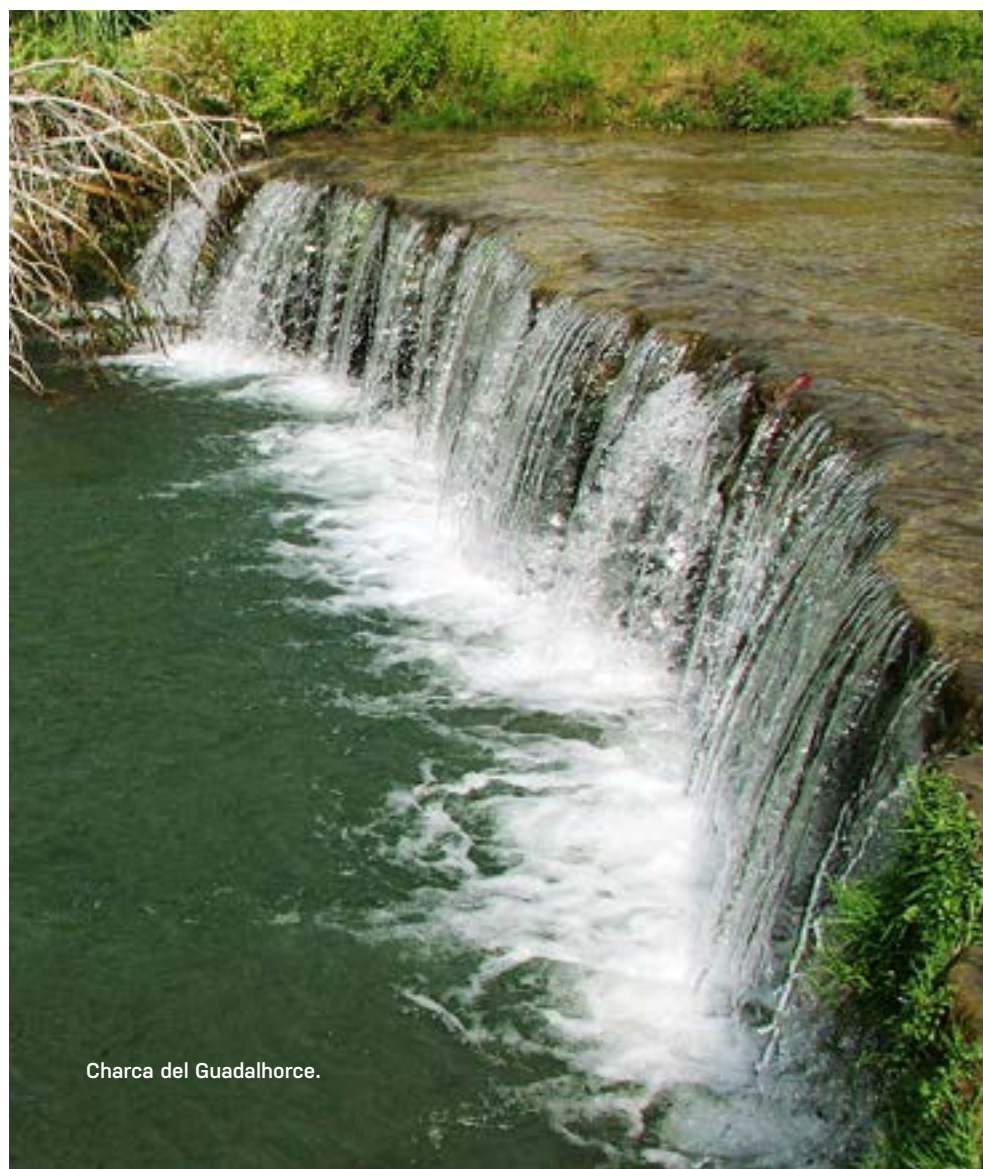


THE GUADALHORCE RIVER BASIN

This is one of the most important rivers in Andalusia, both because of its length, over 165 km, and its flow rate, estimated at 8 m³/s. It has a vast basin of 3,160 km² covering almost every geographical area of Málaga's territory. The water sources of the Guadalhorce consist of several waterfalls located in the popular Sierra de Jorge, near the Puerto de los Alazores pass, between the provinces of Málaga and Granada, although the proposed official source in the spectacular Cien Caños spring, located in the municipal district of Villanueva del Trabuco, is increasingly accepted. In this natural reserve, declared a Natural Monument of Andalusia, the filtered waters of the aquifer are collected into channels from which they drop from different heights down 101 waterfalls. The water show is tremendous, and, after heavy rainfall, it is superb. The Guadalhorce's largest tributaries come from the Serranía de Ronda, namely, the rivers Grande, Turón and Guadalteba, although there are also other tributaries from different areas such as the rivers Almargen, Fahala and Campanillas. The incipient watercourse, shaped by the orographic conditions of the territory, crosses the lands of Archidona, where it carves the Garganta del Guadalhorce gorge through limestone, clay and gypsum. It then runs from west to east through the Depresión de Antequera. This area, of great agricultural tradition, produces potatoes, onions, asparagus, and different types of grains. It subsequently plots a wide arch to cross the Sierra de Huma and the vast alluvial plains of a group of villages belonging to the Valle del Guadalhorce region, known for its fertile farmland, mainly used for irrigated crops and citrus trees.

Having referred to data from various documentary sources, it is accurate to say that the Guadalhorce river basin has the largest amount of hydraulic infrastructure in the province of Málaga. Some of it was built to generate electricity, water crops or supply the cities, such as the reservoirs Conde de Guadalhorce, Gaitanejos, Guadalteba, Guadalhorce, Encantada Superior,



Charca del Guadalhorce.



