

THE COASTAL VALLEYS OF THE SIERRA BERMEJA MOUNTAIN RANGE

The Sierra Bermeja mountain range runs along the area between Manilva and Marbella, along the eastern reaches of the Málaga coast, consisting of four mountain ridges of similar origin. These are, from east to west: Sierra Real, Sierra de las Apretaderas, Sierra Palmitera and Sierra Bermeja. Characterised by their short length, a considerable number of watercourses run down from this range, particularly from Sierra Bermeja, the longest of which is the Guadalmanza River at 24 km. Another characteristic of these streams is the steep topography of their headwaters, with falls of more than 1000 m in height over a mere 15 to 20 km. It is worth pointing out that the volume of water they carry is significant at any time of year, which is not unusual considering that the annual rainfall in these mountains is between 1,200 and 1,500 mm. However, the most peculiar aspect is undoubtedly the soil which originates from a strange rock known as peridotite. Peridotite is rich in olivine, iron and very toxic heavy metals, despite which the pinsapo or Spanish fir tree (*Abies pinsapo*), an endemic fir tree of the Serranía de Ronda still flourishes in the Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja natural reserve. This lithological substrate gives rise to a host of endemic species of flowers found only in the Sierra Bermeja mountain range, which are the focal point for both research and the admiration of botanists and scientists generally. It is worth noting that the generic name for this mountain range stems from its red colour: the product of oxidation following contact with water and air.

The main river basins are: the Jordana, Vaquero, de Enmedio, Monterroso and Guadalobón streams; the Padrón and Castor rivers; the Velerín and de las Cañas streams, and the rivers Guadalmanza, Guadalmina, Guadaiza and Verde. The Concepción reservoir was built on the latter river in 1971. Later,

to guarantee the Costa del Sol water supply, the Guadalmanza, Guadalmina and Guadaiza were connected by a canal connecting these rivers to the reservoir.

There can be no doubt that these wild waters bring with them the gift of life to important ecosystems that have been acknowledged by the European Union as SACs (Special Areas of Conservation), but as they reach the narrow coastal belt their waters are mercilessly stripped from them due to the intensive use of water so closely associated with the tourist industry. Despite the insatiable appetite for building in the past decades, some of the landscapes near the mouths of the rivers have retained their cultural past, with market gardens and traditional crops which are farmed using irrigation and cropping techniques that are sustainable.

The strong runoff that occurs during the months when it is likely to rain, particularly in the autumn and spring, prevents these woodlands from harbouring riverine woodland. Only oleander, redoul, sedge and some willows withstand the onslaught of the spates which, additionally, create riverbeds covered in round boulders and an enormous jumble of rocks that have been dragged down by the current and others that have fallen from the banks. Despite all this, the fauna in this environment is as extensive as it is interesting. These Sierra Bermeja streams and rivers are the ideal habitat for some species of fish of considerable ecological value, like the Guadiana cyprinid (*Chondrostoma willkommii*), the Málaga chub (*Squalius malacitanus*) of the Genal River, the eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and the freshwater blenny (*Salarias fluviatilis*). Some amphibians are also well represented, like the small spotted toad (*Discoglossus jeanae*), the Iberian parsley frog (*Pelodytes ibericus*) or the common fire salamander (*Salamandra longirostris*). The Odonata deserve a separate mention, as the riparian habitat for this family of insects is unbeatable, with the following being of particular interest: *Gomphus graslinii*, *Zygonyx torridus*, *Erythromma viridulum*, *Macromia splendens*, *Oxygastra curtisii*, etc.

Freshwater pools in the coastal river basins of the Sierra Bermeja range:

Charco del Canalón, charco de las Mozas, charca de las Nutrias and charca de la Extranjera.

Other bathing areas in the coastal river basins of the Sierra Bermeja range:

Bañeras del Velerín. Río Velerín: Follow the A-7 (Autovía del Mediterráneo) from Marbella to Estepona, and take the second turning on the right after passing the sign for kilometre 161. Drive up the Camino de Nicola for 3.2 km, turning right to drive under the AP-7 flyover and crossing over to the Velerín. There is a steep hill at this stage, and after 2.2 km the tarmac runs out at the entrance to a private property. Turn right at this point and drive along the dirt track. After 700 m, there is a wide enough layby for you to park. Follow the Camino de Marc Burca on the left (blocked by a gate, but with an entrance for pedestrians) until you reach the four plunge pools on the Velerín, each connected by lovely waterfalls.

Charcas del Abrón. Río Abrón: Go to the car park that you used to visit the Charca de la Extranjera. Walk up the track until the road ends. Take the Bosquecillo footpath along the left bank of the Abrón (the left as you face downstream) until you reach a low marshy field where you have to walk along the riverbed. First, you will see the Arroyo del Infierno on the left, and slightly further up, in the same direction, the Abrón, along the first 200 m of which lie several plunge pools with deep green waters, waterfalls and natural waterslides. The walk there and back is over 15 km long, so it is tough and demanding.



Charcas del Arroyo del Infierno. Arroyo del Infierno: After Estepona in the direction of Algeciras on the A-7 (Autovía del Mediterráneo), take exit 153 and on reaching the roundabout next to a petrol station (where there is another roundabout), take the road leading to Casares and the Los Pedregales Park. After 3.5 km turn right following the road leading to the ADANA facilities.



Charco del Canalón.

Your route meets the GR-249. If you follow the GR-249, this leads you to a ford from which you can descend to two beautiful pools, although you may also do so more easily from a winding dirt track where this meets a high voltage tower. Anyway, the largest pool lies behind the ADANA building, which you should find by following a footpath running off to the right before reaching the facilities. Access is complicated and requires orienteering skills.

Río Padrón / Estepona

CHARCA DE LA EXTRANJERA



HOW TO GET THERE

From the A-7 (Autovía del Mediterráneo, or Mediterranean Dual Carriageway), not to be confused with the AP-7 (the toll-pay motorway), take exit 160 towards the Costa del Sol Riding School [Escuela de Arte Ecuestre]. On reaching the roundabout, turn left and cross a bridge placing you on the right-hand side, next to the river Padrón. Now drive north driving under the AP-7 flyover. The next landmark is the Forest Hill residential estate, the entrance to which is on the right. After 6 km the road becomes a dirt track and it branches off down to the riverbank. A few metres further on from this junction, there is a flat area where you can park. Walk down the track leading to the Padrón River and up the river to find this hidden pool.

INTERESTING FACTS

As indicated, there are almost 300 m from the ford to the pool, which is reached along the riverbed. The water is no higher than chest height at anywhere along this stretch, and if agile enough, it is possible to make your way jumping from rock to rock without getting wet. The pool is guarded by high rocks either side through which the water flows. The place is extraordinarily beautiful and the pool appears to be dark green in colour. If you follow the riverbed upstream for around 500 m, you will reach the Marmitas del Padrón cauldrons, of white highly polished limestone. From here to the dirt track on which you parked, it is only slightly more than a one minute walk up to the track. Once on the track, just stroll down the road for a little over a kilometre.

Please Note

The pool is of an average size and only deeper than an adult in its centre. The easily accessible rocks either side may tempt you to leap into the water from them, but make sure there are no rocks you might hit in the bottom of the pool first. The edge is very stony and does not provide anywhere comfortable to linger, although the narrow valley and the surrounding slopes do provide shade in some places.

Coordinates:

x: 307977 / y: 4039096 / z: 112 m

Location: convenient

Access: convoluted

Protected Area: not included

