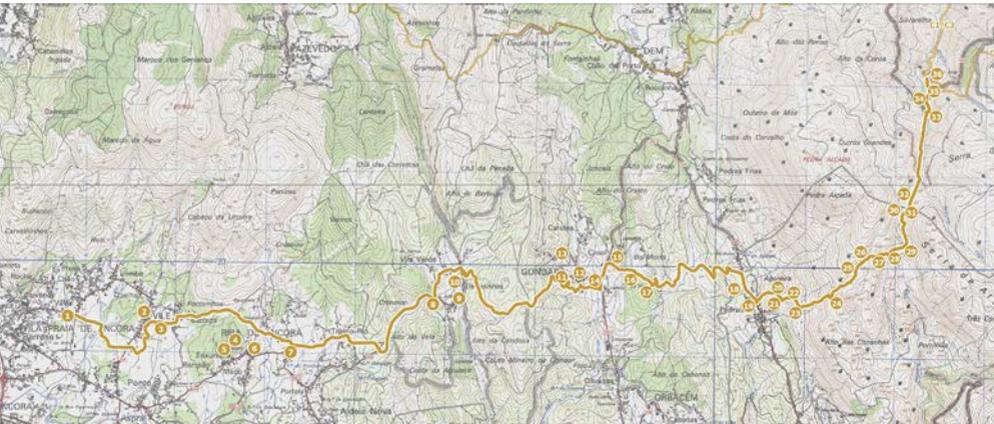
At the centre, from a small headland formed by the Ribeiro de São João and Ribeiro da Corguiña streams, and framed by monumental cork oaks, English oaks, birches, pine trees and Lawson cypresses, can be seen the old walls of the

venerable monastery. At its feet flow the stream's restless and crystalline waters, which, as they descend across the middle of valley create beautiful pools and waterfalls.

To the south, at the top of the valley and above the monastery, can be glimpsed a succession of slopes and ridges climbing up the *serra* to meet the two large plateaus at the top: that of São João and that of Grande, as well as Alto do Espinheiro peak, the highest point of Serra d'Arga, at an altitude of 825 metres.

ÂNCORA VALLEY TRAIL

C4 — Âncora Valley Trail Other trails (C1, C2, C3)



Interest points

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Vila Praia de Âncora Parish Church | 22. Pedra Alçada granitic massif |
| 2. Vile Parish Church | 23. View over the valley of the Âncora river |
| 3. Vile meadow | 24. Panoramic view over the valley of the Âncora river |
| 4. Santo Amaro Chapel | 25. Small flatland on the valley of the Galego river |
| 5. Panoramic view over the Atlantic basin of the Âncora river | 26. View over the valley of the Galego river |
| 6. Espírito Santo Chapel | 27. Pedra Alçada ridge |
| 7. Riba de Âncora Parish Church | 28. View over the valley of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek |
| 8. Apardal Mills | 29. Granite blockfield and pothole |
| 9. São Miguel Chapel | 30. Pioneering peat bog (habitat types 3130, 4020, 6230, 6410, 7140 and 7150) |
| 10. View towards the Vila Verde meadow | 31. Chã do Guindeiro |
| 11. View over the valley of the Ribeira de Gondar stream | 32. View over the valley of the Ribeiro de São João stream |
| 12. Gondar Parish Church | 33. Ribeiro de São João stream and gold-striped salamander |
| 13. Nossa Senhora da Agonia Chapel | 34. Narrow buckler fern |
| 14. Gondar meadow | 35. São João d'Arga Wayside Cross (Monastery) |
| 15. Gondar Alminhas Shrine and Wayside Cross | 36. São João d'Arga Monastery |
| 16. Boi Morto meadow | |
| 17. Gondar Mills | |
| 18. Pedrulhos Mills and Sundial | |
| 19. São Francisco Chapel | |
| 20. Bush species | |
| 21. Granite pseudo-stratification | |

Start
Vila Praia de Âncora
Parish Church
41°48'50.951"N 8°50'47.666"W

Finish
São João d'Arga Monastery
41°50'18.272"N 8°43'57.5"W



Altimetric profile of the trail with location of interest points



Pilgrims on the way to the São João d'Arga Monastery



View towards the valley of the Âncora and the Atlantic



Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*)

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Starting at the square of the Vila Praia de Âncora Parish Church, the first section of the Âncora Valley Trail follows along the valley of the Âncora river, then crossing the parishes of Vile, Riba de Âncora, Gondar and Orbacém. The fertile meadow of the Âncora features a complex landscape mosaic, typical of the Minho region, marked by dense, albeit scattered, human occupation complemented by agricultural fields, dense native bush, meandering riparian galleries accompanying the numerous watercourses that cut through this terrain and small forested areas of pine and Tasmanian blue gum. From the Santo Amaro Chapel, located on top of a small granitic headland at Riba de Âncora, there are vast panoramas over this wide and luminous basin turned to the Atlantic and hemmed by Serra de Santa Luzia, to the south, and Monte de Santo Antão hill, to the north. From Gondar onwards, leaving behind the

flatlands of the Âncora, the trail crosses a territory with a more irregular topography, on which settlements concentrate around meadows of various sizes, the largest and most beautiful of which runs along the banks of the Ribeira de Gondar stream.

