St. James' Way, natural heritage

galicia



St. James Wort *(Jacobaea vulgaris)*

XUNTA DE GALICIA



St. James' Way, natural heritage

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Coordination
Santiago Bacariza Cortiñas
Arturo Rodríguez González

Scientific assessment
Antonio Rigueiro Rodríguez
PhD in Forestry Engineering
Lecture at USC

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In the 9th century, the Bishop of Iria, Theodemir, proclaimed to the world that the body of St. James, Christ's apostle, had been found in Galicia, at the farthest limits of the Christian kingdoms. Since then, publications on St. James' Way have looked at this subject from many different angles.

But there has been none that has looked at the Way as natural heritage. A gradual presentation of the natural features that pilgrims can find on their way to Compostela. One that calls on them to stop looking down at their feet and gaze at the nature surrounding them.

Tradition says that the tomb containing the remains of the apostle was found in the Libredón wood. It is easy to imagine that place when looking at the magical beauty of the Galician hillsides that the Way crosses today.

These pages contain the official routes, grouping the sections together from the viewpoint of their natural characteristics. It has an educational focus, but with due scientific rigour, and a new way of looking at the different routes across Galicia. The Way is a place to find natural treasures, such as outstanding trees, some of them over a half a millennium old; unique geological formations, like Campodola-Leixazós and Mount Pindo; impressive ecosystems, such as riverside woods, ancient oak forests and endemic botanical species that hide along the different routes.

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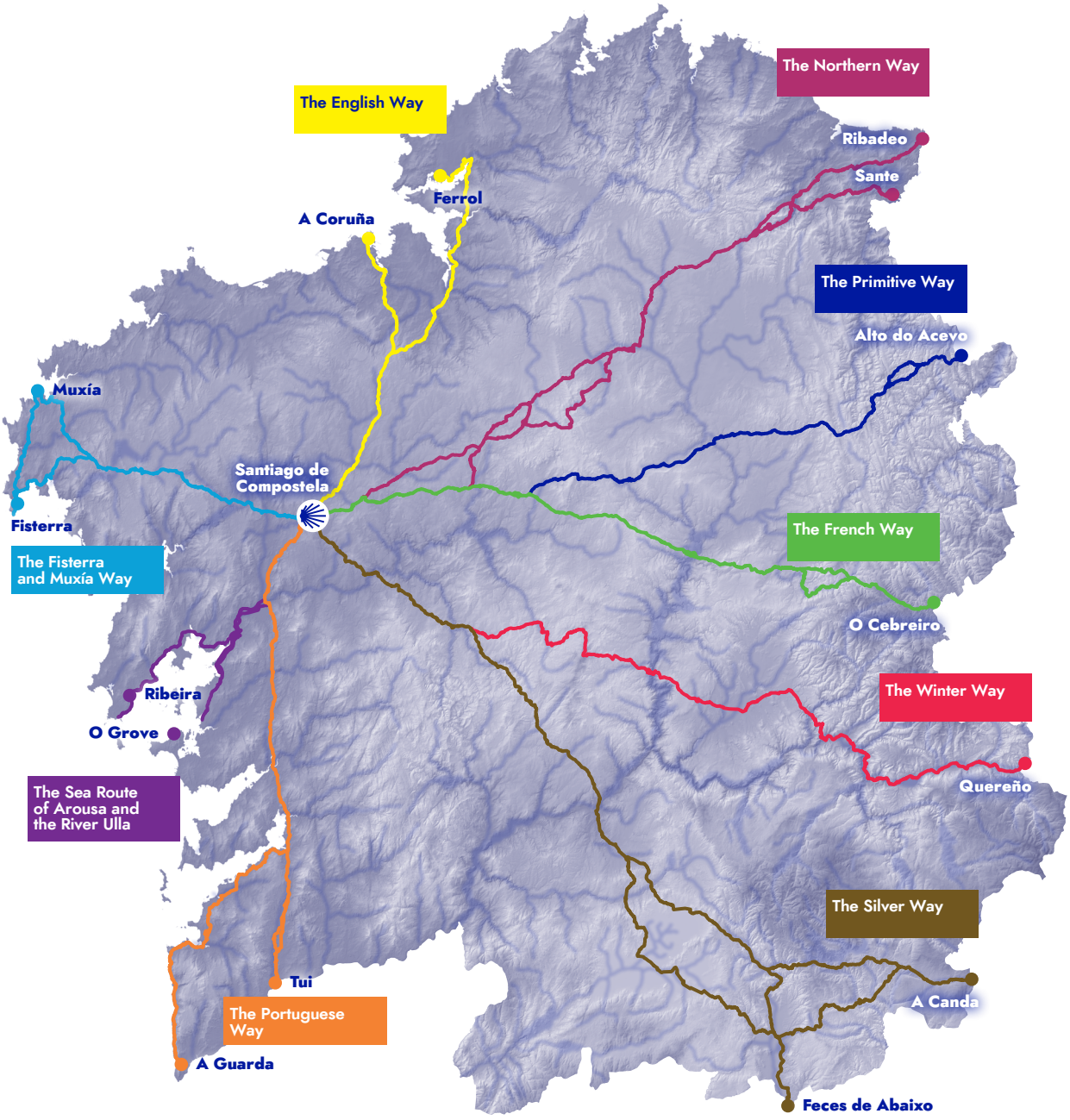
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The Primitive Way

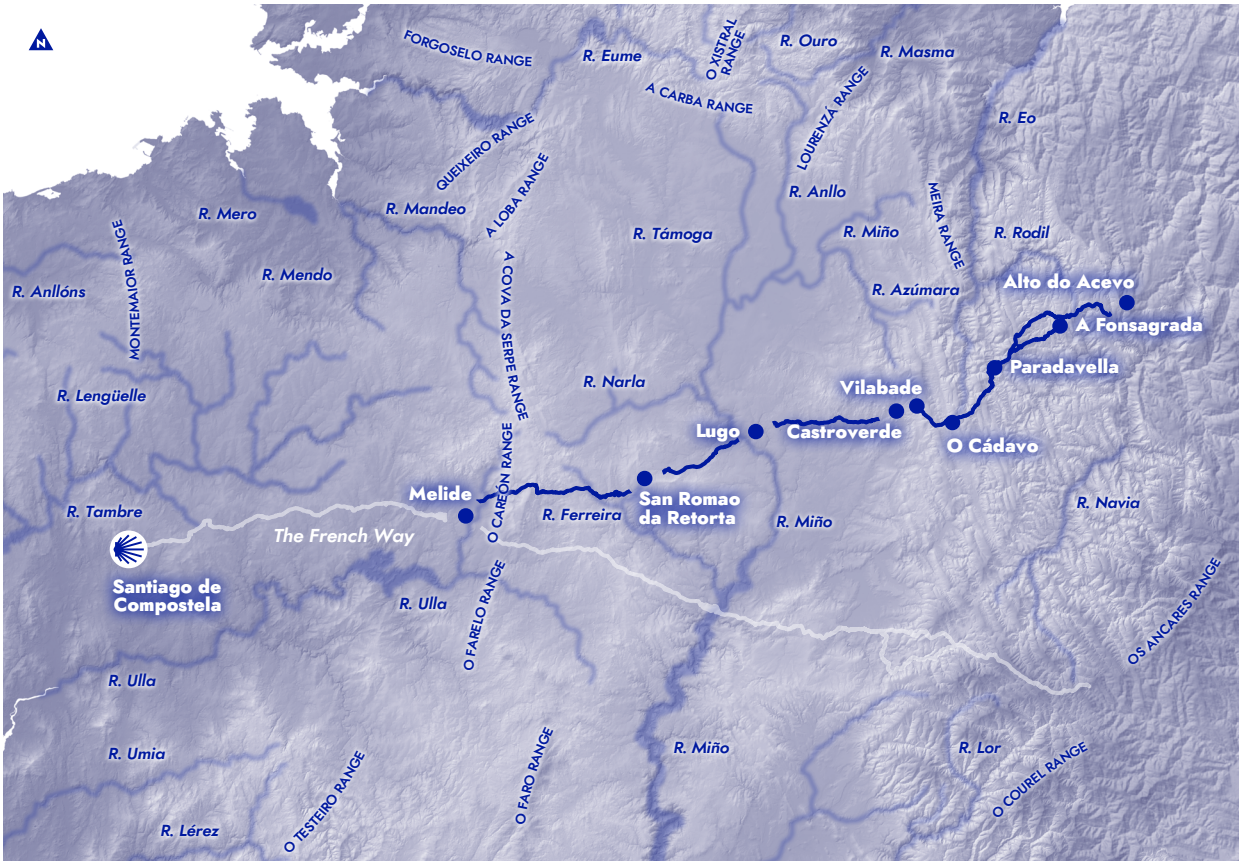
As its name indicates, this is the oldest route. It comes from Asturias and enters Galicia at the O Acevo pass. The first few kilometres cross the ranges in A Fonsagrada, where the steep, rocky terrain and the climate justify the lack of human settlement, which tends to be situated on small hills. After Castroverde, the countryside changes and gives way to mostly agriculture and livestock breeding. Here, therefore, grassland and fields, often growing fodder crops, predominate. The local livestock production gives rise to larger population centres than in the mountains.

Ruins of the former Montouto Pilgrims Hospital and remains of a dolmen at the foot of the O Muradal peak (A Fonsagrada)

43°5'42"N 7°8'38.4"W

The First of the Ways of St. James

From A Fonsagrada the Way starts to descend, down to the Lugo plateau, a wide sedimentary depression. After passing through pastureland and market gardens, it reaches Lugo, where the rural and urban worlds mix. The relief continues with almost no changes as far as O Careón mountains, which belong to the Galician Ridge, a system of peaks running from north to south. After going over these mountains, in a few kilometres it arrives in Melide, where it joins the French Way.





The valleys to the northeast of Mount Penoucos (A Fonsagrada) covered in fog

43°9'10.1"N 7°0'24.8"W

From Alto do Acevo to Castroverde

Distance: 45.1 km

For the first few metres, the Primitive Way crosses a saddle with oak, birch and chestnut trees that continues on into Asturias. This first stage crosses a ridge with steep slopes topped by peaks such as A Fontaneira and A Vacariza. The meadows and pastureland add texture to the landscape, especially in the valleys. Among the noteworthy vegetation are pine trees, both the local species and replantings of Scots pine.

DON'T MISS

The A Fontaneira Yew

43°1'38.77"N 7°10'39.19"W

In A Pasada is one of the oldest and most outstanding yew trees in Galicia. It is thought to be more than 200 years old. The perimeter of its trunk measures 9.8 metres and it stands 20 metres high.

1. Alto do Acevo

43°8'49.3"N 6°58'24"W

O Acevo, which is over 1,000 metres in height, gets its name from the holly bushes found in this area. The herds that pasture on these hills shelter under them to escape the winter cold and summer heat. Birds also shelter in the bushes, including the European robin, Eurasian jay and common blackbird.

2. Holly Bushes

43°8'36.8"N 6°58'9.9"W

Holly is a shrub with dark green perennial leaves. It is resistant to cold temperatures and its growth is very slow. It flowers in spring and its fruits, on which the wild fauna feed, mature the next winter, turning a brilliant red colour. Holly wood is hard and resistant.

3. Alto da Fontaneira

43°2'15.2"N 7°11'45.5"W

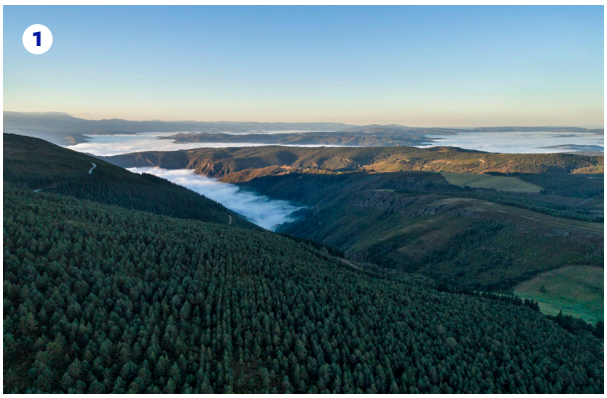
Because of its altitude, 936 metres above sea level, and its location in the interior of Galicia, this place has a mountain climate. It is characterised by low average temperatures, leading to frequent frosts. Rainfall is also abundant, falling as snow in the winter.

4. *Fraga de Estornín*

43°1'44.11"N 7°12'32.96"W

These mountainous saddles are generally hard to reach and populated by deciduous trees. On the Estornín saddle, oak, sycamore, rowan, European yew, birch and chestnut trees grow. The interior is inhabited by wild mammals, including wolves, roe deer, wild boar and foxes.




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From Castroverde to Lugo

Distance: 22.1 km

After Castroverde the landscape is much less abrupt than on the previous stage. This municipality is an important area for farming, especially cattle breeding. Thus, the Primitive Way is here bordered by houses and meadows, sometimes separated by small clumps of trees. A considerable area also grows wheat and rye. Among the fodder crops grown here we can find grasses, such as English ryegrass, Italian ryegrass and cocksfoot.















1. Ancient Chestnut Tree

43°1'46.5"N 7°19'12.8"W

An ancient chestnut tree that grew by the church in the village of Soutomerille, near the Primitive Way, fell down due to bad weather in March 2015. The following year, its skeleton was taken to Castroverde, where it is still preserved next to the municipal pilgrim hostel.

2. Chestnut Path

43°1'45.9"N 7°19'39.3"W

The chestnut is a deciduous tree found all over the country, although it is more abundant in the east. Chestnuts have always been an important source of food in Galicia and since 2009 they have had a Protected Geographical Indication. Each year some 20,000 tons are sold.

3. River Rato

43°0'49.4"N 7°32'46.2"W

The humid area around the River Rato is home to a variety of species of birds, amphibians and reptiles that are of interest for conservation, such as the Iberian frog, endemic to the northwest of the Peninsula. Small and long-legged, they abound in Galicia but are rare in other areas.

4. River Rato Periurban Park

43°0'24.2"N 7°32'21.2"W

It was created in the 1980's and follows the course of the River Rato. It has some well-preserved oak trees and a riverside wood of black alder and willow. Among the local fauna is the Iberian painted frog, which is highly dependent on water and has adapted to living in suburban enviroments.

DON'T MISS



The Soil Materials of the Area

43°1'7.7"N 7°24'13.5"W

The Palaeozoic materials that predominate around Soutomerille are granitic. It is normal in this area to see mounds caused by the desintegration of batholiths, either natural, when it is very meteorised, or the result of being ground down.







