

Routes in the Sierra Calderona

The Calderona and Portaceli range are part of the Iberian System. From the Javalambre massif, just over the border in Aragón, the system gradually loses height as it approaches the Mediterranean. These ranges are the watershed between the Palancia and Turia river valleys, over which they offer magnificent views.

Both the Camp de Túria and Camp de Morvedre districts have mountains on one side and spread out in fertile and intensely cultivated foothills on the other. Both districts have a variety of attractions, with their finest natural scenery to be found in the Calderona and Portaceli mountains. Despite their proximity to the Valencia metropolitan area and their modest height, they offer a wide variety of landscapes and unparalleled conditions for outdoor activities. To enjoy



their natural heritage at your leisure while showing respect for the painstaking labours of the many generations of people who have lived and worked here, it is best to leave the car behind and travel through these beauty spots at the calm pace of a walker, or on horseback or by bicycle.

The magnificent hiking opportunities available in the Calderona and Portaceli ranges have been put to good advantage on what are known as *Senderos de Gran Recorrido* (Long-Distance trails) and *Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido* (Short Distance trails). These routes make use of traditional rural paths and tracks and are signposted with painted markers to facilitate their use.

They can be used by anyone who is reasonably fit and accustomed to a modicum of hill walking. Please remember that the conservation of these areas is a responsibility we all share. Do not light fires or leave rubbish behind; take it back with you until you can deposit it in an appropriate place. Respect croplands, old buildings, and animal and plant life in general.

Long-distance and Short Distance Hiking route network

The Calderona and Portaceli ranges are traversed by a stretch of the GR-10 (European E-7) Long Distance route, which crosses the entire Iberian Peninsula from the Mediterranean (Puçol) to the Atlantic (Lisbon). It is signposted with white and red painted markings and has various branches, such as those leading to Estivella and Serra. The GR-10 connects with the following Short Distance routes (white and yellow markings): PR V 8 Olocau-Tristán, PR V 63.9 Gátova-Soneja and PR V 63.8 El Hontanar-Altura. Information panels are located at stopping points along the trails. The regional government's Department of the Environment has published an explanatory leaflet covering the GR-10 Long Distance route.

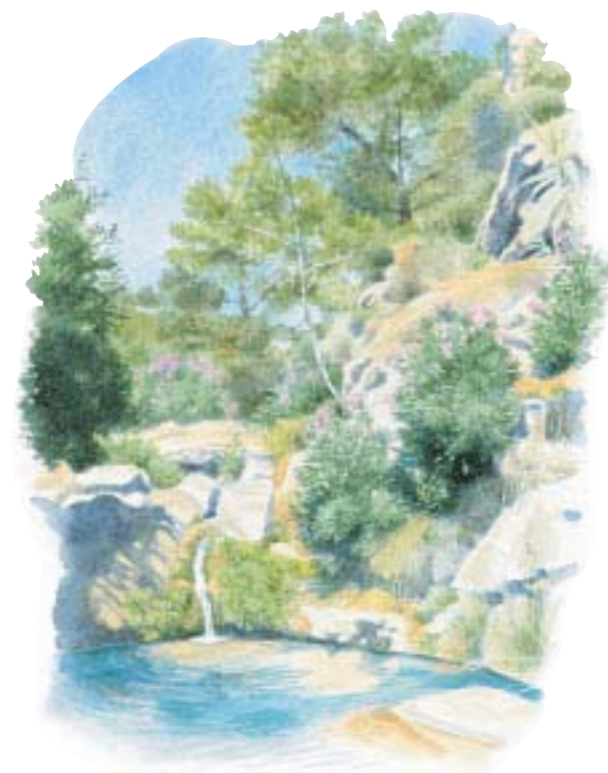
The section of the GR-10 lying closest to the sea (Serra-Puçol) provides access to peaks such as the Picaio and the Garbí, with splendid views over the Camp de Túria, Camp de Morvedre and l'Horta districts. The section between Serra and Gátova goes through the heart

of the Portaceli range, where the Rebalsadors lookout and other places of great botanical interest, such as the cork-oak grove in the Falaguera gully, can be found.