Caminito del Rey.

Encantada Inferior and Casasola. In addition, there are countless weirs, irrigation streams and irrigation canals distributed mainly in the Hoya de Málaga, which supply the agricultural and livestock industries.

Associated with the Guadalhorce catchment area and closely linked to its influence, endless objects of cultural interest are found, some natural and some left behind by the different cultures that have embraced these lands. The dolmens of Antequera and the natural reserve of El Torcal have achieved international fame and they are both included in the list of World Heritage Sites. Let's not forget the Fuente de Piedra lagoon, a wetland recognised as a RAMSAR Site, of great value for breeding flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*). Here, in the geographical centre of the province, the Guadalhorce has carved the impressive narrow gorges of Gaitanejos and Gaitanes, famous worldwide because of the walkway that crosses them, the Caminito del Rey, visited by thousands of tourists every day. These dramatic canyon walls harbour important colonies of griffon vultures and the highest concentration of Bonelli's eagle nests (*Aquila fasciata*) in Europe. Nearby, where the reservoirs Conde de Guadalhorce, Guadalteba and Guadalhorce meet, lies the Ardales Park and the hamlet belonging to Álora called El Chorro, two renowned centres for inland leisure pursuits, offering a significant number of activities to satisfy the demands of water sports and climbing enthusiasts.

The Guadalhorce flows into the Mediterranean very close to the capital city, in an area that was once a deltaic plain, occupied by several marshes that fed on the winter floods. These disappeared after the reservoirs were built upstream, and the land began to be used to grow sugar cane. Subsequently, when this crop was abandoned, sand and gravel began to be extracted, although this activity ceased in the 1980s. The resulting artificial hollows are slowly being filled in by saline groundwater and by the flow of the river Viejo, located between the two artificial branches, east and west, built at the beginning of the 20th century. These conditions encourage the presence of a good number of birds at any time of the year, some as interesting as the Northern gannet (*Morus bassanus*) or the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*). Since 1989, the mouth of the Guadalhorce is protected by the status

of Paraje Natural (Natural Reserve). Curiously, after the Siege of Málaga in 1487 by the Catholic Monarchs, the river was known by the name of Guadalquivirejo.



Balneario
de Fuente Amargosa.

Freshwater pools in the Guadalhorce river basin: Charco del Infierno, charco de la Caldera, charco del Pontón Alto, charco de la Virgen, charco Largo del Dique and charco de la Olla.

Other bathing areas in the Guadalhorce river basin:

Pozas de Marcos López. Río Grande: After 500 m on the path to the Charco de la Virgen (Tolox), wade the Río de los Caballos and locate the mouth of the Arroyo de Marcos López. A few metres further up, you will find two natural dipping pools, each with their own small waterfalls, where the water is not too deep to stand in.



Poza Macías. Río Grande: (CANYONING) About 400 m upriver from the hydroelectric power plant of San Pascual, which can be accessed via a dirt track from Yunquera, lies a beautiful pool below an equally spectacular waterfall that marks the end of the Zarzalones canyoning descent.

Charco de la Requena. Río Turón: This irrigation dam pool, also known as Las Rosas, built to supply water to an irrigation stream, is located upstream from the Charco Largo del Dique (El Burgo). The waters of this elongated pool are very cold and are too deep to stand in as soon as you step away from the edge.

Charco de los Gaviones. Río Turón: From Ardales, drive to the Huertas del Turón (PR-A 90). Walk from the bridge along the official path mentioned above for one kilometre. When you reach a livestock building, walk downhill to the right, between fences, to the irrigation stream leading up to the long and deep pool nestled between limestone walls.

Pozas del Arroyo Marín. Arroyo Marín: From Archidona, follow the signs of the GR-249. After 3.2 km you will find several suitable bathing areas, the last of which is beneath the ruins of the Pilatos country house. The pools are no more than knee-deep.

Río Grande / Tolox

CHARCO DE LA VIRGEN**HOW TO GET THERE**

Travel to Tolox on the A-7250 road, a branch of the A-366 (Ronda-Málaga). Once in the village, head for the through road and cross the town from beginning to end, until you end up at the car park next to the Balneario de Fuente Amargosa baths. Take the local path leading to the Charco de la Virgen, 2.3 km away.

INTERESTING FACTS

The pool is in the Río de los Caballos, one of the tributaries of the Grande River. At the beginning of the walk you will find the elegant building of the Fuente Amargosa baths, open between the months of June and October. It is the only one in Spain specialising in kidney and respiratory tract diseases. The agüistas or spa-goers inhale the gas released by its waters, declared of public utility in 1906. The path runs close to the riverbed, which means that you can walk down to the banks in various places, especially to the dykes, where you can swim in some places. The path ends at the Charco de la Virgen, a striking place where the river rushes down a 20 m high waterfall.

Please Note

Although it is not very deep, which may vary from year to year depending on the spates, it is a large enough pool to swim in. The rocks at the base of the waterfall are covered in algae, so be very careful not to slip. The pool is surrounded by stones and boulders, making it impossible to spread a towel out. The place is quite shady, as the sun only filters down a few hours a day. The local path leading to this pool can be combined with a 10 km circular walk, which also sets off from the baths in Tolox, offering views from the bottom of the Salto de la Rejía, an impressive 51 m high waterfall.

Coordinates:

x: 328057 / y: 4060050 / z: 466 m

Location: convoluted

Access: convenient

Protected Area: Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park