From Lugo to San Romao da Retorta

Distance: 18.8 km

This is an easy stage, as it crosses the Lugo plateau. This eroded area, together with A Terra Chá and the Sarria basin, forms a wide, flat area on which there are only a few residual parts with higher elevation that form small hills. The day's journey starts in Lugo, a city with a history going back over two thousand years, where the urban and rural milieus are interconnected. The Way then crosses the River Miño and leaves the city behind.

1. Rosalía de Castro Park

43°0'22.1"N 7°33'34.5"W

This is Lugo's biggest park, which dates from the beginning of the 20th century. Here, there are beeches, giant sequoias and cedars. It has a lake with water birds, a fountain surrounded by rose bushes and a lookout point over the River Miño valley with a pergola covered in wisterias.

2. River Miño

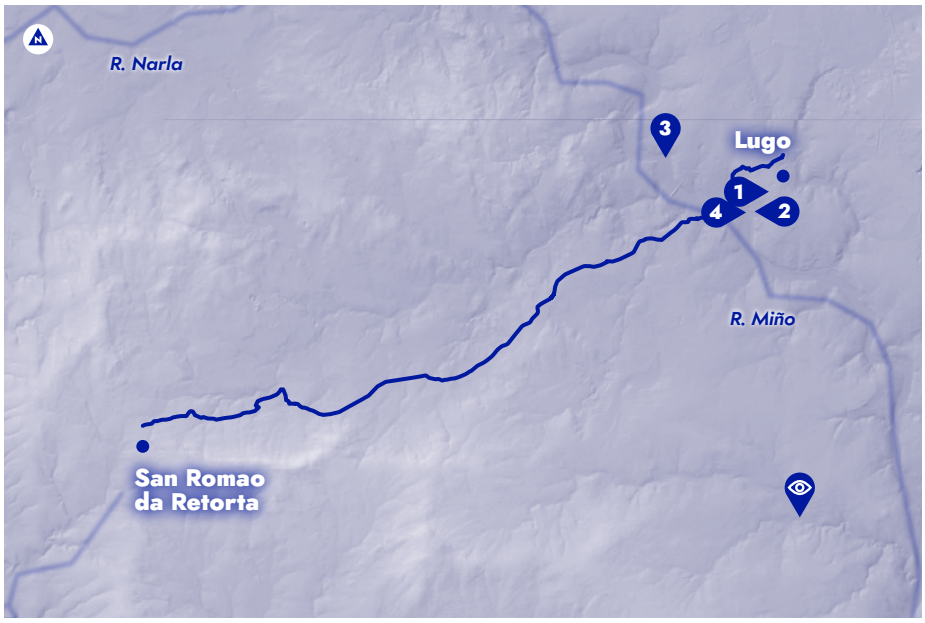
43°0'8.1"N 7°33'48.8"W

From the bridge over the River Miño in Lugo, a spa with Roman baths can be seen. Its waters contain sodium sulphate and bicarbonates, are hyperthermal, and reach a temperature of 43.8 °C. They are suitable for rheumatic and respiratory illnesses, among others.









DON'T MISS

3. Wood on the River Miño Banks

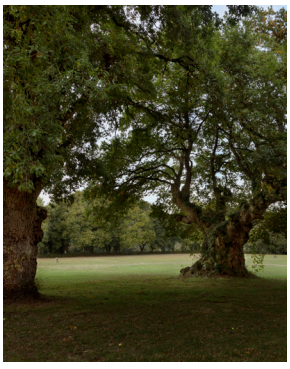
43°0'47.5"N 7°35'15.5"W

As the River Miño flows through Lugo, its banks are covered in willow, black alder and ash trees. In this river, aquatic plants are common, like the river quillwort *(Isoetes fluitans)*, which is endemic to Galicia, and fringed water lily *(Nymphoides peltata)*, listed as an endangered species.

4. Miño River Walk

43°0'7.47"N 7°33'57.19"W

Here *pesqueiras* can be seen. These were formerly used to catch different species of fish, such as eels, which have no scales and are covered in mucus. In the past they were caught for subsistence. Today they can be found in numerous dishes as their fine, tasty flesh is much appreciated.



Golf Course Oak Trees

42°56'27.67"N 7°33'8.91"W

On the Lugo golf course are two specimens of oak tree that are listed in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. The most valuable one is on the practice ground. Its trunk is fully covered in knots and burrs that make its normal perimeter of 7.65 metres even greater.









From San Romao da Retorta to Melide

Distance: 30.7 km

After a few kilometres past fields of crops and rocky outcroppings, the landscape changes as it nears O Careón mountains, whose vegetation, apart from some endemic species due to the unusual characteristics of the soil, includes wide areas of scrubland. Further down, the landscape becomes agricultural again. Of especial importance are fodder crops for the local livestock industry, which is centred around milk production. At the end of this stage, in Melide, this route joins the French Way.





1. Section of Native Woodland

42°56'25.22"N 7°52'57.22"W

In Ribadal, the Way passes by a well preserved oak wood, where there are a few chestnut trees. This wood is noteworthy because the landscape in this area is dominated by pastures, crops, scrubland and repopulated forests of Monterey pine, maritime pine and shining gum trees.

2. White Peaks

42°56'41.7"N 7°53'46"W

These are rock formations of white quartz that can be seen in between the scrubland. Their names Casacamiño and Hospital show a clear relationship with pilgrimages. And the name of Hospital das Seixas refers to the large amount of quartz *(seixo* in Galician) found in the area.

3. O Careón Range

42°55'9.4"N 7°57'39.3"W

O Careón is a range of hills that belongs to the Galician Ridge. It has gentle slopes and forms a natural border between the provinces of Lugo and A Coruña. It is of moderate height, as Alto do Careón, which is its highest point, reaches 798 metres above sea level.

4. *Amanita muscaria*

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

Fly amanita *(Amanita muscaria)* is one of the inedible species of fungi in Galicia with psychoactive properties. These are due to a chemical compound called ibotenic acid. They can be found in oak, beech, pine and birch woods. They have a red cap with white spots.

DON'T MISS



Fervenza de Brañas

42°59'45.9"N 7°56'50.6"W

River Furelos forms a waterfall some 40 metres high. This is a "horsetail" waterfall, as the falling water remains in contact with the rocks most of the time. In summer, it can dry up, so it is recommended to visit it during the other seasons of the year.



Enchanting

Roman Baths in Lugo

Lugo is a two thousand year old city filled with Roman remains, including its city walls, which are a World Heritage site, and its ancient baths, the remains of which can be seen inside the modern spa. Its medicinal mineral waters continue to be used as much today as they were when the city was founded.



Roman baths in Lugo
43°0′5.8″N 7°33′39.1″W



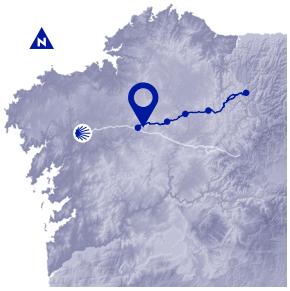
In Addition

This area is of great interest to nature lovers due to its geological and botanical importance:

Serra do Careón Special Conservation Area and Area with Special Protection of Natural Values

42°55'9.4"N 7°57'39.3"W

In the lithology of this mountain range, granite, schist and the formation known as *ollo de sapo* (toad's eye) predominate. But what makes it unusual is the outcropping of ultramafic rocks, the largest in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, with bands of amphibolite, serpentinised ultramafic rocks and metabasic rocks with granulite facies. The chemical characteristics lead to soils with little nutrition for plants and an abundance of heavy metals. The vegetation of this area is therefore unique in Galicia, with various endemic species included in the Galician Catalogue of Endangered Species. In these mountains, streams rise that flow into the River Furelos, a tributary of the River Ulla. At the water's edge Iberian painted frogs and gold-striped salamanders can be found. Among the birds, in addition to raptors, smaller specimens like the Dartford warbler can be seen.







The French Way

This Way enters Galicia through the mountains in the east of Lugo that act as a natural border between Asturias and León. O Courel and Os Ancares ranges, which form part of the Galician Massif, were pushed up during the Alpine orogenesis and later eroded by the action of water and glaciers. The landscapes are characterised by the rarity of human settlements and the varied colours of their plant biodiversity.

Thatched huts in O Cebreiro, north of the O Courel range

42°42'29.2"N 7°2'37.3"W

A Way to Unite Europe

When it enters Galicia, the French Way reaches an altitude of over 1,300 metres above O Cebreiro. The peaks of these mountains provide one of the best natural lookout points over the landscape of Galicia. In the O Rañadoiro range, after crossing Fonfría, the descent to Triacastela and Samos begins. From these two villages the route continues down towards Santiago de Compostela, at about 250 metres above sea level.





O Courel range from the Alto de San Roque (Pedrafita do Cebreiro)

42°41'54.6"N 7°5'2.8"W







From O Cebreiro to Triacastela

Distance: 21.8 km

The eastern mountains of Lugo province are the entry point to Galicia for this Way. Snowfalls are frequent in winter. Between O Cebreiro and Alto do Poio, the O Courel range can be seen on the left. On the right are the peaks of Os Ancares. This is one of the areas with the greatest biodiversity in Galicia, where brown bears can occasionally be found and the Iberian wolf and some raptors live. Among the vegetation are forests, such as the Rogueira Forest in O Courel, at the beech's most western limits in Spain.

1. O Cebreiro Lookout Point

42°42'26.83"N 7°2'35.38"W

Glacial erosion produced hills with no great peaks but with pronounced slopes. The natural tree vegetation in the area of O Cebreiro, at a height of over 1,000 metres, is mostly birch and rowan. Mountain birch woods form the highest forested areas in the mountains of Galicia.

2. Liñares Beech Forest

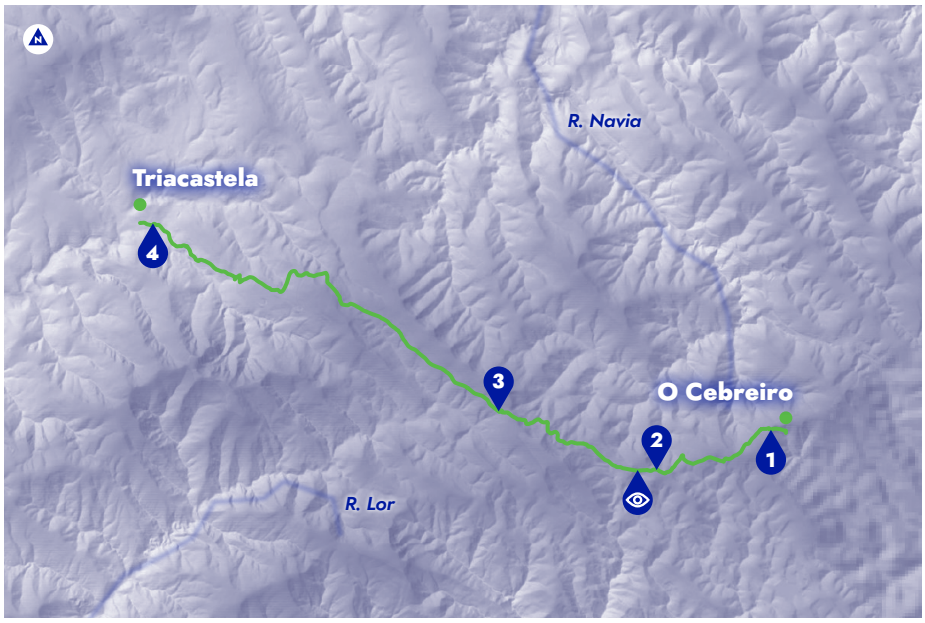
42°41'56.2"N 7°4'41.8"W

This is one of the few beech forests in Galicia and the only one crossed by a Way. These deciduous trees can reach a height of 40 metres. They create a high quality humus, enriching the soil. These are bio-diverse woods that make life easier for woodland species.









DON'T MISS

3. Alto do Poio

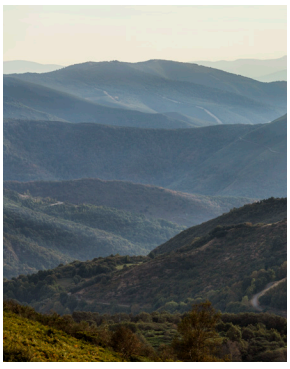
42°42'45.2"N 7°7'34.6"W

This is the highest point on this route, at 1,337 metres above sea level. From this natural balcony O Rañadoiro mountains and the Lóuzara Valley can be seen. Although snow covers this Galician peak in winter, from here the scrubland in the higher areas and the trees in the bottom of the valleys can be seen.

4. Ancient Chestnut Tree

42°45'21.5"N 7°13'51.7"W

Just next to the Way, in the small village of Ramil, is one of the most beautiful ancient chestnut trees in Galicia. The perimeter of its trunk measures 8.5 metres. This enormous trunk is like an x-ray of time, full of hollows and thick branches that seem to hug the tree.



Alto de San Roque

42°41'56"N 7°5'2.7"W

San Roque is 1,270 metres high. On one side are views of the O Courel range. On the other are the peaks of Os Ancares. In this mountain landscape, spring and the beginning of summer carpet the hillsides in green, purple and yellow, mainly because of the shrubs' flowers.

From Triacastela to Portomarín

Distance via Samos: 47.3 km. Distance via San Xil: 40.2 km.

There are two routes to Sarria from Triacastela. The one through San Xil goes through a series of native forests. The other, through Samos, offers sights like the Oribio and O Édramo mountains. After passing through the village of Sarria, the Way goes over the inland plateau of Lugo, saying farewell to the harsh mountain landscapes. Finally, the River Miño announces its arrival in the town of Portomarín.

DON'T MISS

River Loio Canyon

42°47'25.4"N 7°36'53.7"W

Black alder, birch, chestnut and oak are some of the trees along the River Loio. It has some small waterfalls and rapids where it is easy to see birds like the white-bellied dipper diving for larvae, dragonflies and water beetles for food.

1. River Oribio

42°44'25.8"N 7°16'21.1"W

The River Oribio is a mountain trout stream commonly known for the quality of its cold water. On its banks it is possible to find a good example of a riverbank wood, which is very well preserved and includes numerous specimens of black alder, ash and willow tree set in grassland.

2. Mediterranean Cypress

42°43'59.4"N 7°19'29.1"W

This tree is well worth a detour to the Chapel of the Saviour, behind the monastery of Samos. It belongs to the select group of the 50 most notable trees in Spain and to the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. It is over 26 metres tall and its trunk measures 3.29 metres around.