For cyclist fans

The roads leading into the mountains offer interesting routes for cycling fans, who can take advantage of the metro and narrow-gauge local railway network to transport their bicycles as far as Lliria, Bétera or Rafelbunyo. There are lots of choices for touring bikes. The route to the

l'Oronet pass via Náquera and Serra is quite a classic for Valencian cyclists and has some stretches with cycling lanes along the hard shoulder. From Lliria or Bétera there are routes towards the Chirivilla pass via Olocau and Gátova. The climb from Segart (260 m) to the Garbí (560 m) is a short but demanding climb, with a gradient of over 8.5% for the first three kilometres. There are interesting routes combining both sides of the mountain range.



Those who prefer a mountain bike have an extensive network of tracks on which to map out their own routes. From Serra to Gátova, the length of the range can be travelled parallel to the GR-10 walking trail on routes that link to Portaceli and Náquera.

Maps and publications

It is advisable to consult the maps and seek additional written information before embarking on outdoor sports and leisure activities. The Sierra Calderona area is included on the following 1/50,000 scale maps: Villar del Arzobispo 28-26 (667), Sagunto 29-26 (668), Liria 28-27 (695) and Burjasot 29-27 (696). Most of the area is detailed on 1/25,000 maps from the Instituto Geográfico Nacional, and some 1/10,000 maps are published by the Servicio Geográfico del Ejército, or Army Geographical Service.

The Portaceli and Calderona ranges are a veritable school for hiking enthusiasts from Valencia and surrounding districts. A number of interesting publications can be mentioned here: *Redescobrir la serra Calderona*, S. Puchades (Centre Excursionista de València, 1990), *Portaceli i la Calderona, una serra per descobrir* S. Puchades (Centre Excursionista de Catalunya's *Muntanya* magazine, 1996, No. 803), and *Tres excursions a la serra de Portaceli i la Calderona* (*Muntanya* magazine, 1996, No. 804), all in Valencian.

A beautiful book of drawings and commentaries on these mountains is A. Doménech's *Descripción y dibujos de la sierra Calderona* (Valencia, Centre Excursionista de València, 1992, in Spanish). The Centre Excursionista de València has published two leaflets on activities available around the Tristan and V. Penyafort mountain shelters, while climbers might like *Penyes de Guaita, Guia d'escalada*, J. Grifoll et al., (Centre Excursionista de València, 1997), in Valencian.



Useful tips

The Camp de Túria and Camp de Morvedre districts hosting the Portaceli and Calderona ranges have good links. There are regular bus routes from Valencia to the majority of the villages and towns in the area. Both the metro and the regional government narrow-gauge railway network link Valencia to Lliria, Bétera and Rafelbunyo. A Renfe (Spanish national) railway line runs from Valencia to Sagunto then up the Palancia valley.



The area can be accessed by car along three main routes:

- The N-234 railcar following the Palancia valley along the north side of the range.

- The CV-35 (Valencia-Ademuz) railcar, a dual carriageway up to Lliria, one of the main towns in the Camp de Túria, connecting with the CV-25 to Segorbe, which crosses the mountains over the Chirivilla pass.
- The CV-310 runs through Bétera and crosses the mountains over the l'Oronet pass.

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"Growing on these mountains are pines, cork oaks, holm oaks, junipers and a prodigious number of bushes and herbs carpeting the ground. I descended the mountain, treading on plants at every step and pushing aside the branches of the shrubs that hindered my path: the most common of these were Phillyrea augustifolia - called mock privet -, strawberry trees, buckthorn, spurge flax, laurustinus, honeysuckle, mastic trees, oleander and white flax."