At the foot of the granitic batholith of Serra d'Arga, at Abelheira hamlet, the trail enters the Dem parish and, immediately after, the Montaria parish, located already within the territory of Viana do Castelo. There, along the steep western slope of the *serra*, it crosses a territory whose nature differs substantially from the previous. It is hilly, harsh, steep, rocky, imposing, inspiring and very beautiful. Along the slope there are numerous viewpoints affording vast, gorgeous panoramas over the valley of the Âncora, always with the waters of the Atlantic in the background. After the Pedra Alçada ridgeline, and following the narrow



Blockfield displaying granitic exfoliation

valley of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek, the highest point on the trail is reached at Chã do Guindeiro; a privileged viewpoint over the lands of the valley of the Lima river and an obligatory stop for the São João d'Arga pilgrims.

On the tree-bare slopes that enfold the plateau and the valley stand out large granitic blocks emerging from a 'sea' of dry scrub, which is pervasive on the landscape of the *serra*, where quiet herds of *garrano* horses feed. Other than dry scrub, the *serra* also hosts wet scrub wherever the aquifer is closer to the surface. In the wettest areas, such as this flatland, it is even possible to observe a few pioneering peat bogs, near the source of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek.

From this point onwards, again in the territory of Caminha, the trail descends along barren slopes and, already in the proximity of the São João d'Arga Monastery, meets and crosses the dense riparian gallery of the Ribeiro de São João stream. Composed of native tree species typical of watercourse bank environments, unlike both upstream and downstream, this beautiful, extensive and unexpected forested area shelters a



Nossa Senhora da Agonia Wayside Cross. Gondar

varied fauna, particularly some endemic amphibians such as the gold-striped salamander (*Chioglossa lusitanica*).

As for built heritage, there are along the trail various parish churches – Vila Praia de Âncora, Vile, Riba de Âncora and Gondar –, as well as rural chapels typical of Minho punctuating the path of the pilgrims coming from Vila Praia de Âncora – Santo Amaro, Espírito Santo and São Miguel, all three located in Riba de Âncora, Nossa Senhora da Agonia, in Gondar, and São Francisco, in Montaria.

Along the trail it is also possible to see several sets of mills of heritage interest and value, namely the restored Apardal Mills in Riba de Âncora, the Gondar Mills and the Pedrulhos Mills. All these mill structures, built in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, are rustic schist with granite-lintel buildings. These small mills feature rectangular plans and a single millstone with horizontal wood plank wheels; the direction and regulation of water flow were controlled via channels (*levadas*).

OUTSTANDING POINTS



Apardal Mills. Riba de Âncora



Apardal Mills. Riba de Âncora

Apardal Mills

The restored Apardal Mills, in Riba de Âncora, were very likely built in the late 18th century. Featuring a rectangular plan, a single millstone and a wood plank wheel, these small schist buildings display granite lintels and steep single-gabled tile roofs.

In this mill complex, water flow regulation is done through channels that feed water to the mills.

View over the valley of the Ribeira de Gondar stream

One of the most breath-taking and picturesque panoramas on this trail can be had at about 140 metres altitude, from the slope descending Alto da Candosa peak. It encompasses the valley of the Ribeira de Gondar stream and its large

meadow, the largest of all to be found along the serra's route. From the slope rising on the left bank of the stream, one sees a lovely series of farming terraces and the scattered houses of the Casal hamlet, framed by a lush fringe of native trees, followed by large mixed forests of maritime pine and Tasmanian blue gum climbing the schist slope almost to the foothills of the granitic, rocky and almost vegetation-bare batholith of Serra d'Arga. From here, it is possible to see most of its imposing western slope, from the Pedra Alçada massif, the highest point in Caminha, which reaches a maximum height of 742 metres, to Alto do Corisco peak and almost to Outeiro do Homem hill, among which lies Chã Grande, the largest of all *chãs* (flatlands) in the *serra*.



Valley of the Ribeira de Gondar stream

Gondar *Alminhas* Shrine (detail)



Gondar *Alminhas* Shrine and Wayside Cross

The granite-built Gondar Wayside Cross consists of a simple cross on a capital on top of a shaft embedded in a small parallelepiped base.

In turn, the *alminhas* [lit. 'little souls'] correspond to a construction consisting of a parallelepiped granite block with an alms box, featuring a small iron door, supporting the niche with a ledge surmounted by an iron grid. The altarpiece is made of stone with a vernacular-style bas-relief crucifix flanked by two columns.