3. *Bosque da Magdalena*

42°46'41.79"N 7°25'20.90"W

Close by the Way is the wood of the A Magdalena Convent, the biggest green space in Sarria. Here there are ancient common oak and Pyrenean oak trees, as well as European ash and Mediterranean elms and a few examples of introduced species, such as western red cedar, boxelder maple and plum trees.

4. River Miño

42°48'7.8"N 7°36'54.2"W

The River Miño runs through 350 kilometres from its source in Pedregal de Irimia to its mouth where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Its headwaters are in the 336,668.9 hectare Terras do Miño Biosphere Reserve, the largest in Galicia and among the five largest in Spain.




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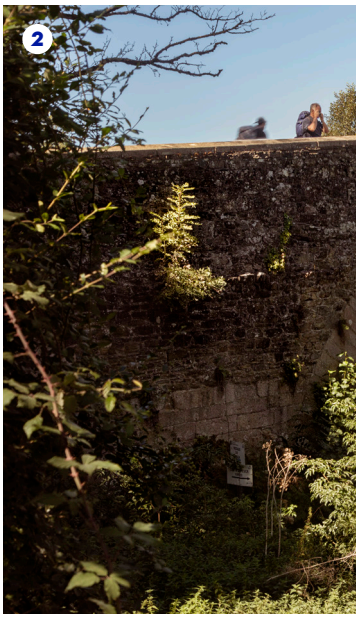


From Portomarín to Arzúa

Distance: 53.9 km

During this stage the Way goes through the area of Monterroso and Palas de Rei, where the landscapes are formed by the enormous plateaus of Lugo. On the horizon, on arriving in Melide, the mountains return, the O Careón range of the so-called Galician Ridge, whose orography divides the climates and terrain. After that, the Way is joined by the route of pilgrims coming along the Primitive Way. The route continues to Arzúa, over plateaus that barely reach 400 m above sea level.















1. Ligonde Mountains

42°51'21.9"N 7°46'14.9"W

A monumental specimen of *Quercus robur,* oak tree, welcomes pilgrims at the entrance to the village of Ligonde next to its well-known *cruceiro* (calvary). This stage leaves behind the catchment area of the River Miño and goes on to the banks of the River Ulla.

2. River Furelos

42°54'29.4"N 7°59'55.9"W

To get to this river the route crosses somewhat infertile land due to the presence of serpentinite, an ultrabasic rock. On top of it, there has been a development of soils with an abundance of heavy metals, an excess of magnesium and a lack of nutrients. Only some specialised species grow here.

3. River Catasol

42°54'55.3"N 8°2'29.2"W

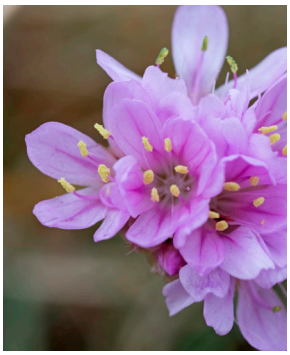
This is a small stream that is crossed over stepping stones between black alder and willow trees. Here insects like water stride can be seen. They can walk on the water without sinking at speeds of up to 1 m/s. As they are so light they can walk on top of the water without breaking its surface.

4. Stone Pine in Boente

42°55'2"N 8°4'23.52"W

Between Arzúa and Melide is a pair of stone pine trees, with their characteristic umbrella-shaped crown, some 300 metres from the route. One of them has extraordinary dimensions. It is almost 17 metres tall and the base of the trunk has a circumference of almost 6 metres, a monumental tree.

DON'T MISS

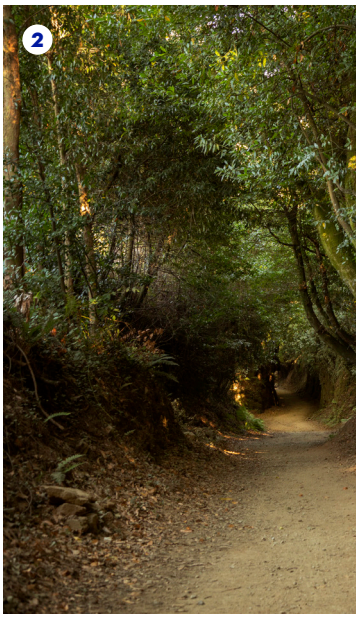


Endemic Species of the Area

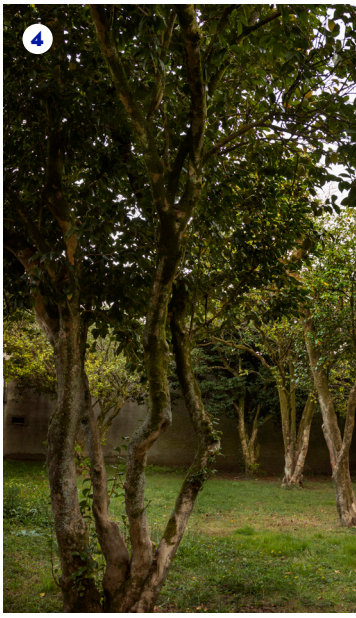
OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

The unusual features of the rocks give rise to soils with a characteristic flora. The species include *Santolina melidensis, Leucanthemum gallaecicum* and *Armeria merinoi,* very vulnerable plants which are listed in the Galician Catalogue of Endangered Species.









From Arzúa to Santiago

Distance: 38.7 km

The mosaic of artificial forests, small woods and grasslands seen on this day's walk is the backdrop to a life given over to agriculture and livestock breeding, as is obvious in this district. This is a land of delicious cheeses with a designation of origin, farms with cows and productive market gardens, and it announces the end of the Way. From the top of Mount Gozo, the silhouette of the cathedral's towers can finally be spotted.





1. *Carballeira de Santa Irene*

42°54'59.2"N 8°19'49.5"W

It is said that the waters of the spring in O Pino hold the secret of eternal youth. Far from offering scientific proof of this mystery, what is obvious is the abundance of foliage in the nearby oak wood *(carballeira* in Galician), which features over 3,000 m^2 of ancient trees that surround the hermitage.

2. *Corredoira de Cimadevila*

42°54'20.9"N 8°23'53.1"W

The vault of plants that covers the *corredoira* (corridor) between Amenal and Cimadevila was formed naturally by species that rooted and grew beside the path. There is a mixture of bay, black elder, chestnut, oak and Plymouth pear, among other tree species.

3. Monte do Gozo

42°53'22.3"N 8°29'37.1"W

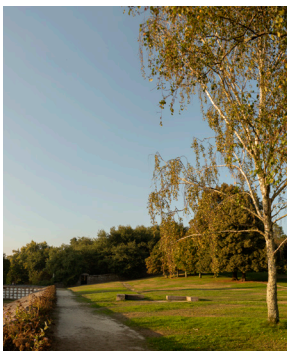
The rural landscape becomes more and more urban on arriving at Monte do Gozo. This is a rest area and an information point for pilgrims, as well as a public space of over sixty hectares, with over four thousand trees and eight thousand bushes arranged in an English style park.

4. Gardens of Pazo de Amarante

42°52'56.7"N 8°32'28.8"W

With a little over 800 square metres of green space, the Pazo de Amarante Gardens, in the historic centre of Compostela, contain an interesting selection of centuries-old camellia and magnolia trees and a curious crape myrtle, an exotic species originally from Asia.

DON'T MISS



Bonaval Park

42°52'59"N 8°32'15"W

Any time of the year is perfect for visiting this emblematic park, which is home to a centuries-old oak wood and numerous specimens of exotic species, including a Parana pine and a ceiba. Many of the trees are over a hunder years old, like a linden tree and a western red cedar that is 17 metres tall.



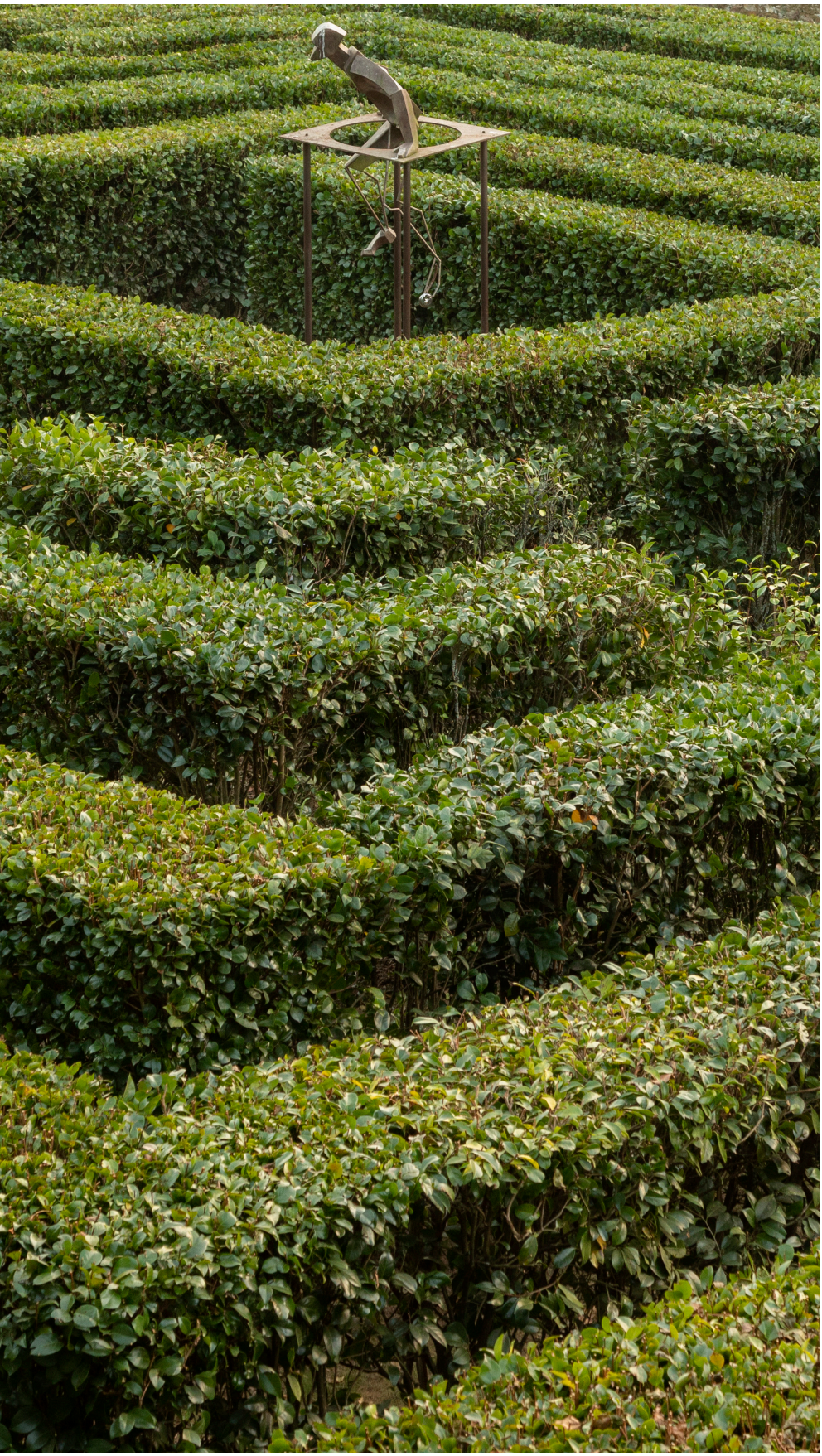
Enchanting

Belvís Park

The Belvís Park occupies an area of some 3 hectares in a small valley in a Santiago neighbourhood. It is a small elongated space with a grassy area crossed by a small stream. At the beginning of this decade, over 1,700 camellias were planted here. Today these trees measure just under 2 metres tall and form a set of three labyrinths that is unique in Europe.



Labyrinth of camellias in the Belvis Park (Santiago de Compostela)
42°52'39"N 8°32'19"W



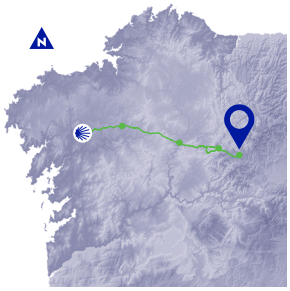
In Addition

An unforgettable landscape awaits on the French Way:

Ancares-Courel Special Conservation Area and Area with Special Protection of Natural Values

42°43'36.6"N 7°1'17"W

Green, gold, white... These colours seem much more intense in Os Ancares and O Courel. Spread over 100,000 hectares are patches of heather and grasslands that come together with an incomparable variety of woods. The beech trees in the Rogueira forest form part of a natural heritage that is a must-see for all nature lovers. The animal kingdom shows a great desire to survive here, even if the climate does not make this easy at all. Here, the wild boar have no reason to envy the beauty of the roe deer. Although it is difficult to spot them, Iberian wolves also live in these mountains. This species is found in a significant area of Galicia, with 90 reproducing packs and some 700 specimens. The treasure par excellence of the fauna is the brown bear. Paw prints, droppings and damage to hives are evidence of the presence of a species that is in serious danger of extinction. Os Ancares and O Courel mountains are a very suitable habitat for this mammal.