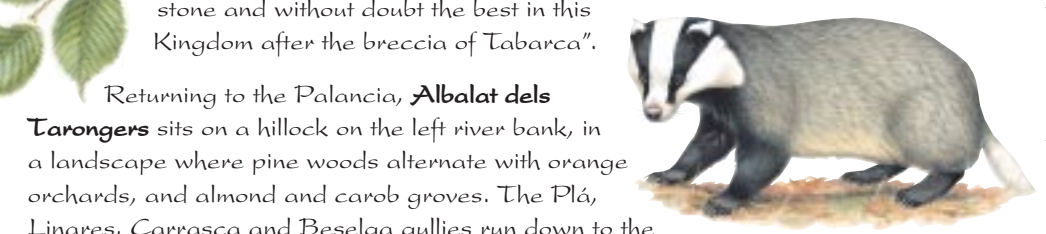
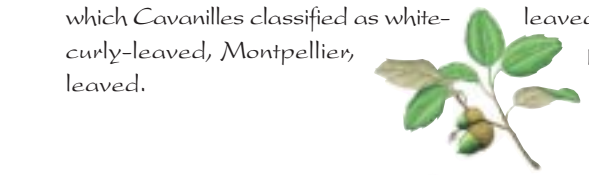
This is how the 18th-century Valencian botanist Cavanilles described the Portacoeli Mountains, which was the name of the Sierra Calderona up to the early 20th century.

Until that time the name of Calderona had only been used for the area lying between the Garbí and Picaio peaks.

This massif situated between the provinces of Castellón and Valencia was then, and still continues to be today, a special landmark in Valencia's geography.

Covered in woods, crisscrossed by gullies that force the footpaths up and down, and sprinkled with a number of springs and fountains (Llentiscle, Vella, Sentig, Berro, Poll, Saladilla, Sant Antoni, Prunera, Umbría, Gota and Sapo), the terrain offers the traveller countless alternatives: quiet, welcoming holiday villages hidden in the mountains; trails for hiking, riding or mountain biking; peaks and cliffs for the more adventurous to scale. Photography fans can shoot close-ups of rare insect and plant species, only to be found in the neighbourhood, or panoramic views of the magnificent scenery from lookout points such as the Picaio promontory or the peaks of Gorgo, Penya-roja, Moratilla, Garbí or Rebalsadors, which are the highest summits in the area. Because it is so close to the coast, short trips can also be made to the beaches in Valencia or Castellón.

Extensive pine wood are interspersed with cork oaks, holly oaks and strawberry trees, while in the more leafy gullies willows, elms and poplars alternate with oleanders, blackberry bushes, terebinth trees, service or sorb trees, and hawthorns. The plant cover is rich indeed - with carpets of rosemary, kermes oak mastic trees, heather and French lavender - but the most precious species in this terrain is the rockrose. As many as six varieties of rockrose are known, which Cavanilles classified as white-leaved, rosemary-leaved, curly or curly-leaved, Montpellier, poplar-leaved and sage-leaved.



Returning to the Palancia, **Albalat dels Tarongers** sits on a hillock on the left river bank, in a landscape where pine woods alternate with orange orchards, and almond and carob groves. The Plá, Linares, Carrasca and Beselga gullies run down to the Palancia through the farmlands of **Estivella**. In this water-rich country, the Roman aqueduct is still in use (providing the main irrigation channel for Sagunto) and the Barraix and Beselga springs are much appreciated for their medicinal

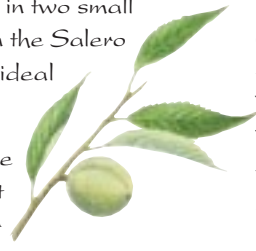
Over these mountains fly sparrowhawks, Montagu's harriers, tawny owls, long-eared owls, short-toed eagles, booted eagles and secretive nocturnal nightjars.

The wild boar, the squirrel and the fox share the peaks and slopes with the genet, the badger, the weasel and the stone marten. A great variety of amphibians, reptiles and insects, including such unusual species as the spurred toad, the salamandrid, the blind snake and the ocellated lizard, complete the plentiful fauna of the Calderona.

In addition to its nature attractions, the Calderona has many historical and archaeological ruins that testify to its Iberian, Roman and Moorish past, forming a colourful heritage simply waiting to be discovered in the towns and villages of the districts of Camp de Túria and Camp de Morvedre.

Our route begins in the Camp de Morvedre, where the villages nestle in two small valleys, following the Palancia river valley. At **Gilet**, saddled between the Salero and San Miguel hills, the Águila, Xocainet and Redona peaks are ideal for climbing enthusiasts.

