An aerial photograph of a village built on a rocky hillside. The buildings are light-colored with dark roofs. The surrounding area is lush with green trees and vegetation. A river flows through the valley below the village. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font with a yellow glow.

From A Pobra de Trives to As Ermidas... Roman heritage in the lands of the Bibei

The River Bibei flows through the province of Ourense until it joins the River Sil. Its course winds through Trives, between walls of rock on which historic vines grow.

Leaving A Pobra de Trives, the route descends to the Bibei bridge, an outstanding example of the area's Roman heritage, which still today enables travellers to cross to Larouco and Valdeorras in search of a surprising final destination: the As Ermidas sanctuary, high up on the rocks.

19

The narrow valley of the Bibei defines this route, dividing it in two and forming the backbone of this mountainous terrain with strongly contrasting climates. A Pobra de Trives is the main town in the county and the starting point for the route. The old town centre, which has conserved its old, narrow streets, lay on Roman Road XVIII (the Via Nova) which linked Bracara Augusta (Braga) and Asturica Augusta (Astorga). The route starts from the iconic Torre do Reloxo in the square of the same name but, before leaving, one should try *bica*, the delicious local cake that no visitor should miss. The old road from Ourense to Ponferrada leaves the town and runs through dense groves that



remind us of the importance of chestnuts in this area. The road continues to go down and opens out into the Bibei valley, the leafy trees giving way to terraces on the slopes above the river. The site's orientation to the sun and

*Lâdranlle os cás de palleiro
as néboas de medía noite
que, coma lobos famentos,
faíscan nivand'o monte...*

its protected position in the valley give rise to a micro-climate that is very suitable for growing Godello and Mencia grapes.