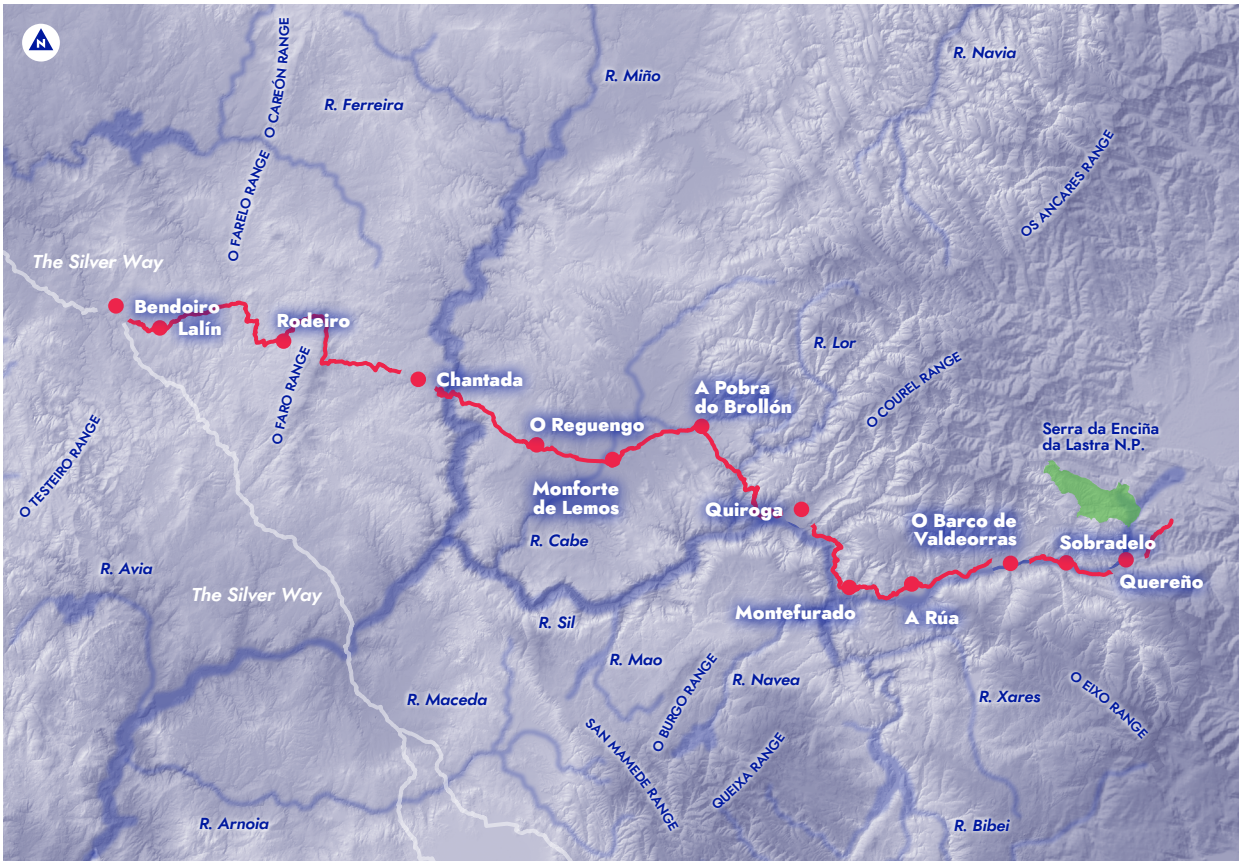
The Winter Way

It is said that this route began as an alternative to the French Way, since the snow in the mountains made travelling difficult for pilgrims in the colder months. One thing in particular characterises the Winter Way: it is the only Way of St. James that crosses the four Galician provinces. So it is not surprising that it passes through a wide variety of climates and landscapes.

View of San Salvador de Covas in the Enciña da Lastra range (Rubiá)
42°28'27.8"N 6°50'16.4"W

From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic

This route is full of contrasts. It starts in Valdeorras, a district that is more Mediterranean than Atlantic owing to its hot, dry summers. It continues through the vineyards of the Ribeira Sacra in Lugo province and then crosses the River Miño. It climbs up into the O Faro mountains, which have an oceanic mountain climate with abundant rainfall. Then it descends into the Deza district, in the province of Pontevedra, where it joins the Silver Route to end in Santiago.





Olive trees on the River Sil (Quiroga)
42°26'45.6"N 7°13'19.92"W

From Quereño to O Barco de Valdeorras

Distance: 16.5 km

The Winter Way enters Galicia in the east by way of a bridge over the River Sil leading into the village of Quereño. It continues through the district of Valdeorras on the right bank of the river. Throughout history this river valley has been a natural entry point from the Inner Iberian Plateau as it provides an easy route for travellers, without their having to face difficult terrain with mountains that rise to over two thousand metres.















1. River Sil

42°25'0.3"N 6°49'44.4"W

The River Sil rises in the Cantabrian Range and flows through three rift valleys after entering Galicia: The Valdeorras, A Rúa and Quiroga. Its course forms a deep depression that is flanked by the highest mountains in the Community, such as the Pena Trevinca massif.

2. Slate

42°23'39.5"N 6°51'43.1"W

Slate is a metamorphic rock that originates when clay is transformed into rock by being submitted to strong tectonic compression. It is characterised by being divided into layers by a process called foliation. The Valdeorras district is Galicia's leading producer and exporter of slate.

3. River Galir

42°25'19"N 6°56'8.4"W

This river is a small tributary of the River Sil. The Way crosses it in Éntoma over a bridge built of slate. From April to September, golden orioles can be spotted in this area. This is a yellow and black bird measuring about 24 centimetres that lives in deciduous woods.

4. Natural Park

42°28'55.1"N 6°51'46"W

The Serra da Enciña da Lastra Natural Park owes its name to the holm oak a species that covers one third of its area. It has more than 25 species of orchids, more than half of those recorded in Galicia. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

DON'T MISS



Holm Oaks

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

This is the most characteristic species of tree on the Iberian Peninsula. An evergreen tree, the holm oak grows on siliceous and calcareous substrates and has a broad crown and small, hard leaves. As it is drought-resistant, in Galicia it can be found in some parts of Ourense and the south of Lugo, where the climate is Mediterranean.

From O Barco de Valdeorras to Quiroga

Distance: 39.9 km

This stage, like the previous one, follows the right-hand bank of the River Sil to Quiroga. The climate of Valdeorras explains why Mediterranean trees, such as olive, cork oak, fig and holm oak trees, are found here. But there are also other native trees, such as chestnut trees. In these woods, the *Amanita caesaria* or Caesar's mushroom, a prized edible variety with a smooth, orange-coloured cap, grows abundantly some years.

DON'T MISS

Geological Fold

42°31'42.1"N 7°12'59.6"W

This formation, located between Campodola and Leixazós, is considered to be a Geological Place of Interest. In 2012 it was declared a Natural Monument. It has remained almost intact since the Lower Carboniferous Period, over 300 million years ago.

1. View of the Valdeorras Valley

42°23'49"N 7°5'27.9"W

The fertile soil of this valley supports a wide variety of crops, including vineyards, which have a long tradition here. Dry wines are made here that belong to the Designation of Origin Valdeorras. Among the grapes used are mencia, for red wine, and godello, for white wine.

2. Olive Trees

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

These Mediterranean trees can live for centuries. They have small white flowers and the fruit ripens in autumn and winter. After years of research into restoring the olive industry in Galicia, several native varieties have been officially recognised, *mansa galega* and *brava galega*.

3. Vineyards of the Ribeira Sacra

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

One of the distinctive features of the Ribeira Sacra is its mountain viticulture, where the grapes are grown on steeply sloping land that prevents mechanisation. This system is known as "heroic viticulture". In the harvest season, it is common to find harvesters carrying baskets and boxes on their backs

4. Quiroga River Walk

42°28'13.7"N 7°15'55.1"W

From this village there is a walk with no significant level differences which, in less than an hour, allows you to follow about 3 kilometres of the level lower reaches of the River Quiroga and a stretch of the River Sil. The most noteworthy part of the walk is the place where the two rivers meet.

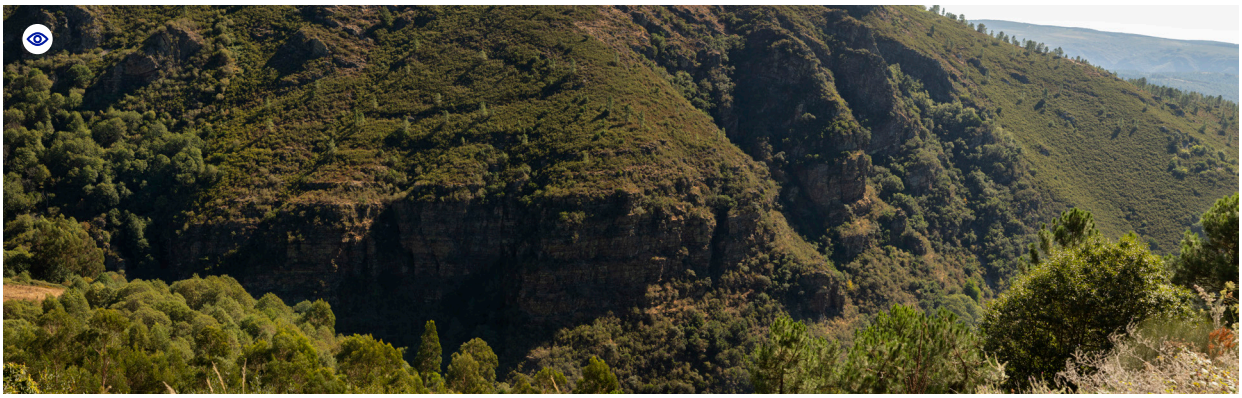



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From Quiroga to Chantada

Distance: 66.1 km

Although pilgrims leave the course of the River Sil on the next stage, to Chantada, the route continues through the landscape of the Ribeira Sacra. The Way crosses the Terra de Lemos, a district where the relief has almost no geographical accidents and agriculture flourishes. The plain is bounded by the largest rivers in Galicia, the Miño and Sil, which have dug deep gorges with almost vertical walls into the landscape, contrasting with the rest of the area.

1. Cork Oaks

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

This species of evergreen tree is endemic to the western area of the Mediterranean region. The male flowers are yellow and the acorns used to feed cattle. Within Galician areas with Mediterranean climate, cork oaks grow on flat or sloping siliceous soils with granite, gneiss or slate.

2. River Cabe

42°31′22.5″N 7°30′52.3″W

The River Cabe and its tributaries drain a wide, flat area formed by tectonic movement known as the Lemos valley. This plateau, where quaternary sediments were collected in its bed, covers the central third of this district at an average altitude of 400 metres above sea level.









DON'T MISS

3. Narrow-leaved Ash

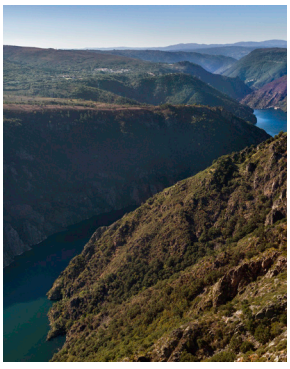
42°29'29.5"N 7°28'58.9"W

20.9 metres tall with a sturdy trunk, this specimen in Montepando is possibly one of the tallest narrow-leaved ash trees that can be found in Europe. This deciduous tree is thought to be around 250 years old and is included in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees.

4. River Miño Gorge

42°35'29"N 7°43'28"W

The River Miño flows through a deep gorge at the village of Belesar, where the walls are fully covered in vines planted in plots on *socalcos* (a Galician word for terraces). This method of cultivation retains the earth, allowing very steep land like this to be used for wine growing.

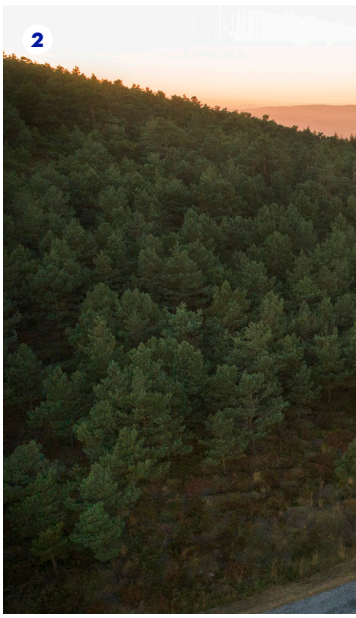


River Sil Gorge

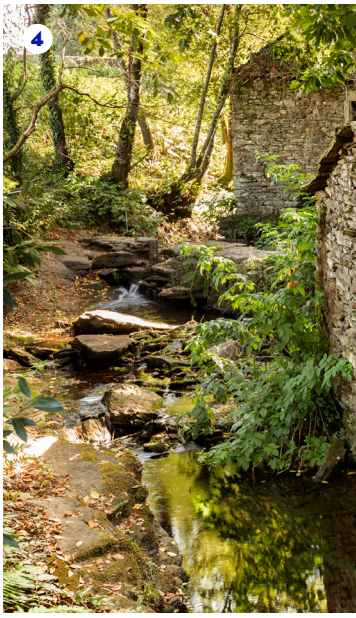
42°23'35.7"N 7°36'53.7"W

The banks of the Sil gorge plunge down some 500 metres to the river. The gorge is of great geological interest, in part because it contains *ollo de sapo* gneiss (toad's eye), which was given this name by the Galician geologist Isidro Parga Pondal because of its blue-violet quartz pyroclastic deposits.









From Chantada to Bendoiro

Distance: 52.5 km

This stage starts on the Chantada plateau. It continues on to the O Faro mountains, a range formed by tectonic movements in the Tertiary period. These mountains separate the Miño and Ulla basins and their highest peaks, which are over 1,000 metres high, have smooth ridges due to erosion. It has great ecological value and in its plant cover gorse, broom, heather, iberian silver-leaved broom, ferns, and stands of deciduous forest can be found. At the end of the stage this route joins the Silver Way.





1. River Asma

42°36'18.9"N 7°46'0.2"W

The River Asma crosses the municipality of Chantada and flows into the River Miño after passing through a steep-sided valley. Its succession of waterfalls led to the construction of water mills, formerly used to grind cereals by taking advantage of the hydraulic power.

2. Mount Faro

42°37'35.4"N 7°53'22.4"W

At 1,187 metres high, this is the highest mountain in O Faro range. The countryside of the four Galician provinces can be seen from its summit. Amphibians, like the back gold-striped salamander (brown with two golden stripes on its back) that is listed as an endangered species, live here.

3. River Arnego

42°38'46.6"N 7°58'2.5"W

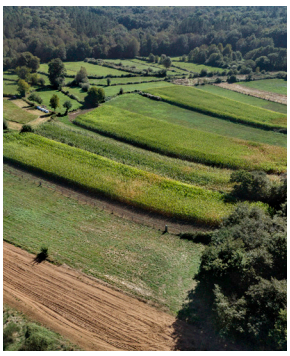
On the banks of the river is a mixed forest of Euro-Siberian and Mediterranean species that is among the best preserved in Galicia: the Arnego cork oak forest, an area of 1,080 hectares where the cork oak trees coexist with other native species, such as the common oak.

4. Pontiñas River Walk

42°39'43.3"N 8°7'6.2"W

This walking or cycle route along the banks of the River Pontiñas goes through one of Lalín's major green areas. It is well integrated into the town centre and is much used by local residents. In the area is the *Carballeira da Crespa*, a wood of oak and chestnut trees.