From this village, turning our backs on the banks of the Palancia, we reach the **Monasterio de Sancti Spiriti**, also known as Sant Espèrit del Mont, a monastery complex built in the classical Valencian popular style and founded in the 15th century. A cloister surrounds a well-kept orange orchard and, inside the church, a collection of 66 paintings by Josep Benlliure recount the life of St. Francis. To the north-east, taking a path that twists through pine trees and rosemary bushes in one of the most beautiful spots in the district, the houses of **Segart** cling to the slope of a hill where a Via Dolorosa climbs up to a chapel. From Segart we can visit the Font de l'Or spring on the Penya-roja mountain (between Segart and Náquera) and visit an abandoned quarry that once produced the marble that Cavanilles called "the stone of flowers (...), the most precious stone and without doubt the best in this Kingdom after the breccia of Tabarca".

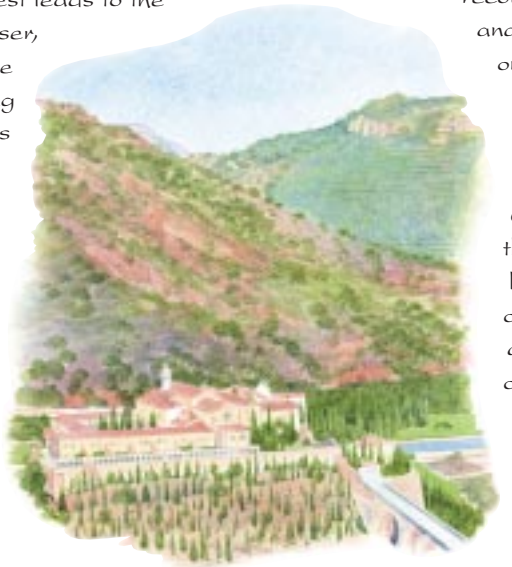


powers. The Garbí peak can be reached from Barraix. From here, close to the remains of a chapel and an old inn, there is an excellent view over the entire district as far as the sea.

Ascending to **Torres Torres** we can observe the contrast between the eastern side, covered in orange groves and other fruit trees, and the wild, mountainous area to the west, with heights of over 500 metres rising to 725 metres on the Nevera peak. This village deserves a leisurely visit. It lies at the foot of a hill, crowned by a small castle which has a tower and part of the walls still standing. **Algimia de Alfara** and **Alfara de Algimia** share their name in reverse as well as sharing an irregular geography with **Algar de Palancia**: they are flat on the river banks and serrated on the mountain slopes, which are covered in pines, kermes oak, rosemary and thyme.

Over a ridge known as the Collado de la Viña or de l'Oronet - now in the Camp de Túria district - we come to **Serra**. This town is overlooked by a ruined castle and by the Rebalsadors and l'Alt del Pi peaks, over 800 metres high, forming a wall that protects the village and benefits the rich cherry orchards, which are quite famous, and play a star role in the annual town fiesta. A walk up and down the neighbourhood will lead us to beauty spots such as the Puntal del Sapo, the Cova Soterranya, the Cova Papallona and also in the spurs of Rebalsadors, the so-called "Mina de Plata", or Silver Mine, whose history has unfortunately fallen into complete oblivion.

Between Serra and Náquera, a road heading west leads to the **Cartuja de Porta Coeli** monastery. As we get closer, it is easy to understand why the monks, back in the 12th century, chose this spot as their retreat, giving it the name of Porta Coeli, or Door to Heaven. This small valley suddenly opening out in the midst of the mountains seems to spring straight out of a medieval tale. The land was originally bought by bishop Abalat, confessor to King Jaime I, and a building was started here in 1272. The cloisters, the Gothic church and a collection of paintings with works by Ribalta and Alonso Cano are the most interesting features. The monastery, however, is completely off-bounds for women and very restricted for men, so visitors must content themselves with a fine view from the outside or a walk along the Gothic aqueduct.



Náquera's highest points are the peaks of the Pinar, Trencalls, Montcudio and Cabeç Bort. The remainder of its municipal district is made up of eroded foothills, washed away and broken up by the l'Or, Náquera and Carraixet gullies. In the village itself, we can visit the 18th century church and the stations of the cross leading to the chapel of St. Francis of Assisi with an interesting 15th century altarpiece. Nearby, the Covas de la Corralista and Cova dels Estudiants, the Puntal de los Moros, and the Salt and de l'Or springs are very beautiful spots to visit. On the other side of the Carraixet gully, the restored castle and the Torre Bofilla tower bear witness to **Bétera's** Arab past.

