

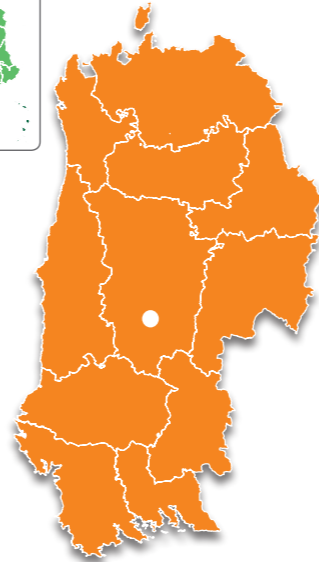
NATURE TRAIL RUTA DE LA CONQUISTA



Guide to the
Nature Trails
of Spain



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Since 1993 the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, Food and the Environment's Nature Trails Program aims to restore former transport infrastructures such as railway tracks, cattle trails and traditional routes, for public use and enjoyment. These routes take us to the countryside to discover the biodiversity and beauty of our precious natural heritage, and discover the villages, sights, traditions and people that are part of the unique cultural landscape of our country.

We invite you to visit them and offer you the keys to enjoy the trip. In this brochure you will find a brief description of The Arrieiros Nature Trail and the map for the journey, along with recommendations to make the most of this experience. We only ask one thing of you: do not forget to leave everything as you found it. The conservation of these pathways is also your responsibility.

TELEPHONES OF INTEREST:

- City Council of Bembibre: 0034 987 510 001
- City Council of Congosto: 0034 987 467 131

DE
NPO

VILLAGES OF STONE AND SLATE DOT THE WOODS OF CORK OAKS AND PYRENEAN OAKS



Labaniego marks the start of the Conquerors' Route Nature Trail. After crossing a beautiful forest of Pyrenean oaks, San Esteban del Toral may be visited. Vineyards have been cultivated here since ancient times, giving the village of Viñales its name. After enjoying a visit to Rodanillo, cork oaks and strawberry trees adorn the path, and become more dense after passing Cobrana, running along the Zofrería Route. The Shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Peña offers and spectacular panoramic views over Congosto, which is the end of this Conquerors' Route Nature Trail.

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1. Labaniego, and its Santiago Apóstol Church, dedicated to St. James the Apostle, the Shrine of Santo Cristo and the remains of the San Fructuoso Monastery, conform an spectacular starting point to this route. After crossing the Creek Rodicos, the trail ascends among Pyrenean oaks (*Quercus pyrenaica*) until reaching the Corón de la Escrita viewpoint, whose views charm hikers and cyclists.
2. Descending parallel to the Creek Reguera del Goyo, the trail reaches the municipality of San Esteban del Toral, whose church is a must-see.
3. Among vineyards, a crop which has been cultivated here since ancient times and has given its name to the next village, Viñales, where the traveller may visit the Coal Mining Memorial which pays homage to the areas mining past. The lookout tower, presently known as *The Viñales Sentinel*, stands next to the site where the ancient parish once was located before it was destroyed in a fire in 1956, of which only the tower survived.
4. Again, the trail leaves a valley only to enter the next one. After descending the Creek Valdemolin, it reaches the village of Rodanillo, at the heart of which stands its church.
5. As the trail goes on, the surrounding vegetation changes. Pyrenean oaks become more scarce as the path continues among cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) and strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*).
6. Cobrana welcomes the traveller with the view of its Shrine of Santo Cristo, of which only the walls have survived to this day. The village is left behind after visiting the church of Santa María Magdalena.

7. Little by little, the walker enters deep into the Zofrería, the local name for a wood of cork oaks. This mass of cork oaks, among which many other species may be found, has its highest point in the Cobrana viewpoint, where the traveller may get some well-deserved rest while admiring the landscape.
8. Among woods of pines, oaks and shrubs, the trail climbs to Mount Turcia, atop which stands the Sanctuary of Virgen de la Peña. This has been a place of worship since 1281, when it was a humble shrine.
9. Finally, the trail descends with the sole purpose of reaching the pretty village of Congosto, where the Santa Olaya fountain welcomes the traveller. Walking its streets, the trail reaches the porticoed market that stands on the ancient threshing floor. There, the traveller may find the information panel that marks the end of the Conquerors' Route Nature Trail.