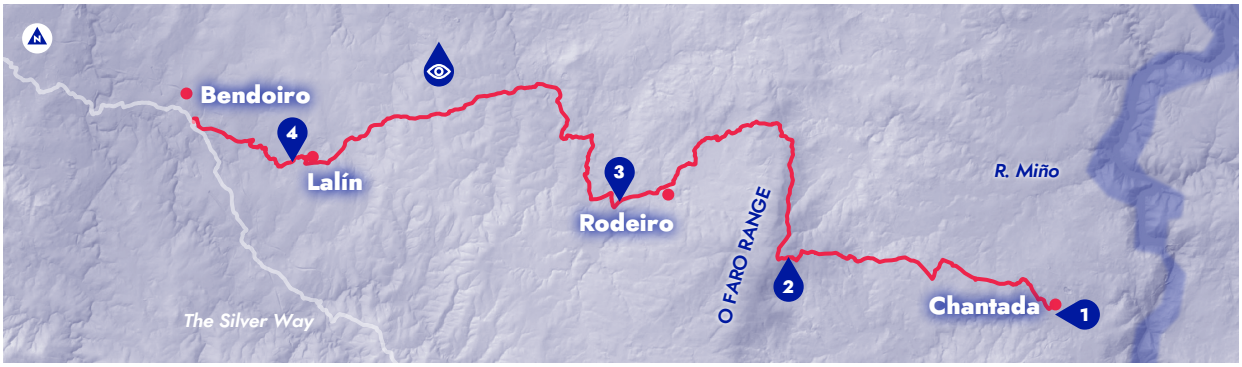
DON'T MISS



Deza Valley

42°42'15.48"N 8°3'44.64"W

The valley of the River Deza marks the geographical centre of Galicia as it separates the coast from the interior. On this plain are large areas of land used for pasture and growing fodder that exemplify the human activities of the district: agriculture and, in particular, stock breeding.



Enchanting

Montefurado Tunnel

In the time of the Emperor Trajan the Romans already knew of the gold in the River Sil. They therefore dug a huge wall of exceptional strength to create the Montefurado tunnel. This is an important work of engineering because when the river began to flow through it, abandoning its original course, it became easier to extract the gold from the old river bed.



River Sil flowing through the Montefurado tunnel (Quiroga)

42°23'36.96"N 7°12'16.2"W



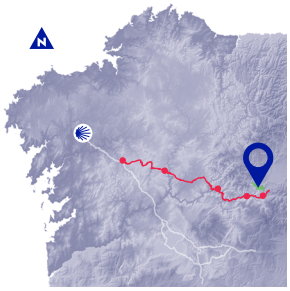
In Addition

The province of Ourense has this exemplar of a Mediterranean forest:

Serra da Enciña da Lastra Natural Park

42°28′55.1″N 6°51′46″W

It was declared to be a natural park in 2002. It has an area of 3,151.67 hectares. It features forests containing Mediterranean species, such as the holm oak, arbutus or strawberry madrone, and wild thyme, as well as protected species, including the marguerite daisy and santolina. A great place for amateur ornithologists is Pena Falcueira, where raptors like the golden eagle and peregrine falcon can be seen. Its fauna includes a bat colony, one of the most varied in Galicia with nine different species. Other species of protected mammals are the otter and Pyrenean desman. It is also inhabited by amphibians and reptiles that like a dry, rocky environment. Among the invertebrates are butterflies, the stag beetle and the Atlantic stream crayfish, which is only found in a few places in the provinces of Lugo and Ourense. Some of the fish in its rivers are protected, such as the Iberian nase and bermejuela.







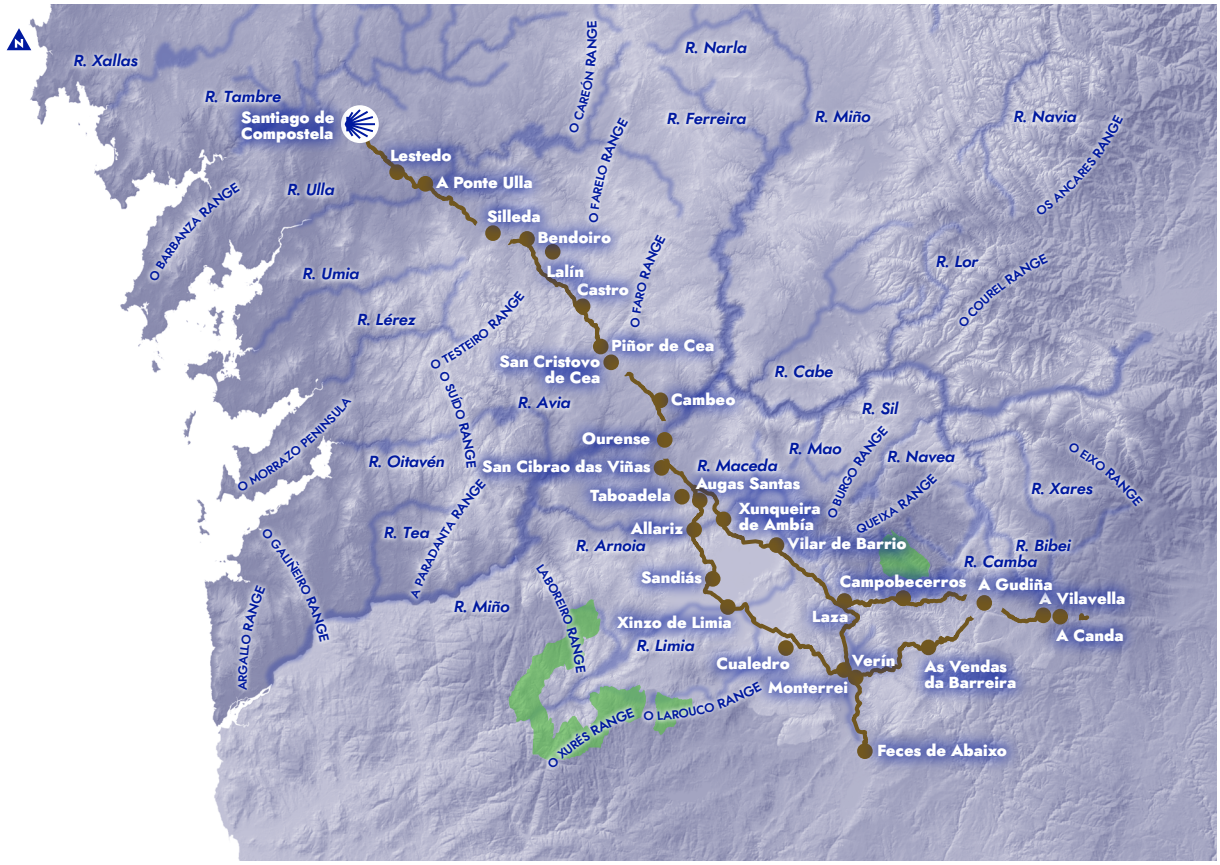
The Silver Way

The Silver Way is the Way that covers the greatest distance inside the borders of Galicia. Part of it crosses high, rough, rugged mountain terrain. But it also goes through valleys and depressions where the land is fertile and a variety of crops can be grown, including grapes. The route passes close to two of Galicia's six natural parks: the O Invernadeiro park, in which there are no human settlements, and the Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés park, on the border with Portugal.

Vines at the foot of Monterrei castle
41°56'33"N 7°26'53.9"W

The Southeastern Way

This Way enters Galicia in the southeast and crosses the province of Ourense from end to end. It enters the district of Deza, in Pontevedra, a transition area between the coast and the interior. This district is where pilgrims on the Winter Way join the Silver Way. After crossing the River Ulla, it enters the province of A Coruña. In a stage with hardly any uplands, the Pico Sacro (literally, Sacred Peak) stands out as a reference point for pilgrims.





Pazo de Oca gardens (A Estrada)
42°44'45.6"N 8°23'45.6"W

From A Canda to A Gudiña

Distance: 26.5 km

The Silver Way enters Galicia on the heights of A Canda, where in winter the temperatures fall below zero and there is the heavy snow and frost that are typical of an oceanic mountain climate. The route is bordered by low vegetation and undergrowth. Even so, in the nearby valleys there are many Pyrenean oak and birch woods and stands of Scots pine. Until A Gudiña the soil is granitic, giving way to slate and quartzite soils.















1. Portela da Canda

42°2'1.6"N 6°57'54.7"W

This mountain pass, at an altitude of 1,262 metres, is a traditional crossing point for pilgrims. The harsh weather here makes it hard for trees to grow, so that the vegetation on this section of the Way is low. However, it is possible to see the occasional stand of pines in the valleys.

2. Alto da Canda

42°1'48.7"N 6°57'58"W

The provinces of Ourense and Zamora are separated by a barrier of mountains. Its height is over a thousand metres above sea level and it forms part of the eastern mountain ranges of Galicia. Its peaks are not pronounced because of the erosion produced by glacial movement.

3. High Mountain Scrubland

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

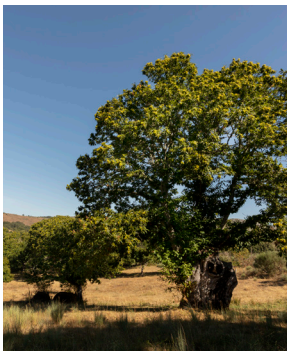
Tree heather, Spanish heather, common broom, white Spanish broom, Iberian silver-leaved broom, carquesia and yellow carquesia are the plants that can be often found in the area of A Canda. They grow at over a thousand metres high, in the coldest places where snow is frequent in winter.

4. Alto do Canizo

42°3'18.1"N 7°6'33.9"W

It is normal for animals like the wild boar, which is common in Galicia, to live in areas like this one. They are mainly nocturnal animals that spend the daytime lying among the vegetation and have an extraordinary sense of smell. Groups of up to 7 individuals can form but the males tend to be solitary.

DON'T MISS



The Ribeira Chestnut Tree

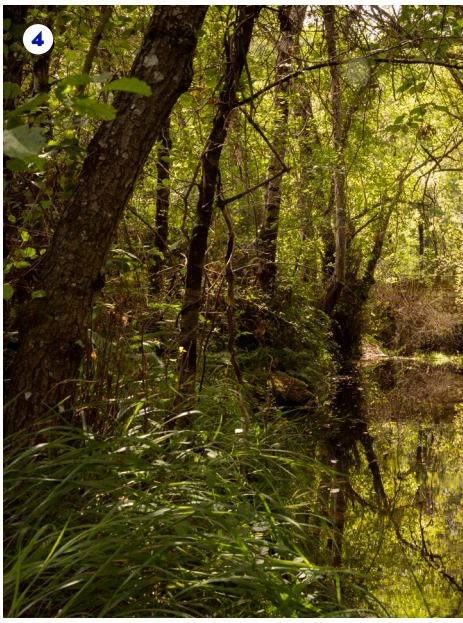
41°58'11.46"N 7°1'12.60"W

This outstanding chestnut tree is in Souto da Ribeira, A Mezquita. Even though half of its crown is missing, it still reaches a height of 24.9 metres. Its trunk rests on buttresses, making its perimeter at the base 11.3 metres. It is estimated to be 500 years old.









From A Gudiña to Ourense (via Laza)

Distance: 78.5 km

From A Gudiña, the Way enters the Seca range, a mountain chain with almost no inhabitants and a low mountain ecosystem. This stage is close to one of Galicia's natural parks, O Invernadeiro, which was declared to be a natural park in 1997. Leaving Laza behind, it follows the upper course of the River Támega. Before reaching Ourense, it enters the district of A Limia, a very flat area surrounded by mountains, and into the valley of the River Arnoia and the A Rabeda valley.

1. Seca Mountains

42°4'30.3"N 7°10'37.5"W

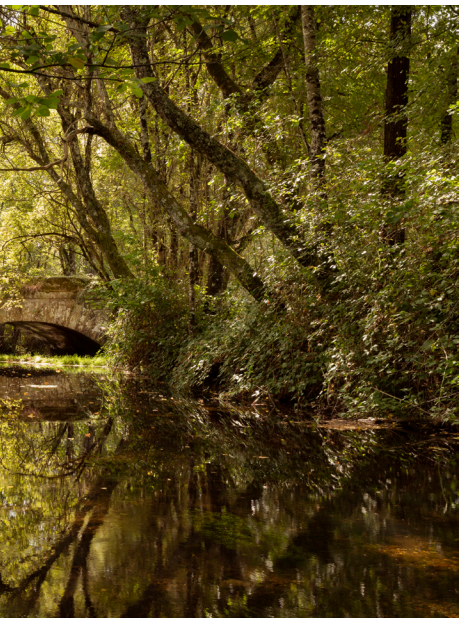
In the Seca Mountains, the Way is bordered by a harsh landscape where the vegetation is dominated by heather. In these mountains there are many half-abandoned villages, because of the harsh climate and the presence of wolves, the enemy of the flocks that used to graze in this area.

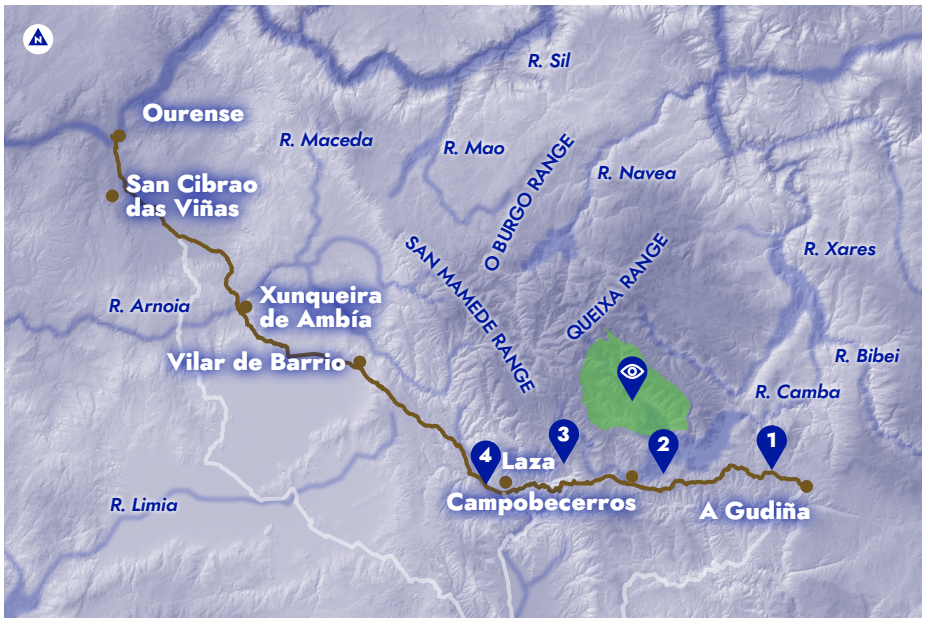
2. River Camba

42°4'24.71"N 7°17'30.31"W

A number of rivers flow from the O Invernadeiro Natural Park into the River Camba, including the Ribeira Grande and Ribeira Pequena. From the Way, the As Portas dam can be seen, holding back the water. It is the second biggest dam in Galicia, after the Belesar dam.