560 metres above sea level, **Gátova** commands the highest peaks in the Calderona range: the Gorgo is 907 metres high and the Águila, Alto de Calera and Piezarroya peaks are all over 800 metres. There are numerous springs in this area, including the Iranzo, Rebollo, Delicias, Pico del Águila, Fuente Frio, Alameda, del Muro and others, encouraging travellers to stop and taste their waters, amid pine forests, cork oaks, holly oaks and rosemary bushes. Further south along the Carraixet gully we come to **Marines Viejo** and **Marines Nuevo** and, in a hollow surrounded by mountains, Olocau, where we can stop to see a small Gothic bell which, according to legend, comes from the monastery and, formerly, from the ruins of the Castell del Real, which, as people still proudly recount, was the first that suffered the onslaught of El Cid and one of the last to surrender to King Jaime I. To the west, in the area bordering on the Los Serranos district, **Casinos** offers visitors its famous *peladillas*, or sugared almonds, and its *garrapiñadas*, or crystallized syrup-coated almonds.

Long before the Romans first marched through here, the Iberians founded Edeta on what is now the San Miguel hill in **Llíria**. This was the capital of Edetania until the Roman conquest, being destroyed by Sertorius, who forced the inhabitants to build their new homes on the plain, where the town is now located. Traces of their brilliant past include interesting painted ceramics on view in the Prehistory Museum in Valencia, or a mosaic known as 'Los doce trabajos de Hércules', Hercules' twelve labours, occupying a place of honour in the National Archaeological Museum. Under Muslim rule, Lliria was the seat of a Cadi (judge appointed by the caliph). King Jaime I granted its Town Charter and Felipe V created the duchy of Lliria, which finally passed to the House of Alba when the third duke married Teresa de Silva, duchess of Alba, who is buried here.



A quiet walk around Lliria enables us to discover its interesting heritage. The Palacio Municipal in the Plaza Mayor, which ranks as an ancient House of Alba palace, is a magnificent Renaissance building, while the most interesting features of the archpriest's church of the Assumption are its Baroque dome and façade. The Iglesia de la Sang, an excellent example of a transitional Romanesque church, is also worth a visit, as are the churches of San Francisco, the Asunción and the Remedio. Lliria has acquired international prestige thanks to its penchant for music, so a visit to the respective headquarters of its two bands, the Primitiva and the Unión Musical, is a must. Before leaving Lliria, the Monasterio de San Miguel should also be seen, where, according to tradition, a feather of the archangel's wing is kept. The chapel and spring of San Vicente, is another spot which is frequently visited by local people.



As we cross the plain of Lliria we stop off at **Benaguasil** to climb to the Montiel sanctuary, at **Benisanó** to take its medicinal waters and admire its castle, surrounded by curtain walls, and, finally, at **La Pobra de Vallbona**, which has numerous housing developments.

As Cavanilles wrote: "The Turia, after traversing 20 leagues among the mountains, enclosed in deep gorges, breaks free in the neighbourhood of Lliria, where it begins to fertilize the banks and fields down to the sea". From Lliria to Valencia this plain stills presents the same picture as in former days, and our trip has come to an end.

Local cuisine varies greatly, from the time-consuming dishes that typical of the interior such as *ollas* and *calderetas* to the classic salads and the thousands of rice dishes of the coast. Serra, Benisanó and La Pobra de Vallbona are famous for their paellas, and Náquera for its *embutidos*, or sausages. For dessert, the cherries of Serra or the peaches and *peladillas* of Casino compete with the almond biscuits called *almendrados* and the round *rosquillas* found in every village.

A full range of fiestas take place throughout the year. Patron saint celebrations and festive processions and pilgrimages to local shrines and sanctuaries are accompanied by bell-ringing, music, bonfires and fireworks. The most spectacular is the *Procesión de les Afàbegues*, or 'basil plants', in Bétera, where these monumental plants, over two metres high, are paraded.