EL ZOFERIAL

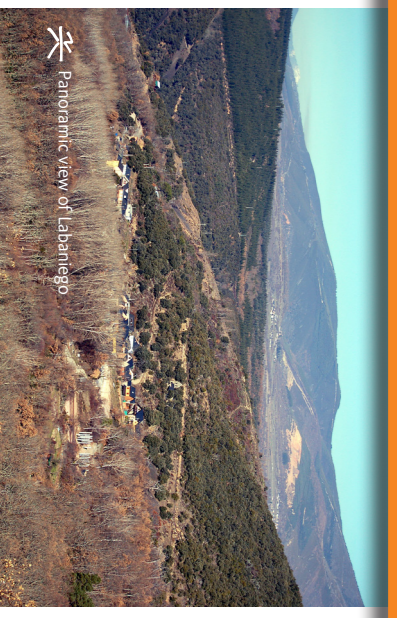
El Zoferial is the name given by the Cobrana natives to the woods of cork oak. It is a wood formed by cork oaks, or zofreríos, as they are known locally, which cover around 180 ha mid-slope (approximately 600 m high) on the south-facing side. These Mediterranean woods, usually characteristic of more southern area, thrive here due to the particular topography and environmental conditions of the area.

THE FORGOTTEN TRAIL OR THE OLD CAMINO DESANTIAGO

The Conquerors' Route Nature Trail leads down a path of millennial terrain, marked by the Roman Conquest of El Bierzo. This route passes through villages which treasure a rich heritage, combined with natural areas of unique beauty due to their geographical location in the Boeza basin.

The Nature Trail, on the whole, traces what is known as the Forgotten Road, the old Way of St. James or the Mountain Road which ran between Bilbao and Carabelos for a total of 637km. During the Middle Ages, it was a well-trodden trail by the pilgrims, who, between the 10th and 12th centuries, preferred to follow the Cantabrian Coast to get to Santiago so as to avoid danger and protect themselves from the Moors that occupied southern territories. But although this trail was safer, after the Reconquest it was slowly forgotten and the trails in the north lost out in favour of the French Way.

The route of the Forgotten Road coincides with that of the Conquerors' Route Nature Trail, stepping through the villages of Labaniego and Congosto and letting the traveller discover those areas that were witness to those times: monasteries, remains of the Roman road, shrines, sanctuaries etc.



Panoramic view of Labaniego



Nuestra Señora de la Peña shrine



Santa Olaya fountain

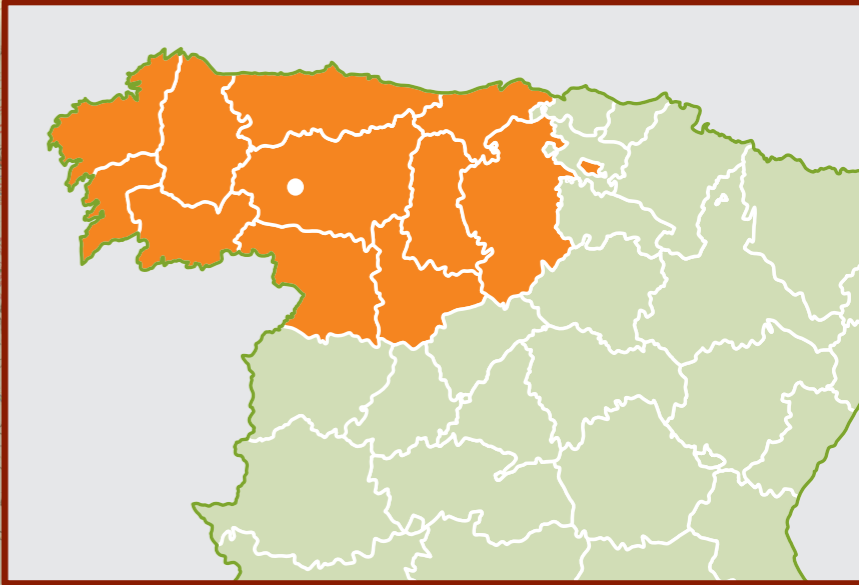
MIDE

Harshness of natural environment	1	▲ Upward gradient	615 m
Guidance along the route	1	▲ Downward gradient	710 m
Route difficulty	2	≡ ROUTE LENGHT	21,9 km
Amount of effort needed	3	⌚ TIME	6 h

◆ town ● point of interest

Labaniego → Congosto

Camino Natural de la Ruta de la Conquista



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- ➔ Starting point
- ➔ End of the trail
- ➔ Religious building
- 🌲 Rest area
- P Parking lot
- ⛪ Hermitage
- 🏰 Fountain
- 🏠 Viewpoint