DON'T MISS

3. The Cerdedelo Chestnut Tree

42°4'54.2"N 7°23'49.4"W

This is one of the biggest chestnut trees in Galicia and is included in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. Its trunk is over a hundred years old and measures 10 metres around. Ten branches grow out of it that stretch 30 metres into the air because of the competition for light with other trees.

4. River Támega

42°4'1"N 7°28'47.9"W

Leaving Laza behind, the route follows the River Támega. The headwaters of this river are in Alberguería and it has created a narrow valley down to where it flows into the River Douro in Portugal. The vegetation on the banks is a typical mixed forest of black alder, ash, poplar, willow and glossy buckthorn.



Natural Park

42°7'50.6"N 7°19'24.6"W

O Invernadeiro Natural Park is in the Galician Central Massif, it measures 5,722 hectares, has no inhabitants and is a completely virgin land. To enter the park it is necessary to apply in advance for a permit. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

From A Gudiña to Ourense (via Verín)

Distance: 120.4 km

It is also possible to get to Ourense via Verín, a town set in a hollow crossed by a fault where mineral waters flow: the Creba da Corga. The grapevines in the area belong to the Designation of Origin Monterrei. The route goes through the district of A Limia, where, in the dried up bed of Lake Antela, there is a great amount of agriculture, such as potatoes and local wheat. Finally, it goes through Allariz, on the banks of the River Arnoia.

DON'T MISS

Natural Park

41°55'8.09"N 7°57'32.13"W

The Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés Natural Park is the largest in Galicia, with 30,000 hectares. Among its flora is the Yellowbeard Iris, a critically endangered species. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

1. Former Antela Lake

42°4'57.21"N 7°45'32.57"W

Until it was dried up in the 1960s, this lake formed one of the most important wetlands on the Iberian Peninsula. A wide variety of flora and fauna could be found in its almost four thousand hectares, especially birds, so that when it was dried up a great ecological heritage was lost.

2. Couto das Picoutas

42°9'59.86"N 7°47'29.47"W

O Couto das Picoutas is a granite formation. Granite is an igneous rock, which means that it was formed through the cooling and solidification of magma. When less resistant materials cover it, rainwater finally filters through them and erodes the rock, creating pointed shapes like this one.

3. River Arnoia

42°11'32.9"N 7°48'10.4"W

The River Arnoia has the largest drainage basin in the province of Ourense, measuring 740 km^2. The Silver Way crosses it at Allariz, where it is surrounded by green areas, such as the Arnado River Walk, an avenue lined with alder, plane and poplar trees, among other species of trees.

4. Penedo da Moura

42°14'45.57"N 7°47'36.78"W

This peak is also a granite formation. When in a massif formed of this material both vertical and horizontal cracks begin to appear, rainwater grinds down the rock creating blocks. Because of water erosion, balls like this one are formed, which tend to have a spherical shape.




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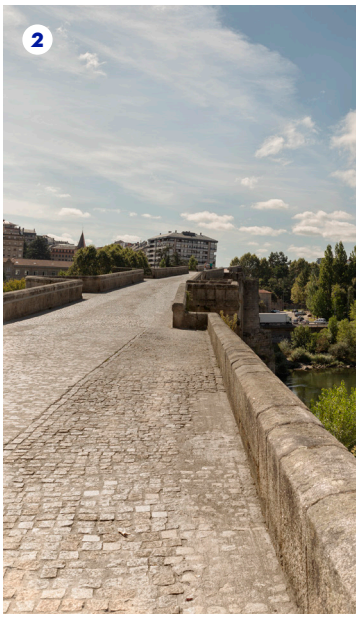

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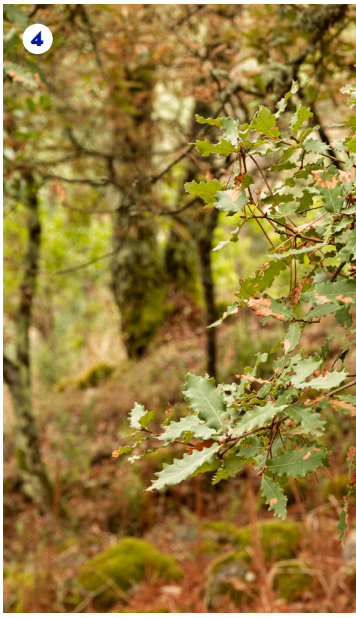

4











From Ourense to Cea

Distance: 22.8 km

This stage starts in Ourense, a spa city. The existence of its hot springs is explained by a process in which water filters through fractures in the earth. It flows down until it arrives at a hotspot, which explains its high temperature. After this it rises to the surface. On the way it acquires properties from the rocks over which it flows, which is why it is considered medicinal. At times the water contains magmatic gases, such as sulphur dioxide.





1. *Xardín do Posío*

42°19'53.7"N 7°51'52.5"W

This garden was created by the teachers of the former secondary school in 1846. It was originally a botanical garden. It contains a number of interesting species, including Japanese pagoda trees and Douglas firs. The path on the lower terrace is lined by two rows of Canary Island date palms.

2. Miño River Walk

42°20'42.3"N 7°52'7.7"W

Along the River Miño, in Ourense, is a path lined with native and introduced tree species. On the riverbank are several hot springs, such as A Chavasqueira spring, whose water is recommended for skin problems, among others. It has slight mineralisation and a temperature around 40 °C.

3. The Loña Cork Oak

42°20'47.37"N 7°51'26.30"W

It is worth the detour of about a kilometre from the Way to stop and see one of the cork oak trees that are listed in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. It has a height of 22.10 metres and is estimated to date back two or three centuries. Its branches form a large, globe-like crown.

4. Portuguese Oak

42°20'53.2"N 7°49'46.5"W

The archaeological and natural site of Santomé is one of the few places in Galicia where *Quercus faginea* has been recorded. It is similar to the common oak but the edges of its leaves are dentate and not lobate. It can reach a height of 10 metres and grows among other Mediterranean trees.

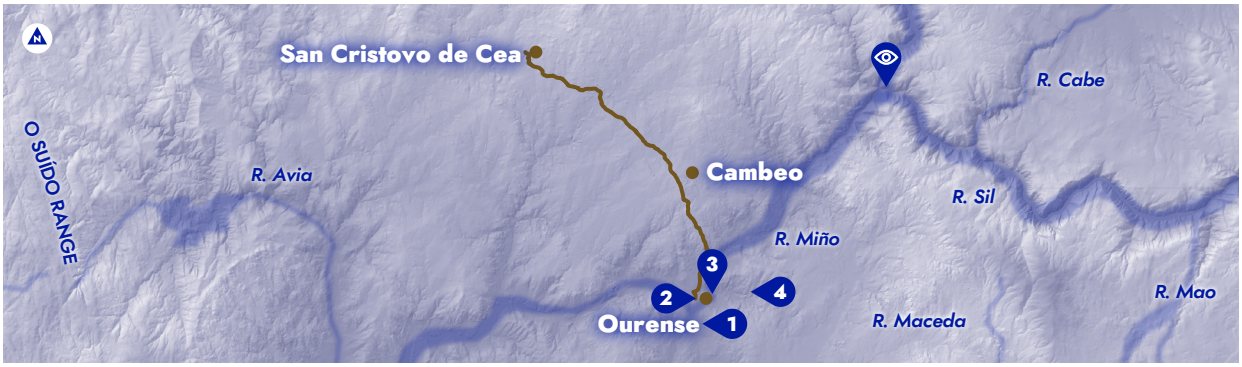
DON'T MISS



Os Peares

42°27'18.62"N 7°43'47.61"W

Os Peares is the place where the River Sil flows into the River Miño. The Mediterranean climate of its valley allows trees that are not normally found in Galicia to grow, such as the strawberry madrone and holm oak. Grape vines can also be seen growing on stone terraces, which is typical of the Ribeira Sacra.









From Cea to Silleda

Distance: 43.2 km

This stage starts in Cea, a village known for its bread, which is baked in the Galician traditional way and protected by the Pan de Cea Protected Geographical Indication. The route continues to Dozón, a municipality with very steep terrain, as it is situated in the Western Foothills of the Galician Ridge. It then goes on to Lalín, which is in the centre of the Deza district. Before the Way reaches Silleda, it is joined by the route of pilgrims coming along the Winter Way.

1. Oseira Monastery

42°32'19.2"N 7°57'1.7"W

There are pilgrims who go out of their way to see this monastery. The Lawson cypresses and cedars are the most impressive species in its gardens. Up to the monastery, the Way follows the River Oseira, where the riverside woods include a species that is not often found in Galicia, elm, as well as black alders.

2. *Carballeira de Barcia*

42°37'33.8"N 8°11'21.8"W

This is a stand of ancient oak trees that appear to be arranged in a straight line no matter from where they are viewed. On the leafy branches of decidious trees like these it is possible to see squirrels. These lithe rodents only go down to the ground to search for food.









DON'T MISS

3. River Deza

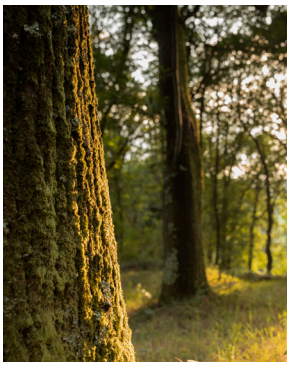
42°40'46.5"N 8°12'35.8"W

When crossing this river through the bridge in A Ponte Taboada, it is common to see odonata, such as dragonflies, which live near to running water. These insects exhibit sexual dimorphism. In some species the males have dark blue wings, while the females' are brown.

4. *Carballeira de Trasfontao*

42°41'15.9"N 8°13'59.6"W

Near the estate of the Pazo de Trasfontao is an oak wood containing some ancient specimens. This type of vegetation is home to the biggest beetle in Europe, the stag beetle. Its name in Galician, *escornabois*, comes from the shape of its mandibles, which look like horns.



Catasós Forest

42°38'12.7"N 8°5'37.8"W

This primary forest was declared a Natural Monument in 2007 and it also appears in the Galicia Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. It contains ancient oak and chestnut trees. The chestnut trees, which reach 30 metres in height, are considered the tallest in any European forest.

From Silleda to Santiago de Compostela

Distance: 41.2 km

The route leaves the province of Pontevedra and enters the province of A Coruña, crossing the natural border of the River Ulla, up which salmon and lamprey travel to spawn. It crosses the Ulla Bridge, in a landscape of pasture and arable land. The microclimate of Vedra is suitable for agriculture and wine growing. The wines belong to the Ribeira do Ulla sub-region of the DO Rías Baixas. Finally, the Pico Sacro, like a natural milestone, indicates that the Way is coming to an end.















1. River Toxa

42°45'26"N 8°16'21.7"W

The River Toxa is one of the rivers that the route crosses that day. It has one of the highest waterfalls in Galicia. The reason behind the waterfall is the granite rock of the terrain. Its exceptional hardness, due to the amount of quartz it contains, prevents the water from eroding it.

2. Gardens of Pazo de Oca

42°44'46.6"N 8°23'39.9"W

The "Versailles of Galicia" is home to several species of great botanical interest due to their rarity and age. There are some catalogued outstanding trees, such as a Camellia reticulata and a Japanese cedar 'Elegans'. For details, see the website of the Ducal House of Medinaceli Foundation.

3. Gardens of Pazo de Ribadulla

42°46'19.99"N 8°25'33.32"W

These gardens contain the largest number of catalogued outstanding trees in Galicia. Mention should be made of a grove of olive trees with over 500 specimens estimated to be 500 years old. For details on visiting the gardens, see the website of the Pazo de Ribadulla.

4. Pico Sacro

42°48'25.64"N 8°26'48.33"W

The Pico Sacro is a reference point for pilgrims. The peak of this pyramid-shaped quartz hill reaches a height of 533 metres above sea level. It is part of a quartz outcrop formed when the ancient Laurasia and Gondwana supercontinents collided some 350 million years ago.

DON'T MISS



The Camellia Route

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

In Galicia there are almost eight thousand varieties of camellias, which makes it an international benchmark. They can be found above all on *pazos* (manor houses) and in other gardens. The different varieties start to flower in October. For further information, see the website of Turismo de Galicia.

Enchanting

Carballo das Pioucas da Santa

Santa Mariña de Augas Santas can be found near Allariz, in the area of the *Castro de Armeá* (hill fort of Armeá). The stone remains, like two carved stone basins—the *Pioucas da Santa*—at the foot of a *carballo* (oak tree) or the crypt of the Basilica of the Ascension, known as the *Forno da Santa* or Saint's oven, are linked to the Castro and Roman cultures. They also have links with the legend of the martyrdom of St. Mariña, connecting together history, tradition and nature.



The Pioucas (little basins) oak tree at Santa Mariña de Augas Santas (Allariz)

42°14'38.8"N 7°47'35.9"W



In Addition

The nearest route to these two Galician natural parks:

1. O Invernadeiro Natural Park

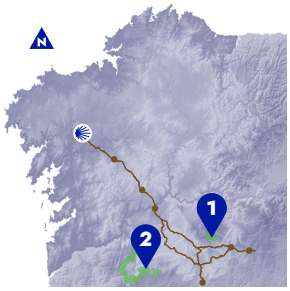
42°7'50.6"N 7°19'24.6"W

In this area, both Atlantic and sub-Mediterranean species can be found, including woods of holly. Mammals like roe deer, wolves and wild boar also live here. There is a significant number of raptors and this is an area where golden eagles choose to nest. There is also an icthyological centre where visitors can follow one of signposted routes: the Trout Route.

2. Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés Natural Park

41°55'8.09"N 7°57'32.13"W

The average altitude of this park is over 1,000 metres. Most of the park is covered in clumps of gorse and heather. On the higher peaks it is possible to spot wild goats. In the park live native species of Iberian reptiles and amphibians and other species of invertebrates. With the Serra do Gerês in Portugal, the park forms a Cross-Border Biosphere Reserve.







