



From Aciveiro to Carboeiro... monasteries in the centre of Galicia

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Galicia's central counties offer a wealth of natural attractions and cultural heritage. These are areas dedicated to livestock, ensuring that the landscape is well conserved, valleys that lie alongside medium-height mountains, like those in the O Candán range, and captivating monasteries that transport us to another age.



Central

Galicia boasts extensive areas of well conserved traditional landscape. Extensive livestock farming in counties like Tabeirós-Terra de Montes and Deza has produced a region of broad pastures in the valleys with wooded areas and scrubland in the mountains. From mediaeval times its central location led to the establishment of monasteries which acted as religious, productive and jurisdictional centres, of which Aciveiro and Carboeiro are among the most notable. Aciveiro is in the municipality of Forcarei, at the foot of the western slopes of Sierra de O Candán. In a cold but beautiful spot, the Santa María de Aciveiro monastery lies in a bend of the River Lérez, still small at this point in its course. The loneliness of the location seems appropriate for this twelfth-century Benedictine monastery, which was

*Así son aquelas terras de Camba,
Deza e Trasdeza,*

*con tantos anos de historia como
anos ten o mundo;*

*dende os celtas que construíron un
castro en cada curuto.*

transferred to the Cistercians in the thirteenth century. It had authority over a large area, exercising jurisdiction in the centre of Galicia. The architectural complex underwent substantial changes with extensive rebuilding. The Santa María Church, possibly taking its inspiration from the Cathedral in Santiago, is a fine example of the Romanesque architecture found widely in Pontevedra, with the exception of the façade, which was totally redesigned. From Aciveiro a gentle ascent

begins towards O Candán. Mountain landscapes with crags and scrubland alternate with grazing land at altitudes around 1,000 metres, where there is normally snow in winter. The Serra do Candán has been specially protected as a Special Area of Conservation since 2014, it has been a Site of Community Interest since 2004 and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network. The O Candán pass (854 metres) marks the division between