Gondar *Alminhas* Shrine and Wayside Cross



Pedrulhos Sundial. Montaria



Granite pseudo-stratification



Valley of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek

Pedrulhos Mills and Sundial

Located by a weir in the vicinity of a set of mills in Pedrulhos, Montaria parish, this sundial once regulated the flow of the waters in channels to the mills, which constitutes a curious way of measuring and telling time for the opening and closing of the weir.

In fact, the sundial is no more than a simple parallelepiped granite piece standing atop a small step.

Granite pseudo-stratification

Pseudo-stratification is a geomorphologic phenomenon very frequent on ridges and plateaus in Serra d'Arga. Essentially, it is a 'false' notion of stratification resulting from the combination of geodynamic processes such as preferential lithostatic fracture and decompression planes

caused by the progressive erosion of overlying material.

In the observed outcrops, the horizontal pseudo-stratification fissures are intersected by later vertical and diagonal fractures. The later are thought to have been caused by the alpine crustal deformation phase.

View of the valley of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek

About 20 metres below the ridgeline, already in the valley of the Regueiro da Lapa do Ladrão creek, one of the most stunning and perhaps unexpected panoramas offered by Serra d'Arga opens up.

Mostly turned to the east and to the south, it affords a view towards the valley's western slope, which is steep, very rocky, covered in low scrub

and almost tree-bare, punctuated here and there by a few stoic Scots pines. Further to the south appears the greener Encosta do Curral slope, rising above Montaria and culminating in Alto do Corisco peak, at 763 metres altitude, a dignified guardian of the flatlands of Chã Grande.

At its foothill lies the true source of the Âncora river, where the waters of the three creeks that originate it merge. On the eastern side of the valley, the Alto das Cocanhas peak and Outeiro das Cabras hill lead the gaze towards the unmistakable profiles of Serra de Perre and, just below it, the Alto de São Silvestre peak, resembling a granitic wave crashing on the extensive plains of the valley of the Lima, opening up under its slopes.

Finally, the gaze comes to rest on the highest points of the serras rising over the left bank of the Lima.

Pioneering peat bog (habitat types 3130, 4020, 6230, 6410, 7140 and 7150)

At this point, it is possible to see a pioneering peat bog marking the source of a small watercourse. This small peat bog is located on a *portela*, the vernacular term for the lowest point of a watershed divider and the highest point of the valley formed by the corresponding watercourse. At this *portela*, it is possible to observe not only the source of a watercourse but also its separation into two, one draining into the Âncora river basin and the other into the Coura river basin. It is not unusual for watercourses to have their source in small peat bogs. The formation of mountain peat bogs begins with a diminution in free-flowing water and the growth of sphagnum, a type of moss that retains a large quantity of water, releasing it slowly across time.



Pioneering peat bog



Chã do Guindeiro



Gold-striped salamander (*Chioglossa lusitanica*)

At this site, it is possible to observe several types of habitat typical of pioneering peat bogs, such as ponds of nutrient-poor waters (habitat 3130), hydrophilic bush (habitat 4020), matgrass (habitat 6230), reed (habitat 6410) and pioneering peat bogs (habitat 7150).

The marsh gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*), one of the plants that grows in these environments, is extremely important for the life cycle of a species of butterfly. The adult females of the rare Alcon blue butterfly (*Phengaris alcon*) lay their eggs in gentian flowers, their only host plant.

Chã do Guindeiro

At 584 metres altitude, next to the imaginary border line between the territories of Viana do Castelo and Caminha, one reaches the highest point on this trail at the top of the valley of the Regueiro da

Lapa do Ladrão creek, marked by a small group of beautiful and resilient Scots pines.

Here, one reaches the plain of Chã do Guindeiro, the source of the creek, embraced to the west by the rocky slope of Pedra Alçada and, to the east, by the slopes rising between it and the valley of the Regueiro da Fisga creek.

At this magnificent natural viewpoint over the valley of the Lima, which can be glimpsed in the distance framed to the east and the west by the craggy and wild slopes of the serra, was the meeting place for the numerous pilgrims who started from the valleys of the Âncora and the Lima up the steep slopes towards the São João d'Arga Monastery on the day of its pilgrimage. They stopped here to rest, eat, drink, sing and dance to the rhythm and sounds of a wide range of instruments, still brimming with energy after long hours of walking.

Ribeiro de São João stream and gold-striped salamander

From the conservation point of view, the gold-striped salamander (*Chioglossa lusitanica*) is one of the most important species of Portuguese fauna. It is endemic to the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, and its distribution area in Portugal corresponds to about 50% of its global distribution. In Portugal, the species is classified as 'Vulnerable', and it is protected by the Habitats European Directive.

This amphibian is fully dependent on extremely humid environments and is usually associated with small, limpid streams with abundant vegetation. Although it is very difficult to observe (during the day, adult individuals usually remain hidden under stones or vegetation along the banks), the species is relatively abundant

in the Ribeiro de São João stream. The adults, which can reach around 16 cm, including the tail (representing about two-thirds of the total length), are easy to distinguish by their black back, marked by two clear golden or copper-coloured longitudinal stripes that come together in one stripe along the tail.

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