The Portuguese Way

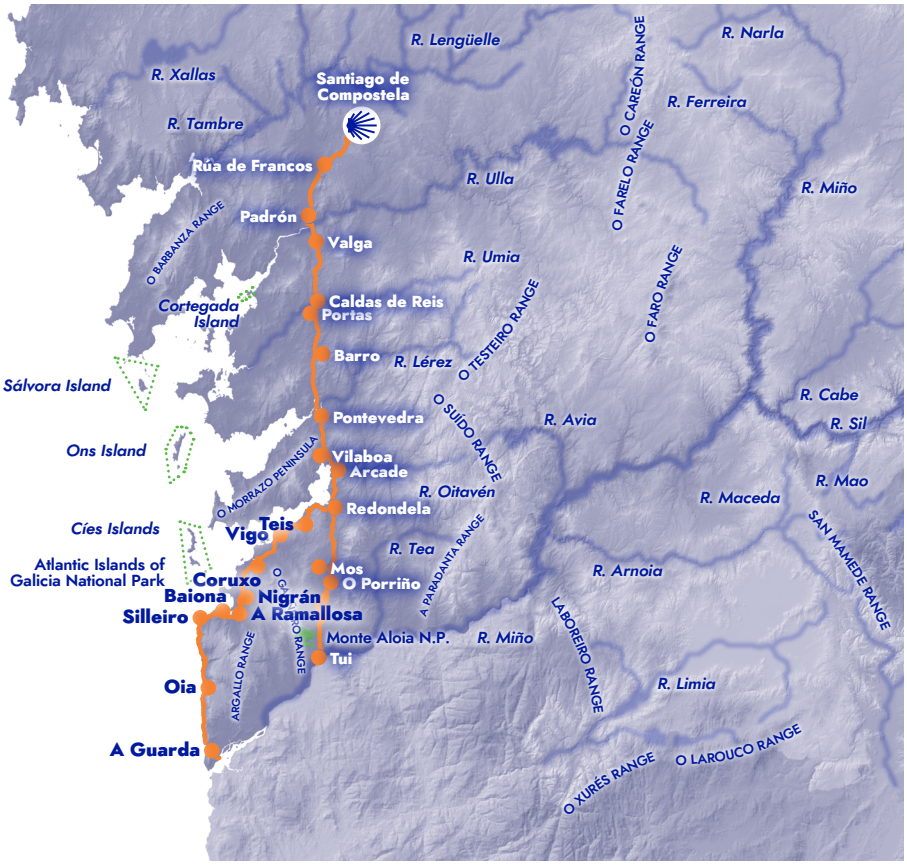
Of all the Ways, the Portuguese Way is the one with the least rugged terrain. This is because it mostly follows the Meridian Rift, a topographical depression that runs through Galicia from north to south. It starts in Carballo, in A Coruña province, and runs to Tui, on the southern border of Pontevedra province. This natural corridor, approximately 140 kilometres long, has been used throughout history for transportation routes and human settlement.

Estuary of the River Miño from the Castro de Santa Trega (A Guarda)

41°53'32.9"N 8°52'9.3"W

Crossing the Meridian Rift

This is an easy route for pilgrims because of the terrain and the climate of the Rías Baixas (Lower Estuaries), which has mild winters and summers with little precipitation due to the influence of the sea. The inland route starts in the O Porriño-Tui Rift, which ranges between sea level and an altitude of 200 metres. The coastal route goes along granite cliffs. The two routes meet in Redondela and continue on together.





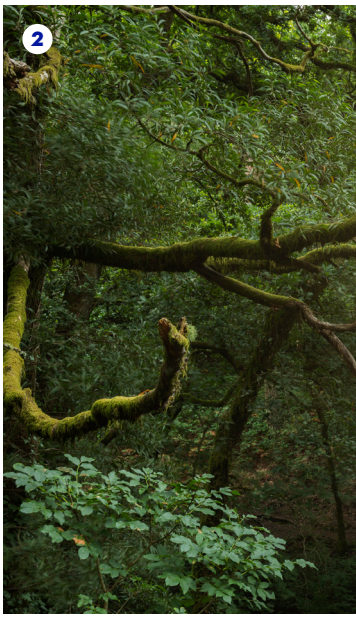
San Simón Bay from Vilaboa
42°18′47.8″N 8°39′40″W

From Tui to O Porriño

Distance: 18.1 km

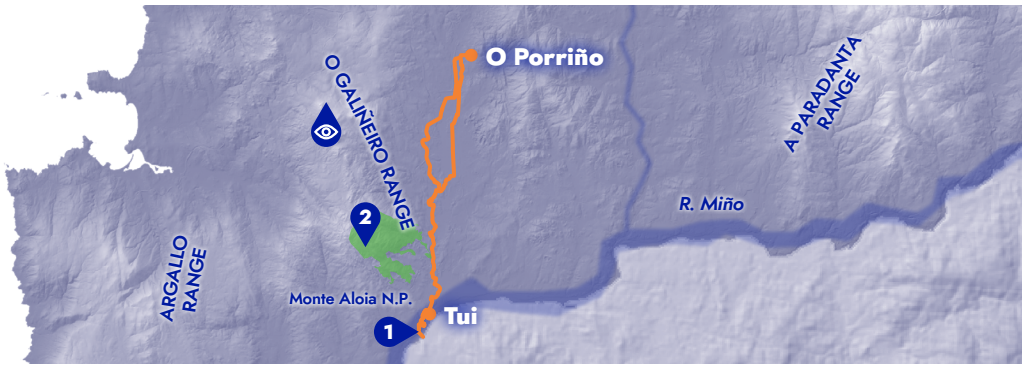
The start of the Portuguese Way in Galicia goes through the first section of the Meridian Rift, known as the O Porriño-Tui Rift. This depression lies between three different types of granite rock faces that are never more than 800 metres high: Mount Aloia and the O Galiñeiro range on the left and the O Porriño Batholith on the right. The River Louro flows through this crack, down from the O Galleiro range into the River Miño, the home of the allis shad and salmon.

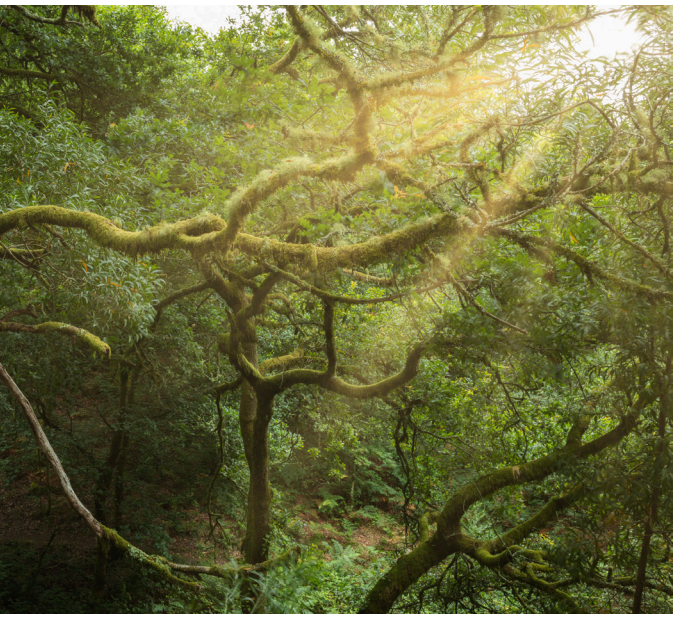














1. River Miño

42°2'14.5"N 8°38'53.4"W

In its waters lamprey, one of the oldest vertebrates in the world, are caught using traditional methods. This fish lives in the sea and goes up river to spawn. It has a scaleless body and its suction-cup mouth attaches onto other marine animals to suck their blood like a parasite.

2. Natural Park

42°4'34.4"N 8°40'51.5"W

The Mount Aloia Natural Park was the first in Galicia. Among its fauna are native Iberian reptiles like the Schreiber's green lizard. This park is recorded for having 11 of the 14 species of amphibians that can be found in Galicia. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

3. Citrus Trees and Kiwi Cultivation

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

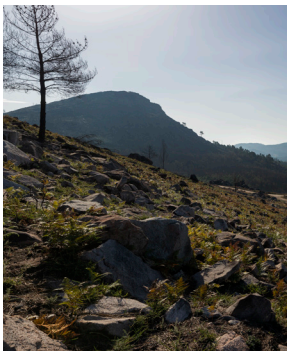
The climate of O Baixo Miño (Lower Miño), with its mild winters and a tendency to very dry summers, permits uncommon species to be grown in Galicia. For example, there are subtropical fruits, like the kiwi, which is grown extensively, and Mediterranean species, like orange and lemon trees.

4. O Porriño Pink Granite

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

This is a kind of biotite granite that gets a characteristic pink colour due to the large quantity of potassium feldspar megacrysts in the rock. In the O Porriño area there are large deposits of this igneous rock, which is exported to countries around the world and has international recognition.

DON'T MISS

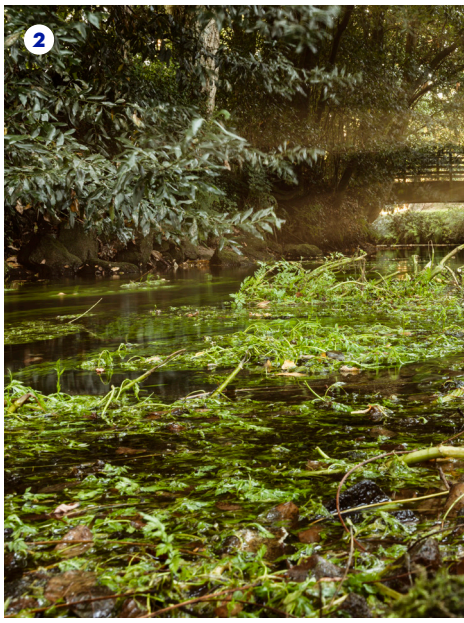


O Galiñeiro Range

42°8'33.8"N 8°42'17.4"W

The O Galiñeiro range is a granite mountain system whose highest point, which has the same name, has an altitude of 709 metres. It can be easily recognised by its peaks, which are shaped like a crest. It runs parallel to the Meridian Rift and ends at Mount Aloia in the south.







From O Porriño to Pontevedra

Distance: 33 km

This stage starts among pine and eucalyptus trees. Redondela is where pilgrims from the coast route join this route. It then goes down to the Vigo estuary, where there are rafts on which mussels are farmed and is frequently visited by cetaceans such as bottlenose dolphins. The Way crosses the River Verdugo, at whose mouth oysters belonging to the flat European variety are farmed in Arcade. Finally, this stage enters the city of Pontevedra, following the River Gafos.

1. San Simón Bay

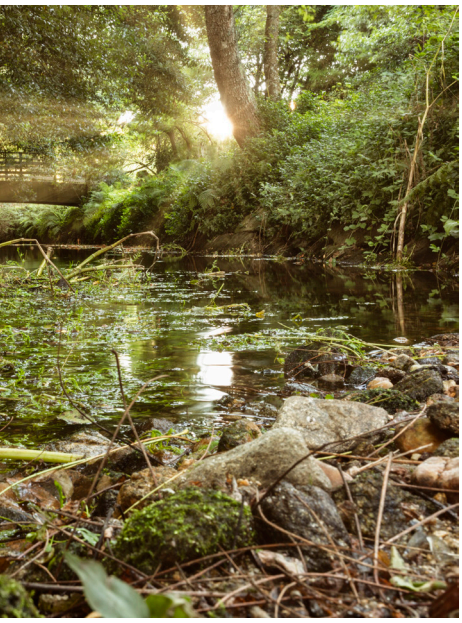
42°18'35"N 8°38'19.6"W

Cuttlefish is the most noteworthy mollusc in San Simón. This cephalopod has a chalky internal shell, the cuttlebone, that gives rigidity to its body. Every year it comes into the bay to reproduce because of the abundant fields of eelgrass, on which the females lay their eggs.

2. *Paseo dos Gafos*

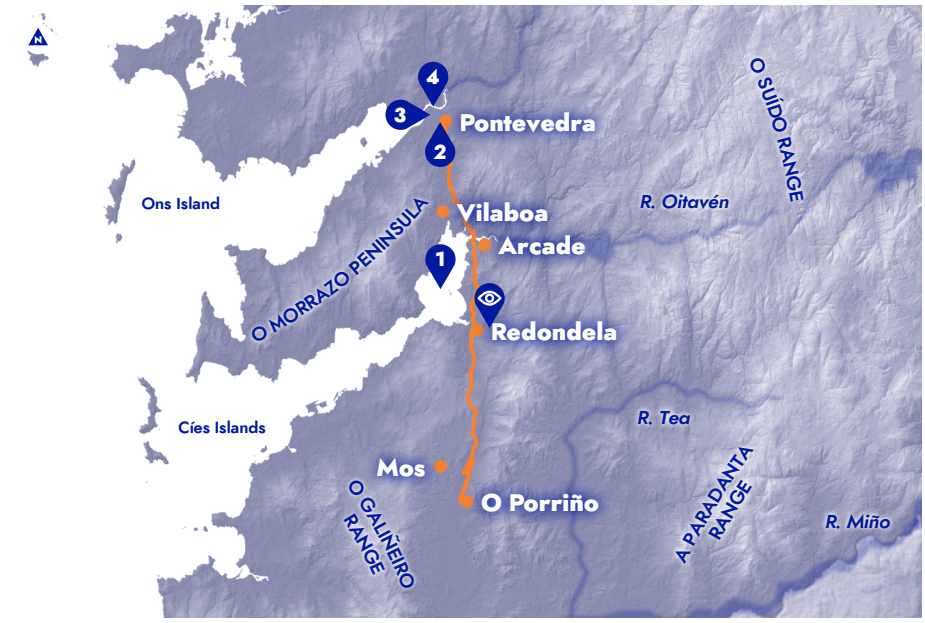
42°25'28"N 8°38'17.6"W

Literally, Os Gafos River Walk. Twenty species of mammals have been listed for the River Gafos, including the otter. This mustelid, which is common in Galicia, is a bioindicator of clean water. It has a long body with brown fur and a lighter coloured patch on the upper chest and neck.









DON'T MISS

3. Himalayan Cedars

42°25'46.32"N 8°38'50.27"W

In the Vicenti Gardens are three specimens of this species. They measure between 20 and 26 metres in height and are thought to be 100 years old. Two of them look like candlesticks, while the third one has less well ordered branches. Some branches were broken off in recent storms, distorting its shape.

4. River Lérez

42°26'6.3"N 8°38'40.6"W

From its source in the O Candán range, this river crosses the entire province of Pontevedra. It traverses soils of different morphologies: micaceous schists at its source, alkaline feldspar granites in the west and, at its mouth, glandular gneiss and Quaternary deposits.