Aciveiro Monastery ▼

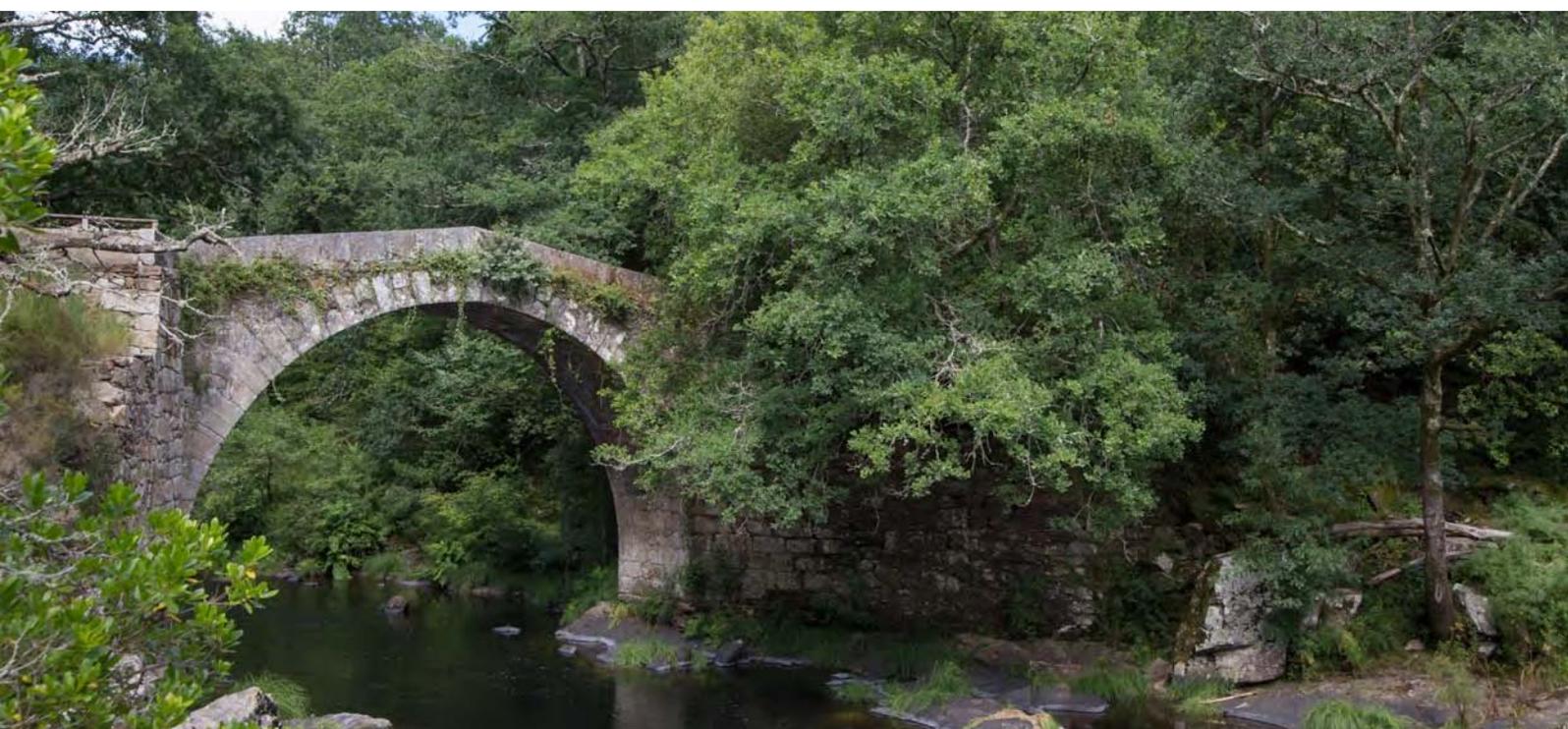


Forcarei and Silleda, leaving the county of Tabeirós - Terra de Montes and entering Deza, on the other side of the mountains. The route down offers continuous views of the green valley. The descent ends at Laro and the route then turns towards Silleda, running between the green fields and oak woods that are typical of these valleys. Silleda is an important town on the

Vía da Prata. The festivities to mark the Green Week in Galicia and other displays throughout the year create a vibrant atmosphere in this town. Visitors must not fail to try the famous local *melindres* (sponge fingers). Visits to the *castros* in the vicinity are also recommended: Toiriz (adjacent to the town centre) and A Copa do Castro (beside the beautiful Romanesque San Mamede church).

Carboeiro Monastery is concealed in a leafy wood, nestling in a meander in the River Deza. Founded in the tenth century as a Benedictine monastery, it is one of the finest exemplars of the Galician Romanesque style, with some touches reflecting the transition to Gothic. Located in a distant, rugged setting that takes us back in history, it marks the end of this route.

Ponte do Demo ▼



Apart from its historic and cultural importance, **Carboeiro** is a magical place that blends beautifully with its natural setting. The River Deza runs through a deep valley with a micro-climate in which Mediterranean species such as strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*) and cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) abound. A recently created easy-to-

follow and very interesting botanical trail allows visitors to learn the names of a large number of tree species. Near the monastery, the river is crossed by the mediaeval O Demo bridge. Its name alludes to a legend according to which the monastery was built as a result of a pact between the monks and the Devil. Stories of robberies and

other mishaps occurring in the vicinity of the bridge reinforced the theory and the name became commonly accepted. As Antonio de Valenzuela said: "*The Carboeiro Monastery says nothing, it has already said everything. It hides the purity of its twelfth-century Romanesque archivolts in a thick Druidic oak wood*".

Don't miss...

O Candán lookout point

The O Candán pass leads into the county of Deza. With the Faro and Farelo ranges in the background, the wide vistas provide an appreciation of the county's natural environment, scenery and agricultural importance.

The Deza valley, surrounded by hills and mountain chains, forms a river sub-basin which is part of the River Ulla's drainage area. Medium-sized rivers, like the Arnego and Asneiro, cross the region, creating a dense network of streams and rivulets. The whole forms part of the Ulla-Deza river system, a natural space protected because of its riverine woodland and the presence of fish.



The **O Candán neveiras** are seventeenth-century ice wells dug into the ground with a stone surround. The Aciveiro monastery traded in ice, mainly supplying Santiago de Compostela. The snow was stored at depth to keep it at sub-zero temperatures, so that it could be used to conserve food.