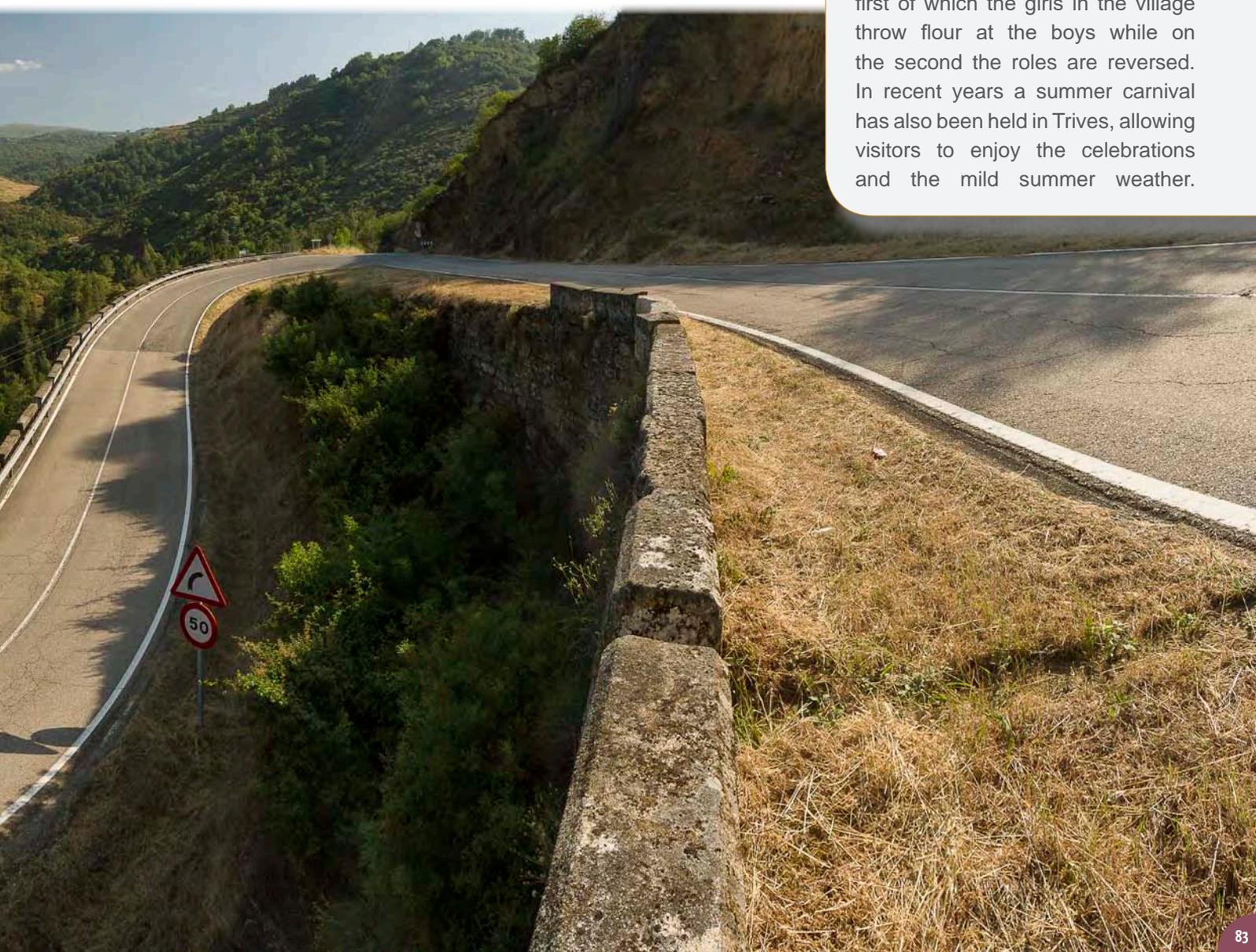


The road gradually winds down to the bottom of the gorge, where, at an altitude of just over 300 metres, we find the Roman bridge over the Bibei. A number of milestones have been found in the vicinity. There is then a steady climb up Alto de A Ermida as far as Larouco, with views of the top of Cabeza de Manzaneda in the distance. The last part of the route, now in the municipality of O Bolo, is a beautiful descent to As Ermidas, where it rejoins the River Bibei. The area's exceptional climate, with conditions similar to the Mediterranean, permits the cultivation of vines and olive trees, while

cork oaks and strawberry trees can also be seen. Nosa Señora das Ermidas sanctuary stands on the edge of the village, set into the granite rocks that run round its upper side. Built in the seventeenth century by order of the Bishop of Astorga (the diocese to which it belongs), it was declared a Cultural Heritage Site in 2006. The façade, dated between 1713 and 1726, is an outstanding example of Galician Baroque architecture. Standing between rocky outcrops and the beginning of the Bibei gorge, As Ermidas is in an incomparable setting which changes as the seasons progress.

Carnival is one of Galicia's great celebrations, especially in the province of Ourense, where many varied customs and traditions are maintained. The festivities, whose origins date back hundreds of years, involve dancing, fancy dress, processions and food, in preparation for the restrictions of Lent. In the Trives area the traditions associated with Carnival vary from one village to another, illustrating the region's rich ethnographical heritage. In A Pobra de Trives the **foli3n** is a noisy procession in which the residents fill the streets, singing and dancing to their drums. A curious tradition is the "xoves de comadres" and the "xoves de compadres": two Thursdays, on the first of which the girls in the village throw flour at the boys while on the second the roles are reversed. In recent years a summer carnival has also been held in Trives, allowing visitors to enjoy the celebrations and the mild summer weather.

▼ Download from A Pobra de Trives.



Don't miss...

! This route's contrasting landscapes are one of its outstanding features. The deep river valleys, especially the River Bibei valley, create a rugged terrain with amazing contrasts between the colours of the vines on the valley floor and the snow covered peaks.

The Roman bridge over the Bibei

The River Bibei gorge conceals an architectural jewel, the bridge over the river, a majestic granite structure with three arches, 75 metres long and rising 20 metres above the river. The bridge, which dates from the time of the emperor Trajan, was a key point on Roman Road XVIII, the Via Nova, part of the Antonine Itinerary. Built approximately between 114 and 119 AD, it is still a functioning road bridge today and is one of the only bridges of its period (together with the O Freixo bridge over the River Arnoia) to retain its original structure, although some renovation work has been carried out.

Its construction involved careful selection of the point at which the river could be crossed and consideration of its geometry. It is a key point on this section of the Via Nova, which reaches the bridge via a series of horseshoe bends.

The way the bridge is integrated perfectly into its surroundings testifies to the skill of the Roman engineers, while the quality of construction is amply demonstrated by its 2,000-year history.

It was declared a Historical and Artistic Monument in 1931. Beside it can be seen a Roman milestone from the time of Vespasian (79-81 AD) and a Trajan column that refers to work on the bridge.