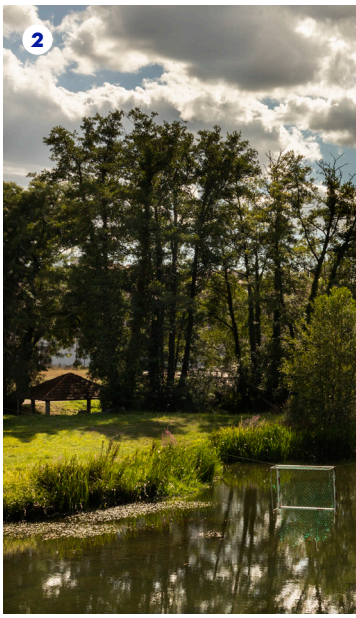


The Cristo de Arriba Cork Oak

42°16'57.8"N 8°35'35.5"W

This unique tree is in Reboreda, Redondela, 1.7 km from the Way. It measures 17.8 m in height and its trunk, which is entirely covered in cork, has large nodules at the base. The crown is 20 metres in diameter and leans to one side because of a broken branch.









From Pontevedra to Caldas de Reis

Distance: 22.8 km

From Pontevedra, the Way passes close to the O Salnés Valley, a wide coastal plain with an altitude of just 100 metres. It is highly eroded since it was partly filled by the sea during the Tertiary period. This valley is one of the five sub-zones of the Designation of Origin Rías Baixas. The vines of this DO are planted on granite soils and on them grow grapes that give wines with a marked Atlantic character. The best known wine is albariño, which accounts for 90% of the production.





1. The Alba Marshes

42°26'52.5"N 8°38'46.7"W

These marshes occupy close to eighty hectares of the final section of the River Rons. They include habitats such as Atlantic saline grasslands, which flourish on damp soils with plenty of river sediment. These formations tend to be dominated by one or two species of rushes.

2. River Umia

42°36'10.8"N 8°38'32.8"W

This river points our arrival in Caldas, where the hot springs have been used for hydrotherapy. The waters of its baths are hypothermal and rich in sulphur and sodium chloride, with a temperature ranging from 23 °C to 45 °C. They are recommended for rheumatism, among other illnesses.

3. *Carballeira de Caldas de Reis*

42°36'11.2"N 8°38'18.9"W

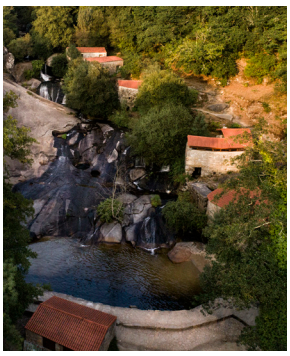
This is a formation made up of more than 200 century-old oak trees and is listed in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. The trees are arranged in rows and have different dimensions and morphologies. It was declared as a Scenic Site in 1962 together with the Caldas Park and Garden.

4. Parana Pine

42°36'13.2"N 8°38'25.4"W

This is one of the outstanding trees in the Caldas de Reis Park. It belongs to a species from South America. Its trunk measures thirty-two metres high and in its upper third is the crown, which is disordered and irregular. Its slightly pointed leaves have a triangular shape.

DON'T MISS



Barosa River Waterfall

42°33'21.8"N 8°37'50.2"W

650 metres from the Way, on the right, the River Barosa forms a waterfall to which numerous pilgrims make a detour. Because of the slope, as the water falls it creates a series of cascades on the granite rocks. The rocks have a very smooth, slippery surface due to erosion.



From Caldas de Reis to Santiago de Compostela

Distance: 43.6 km

The last stage of the Way leaves Caldas, following the course of the River Bermaña. It then runs parallel with the Valga into the valley of the Ulla, a river that forms a natural border between the provinces of Pontevedra and A Coruña. The Way enters Padrón, where the Meridian Rift is 12 kilometres wide. This municipality is located on a floodplain of extremely fertile alluvial sediment. Finally, it reaches the River Sar outside Santiago de Compostela.

DON'T MISS

Carballeira de Conxo

42°51'32.37"N 8°33'12.45"W

This is a stand of centuries-old common oak trees on the banks of the River Sar. Its name comes from the historic Conxo Banquet, held in March 1856 to toast for freedom, equality and Galicianness.

1. Plane Trees

42°44'15.80"N 8°39'41.90"W

The two rows of plane trees lining the Paseo do Espolón in Padrón are protected. They measure around 10 metres in height and are estimated to be a hundred years old. Their main branches have "cat's heads" because they have been repeatedly pruned in the same spot.

2. Padrón Artistic Botanical Garden

42°44'20.2"N 8°39'30.2"W

It was declared a National Artistic Monument in 1946 and has a number of impressive trees. Among them is one of the most important specimens in Spain of the African wild date palm, due to its shape and size. It is 12 metres high and has a number of branches growing out of one place.

3. Pazo de Faramello Garden

42°48'38.35"N 8°37'44.33"W

Located next to the River Tinto, this garden has some well preserved 19th century French gardens and a river wood of cherry and chestnut trees. There is also a path with hydrangeas and camellias and 50 varieties of fruit trees. For details on visiting the park, see www.pazofaramello.com.

4. Carballeira de Francos

42°48'54.1"N 8°37'19.2"W

At Francos, in Teo, is one of the oak grove in Galicia that is still used as a place of celebration. Each autumn, on 11th November, the San Martiño Horse Fair takes place in this *carballeira*. This is a traditional event dating back over half a century where native stock are shown.




1


2


3


4











From A Guarda to Redondela

Distance: 78.2 km

The Portuguese Coastal Way runs along the straightest coastline in Galicia, along some 30 kilometres of rugged coast lined with cliffs. At Oia, the Máxica Route blends together history and natural heritage. After Baiona, the way starts to follow the Vigo estuary. Redondela is where it joins the inland route, from which it is separated by a number of mountain ranges, including the A Groba range, where there is the largest herd of free-roaming *raza galega* (Galician breed) horses.

1. Mouth of the River Miño

41°52'16.85"N 8°52'19.39"W

In the final stage, the River Miño forms an estuary where sedimentary deposits brought down by the water have accumulated. These have given rise to a series of sandy islands, the largest of which is Canosa Island. In the winter, the island welcomes up to 3500 different species of waterbirds.

2. Mount Santa Trega

41°53'29.9"N 8°52'16.2"W

The highest point of this granite massif is the San Francisco peak, 341 metres high, from where the estuary of the River Miño can be seen. On the hill is an archaeological site with the remains of one of the largest hillforts in the northeast of the Peninsula, dating from the 1st century B.C.







DON'T MISS

3. Mouth of the River Miñor

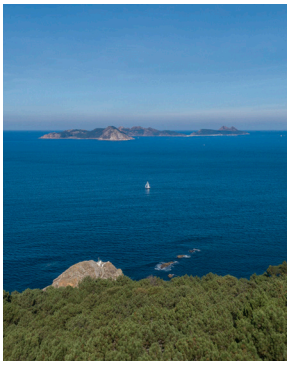
42°6'55.55"N 8°48'46.84"W

The marshlands formed by the River Miñor at its mouth are protected by the Ladeira beach, which forms a natural dam. From September to May spoonbills can be seen here. They are immediately recognisable because of their flat beak, which can be up to 135 centimetres long.

4. Castrelos Park

42°12'49.6"N 8°43'45.3"W

This 24 hectare park is the biggest in Vigo. In the park is the Quiñones de León Mansion and Museum, which has a French garden in a similar style to Versailles, an English garden, rosebushes and several outstanding trees, such as the one known as "Methuselah" owing to its age.



National Park

42°22'46.2"N 8°56'26.9"W

The Atlantic Islands of Galicia National Park was established in 2002 and is the only National Park in Galicia. It is situated on the Rias Baixas and consists of four archipelagos: Cortegada, Sálvora, Ons and Cíes. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

Enchanting

San Simón Island

The island with a thousand faces: a monastic refuge, the delight of mediaeval poets, a quarantine, hospital, a prison… Throughout history, the vegetation on San Simón was influenced by all those who came there and even includes some impressive box alignments. Today, it features a perfect mixture of native and foreign species, in the heart of the Vigo estuary.



San Simón archipelago from the Cesantes beach (Redondela)

42°18′32″N 8°37′16.3″W



In Addition

The area surrounding the Portuguese Way is of great natural importance because of these two parks:

1. Atlantic Islands of Galicia National Park

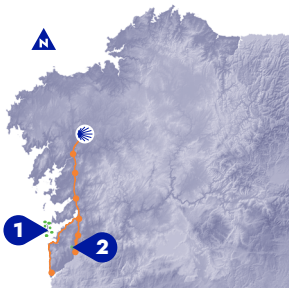
42°22'46.2"N 8°56'26.9"W

The marine environment has brown seaweeds forests that attract crustaceans and fish. The land environment is basically made up of dunes and cliffs. On these islands is one of the foremost breeding colonies of the European shag. This bird has black feathers and a yellow throat-patch just behind the beak.

2. Monte Aloia Natural Park

42°4'34.4"N 8°40'51.5"W

This has been a natural park since 1978 and is 746 hectares of acid soils over granite substrates. Over 80% of its surface is covered in trees of several species that make it a real botanical park. In the rest of the area, gorse, broom and heather abound. It is home to a number of protected species of fauna, including otters, gold-striped salamanders, Pyrenean desmans and stag beetles.







The Sea Route of Arousa and the River Ulla

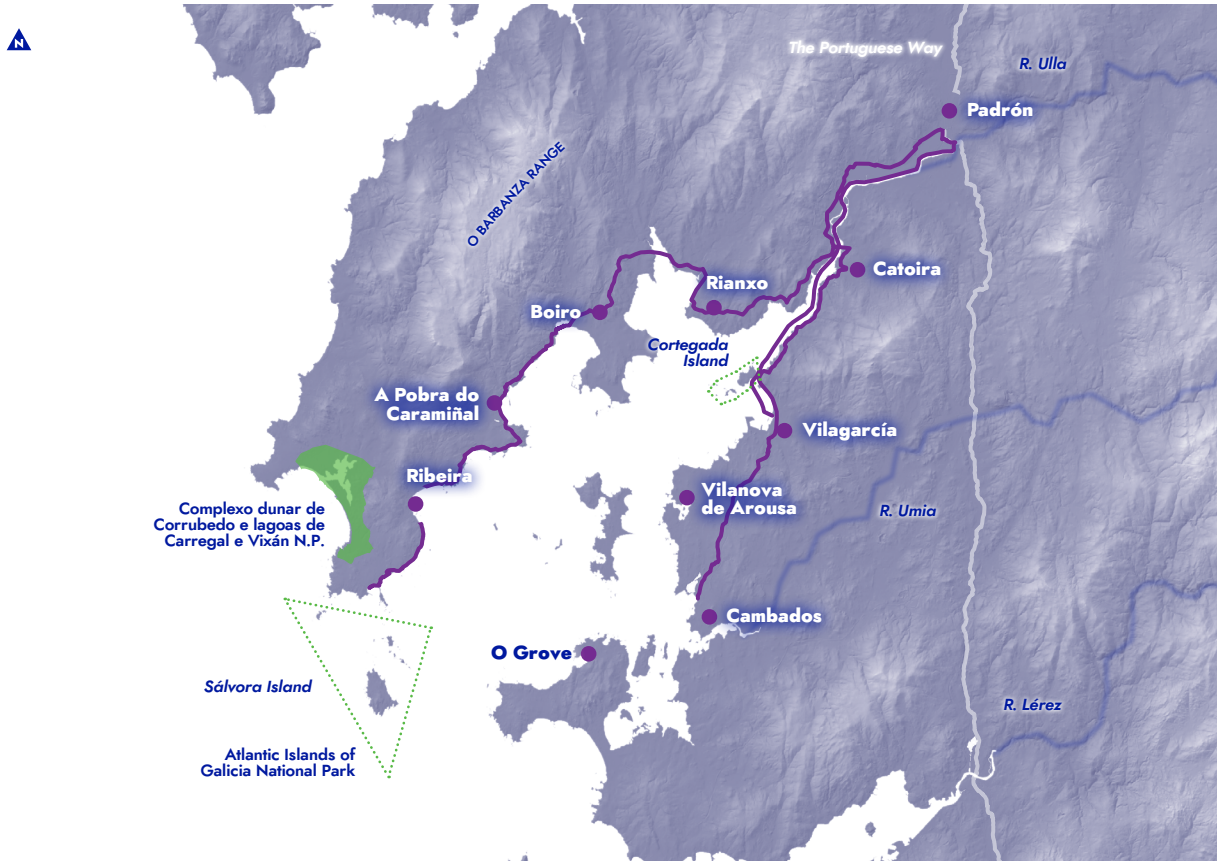
Part of this Way runs along the Arousa estuary, which is the longest of the Rias Baixas, stretching some 10 kilometres to the ocean. It originated as a flooded rift valley and its sea bed is one of the most productive in the world. Numerous islands and islets rise from its waters, the biggest of which are Sálvora, Cortegada, Arousa and A Toxa.

Rúa Island (Ribeira) with O Barbanza range in the background

42°33'2.1"N 8°56'24.2"W

The Secrets of the Arousa Estuary

There are three adjectives to describe this route. The first is marine, as it enters Galicia at the mouth of the Arousa estuary and continues as salt water until it meets the River Ulla at Catoira. The second is riverine, for the stretch to Padrón. And the third and last is inland, as from Padrón it follows the Portuguese Way along what is called the Santiago Step, part of the Meridian Rift, some 200 to 400 metres above sea level.





Palaeosol on the islet of Guidoiro Areoso
(A Illa de Arousa)
42°32'29.8"N 8°54'0.7"W







North of Arousa

Maritime stretch

The first option is the northern section, where the landscape consists of a narrow coastal plain dotted with sand and the O Barbanza range, a mountain chain lifted up by the rift that separates the Arousa estuary from the Muros and Noia estuary. At the westernmost edge of the district it meets one of Galicia's natural parks, the Dunes of Corrubedo and Carregal and Vixán Lakes Natural Park, which includes several lines of dunes and beaches open to the Atlantic Ocean, unlike the beaches on the estuary, which are more sheltered.

1. Sálvora Island

42°28'24.8"N 9°0'43.6"W

Sálvora Island is part of the only National Park in Galicia. In the West it borders on the Arousa estuary and is surrounded by small islands. At its highest point it is 71 metres high above sea level. One of its most characteristic formations is *bolos* or round blocks of granite.

2. A Curota

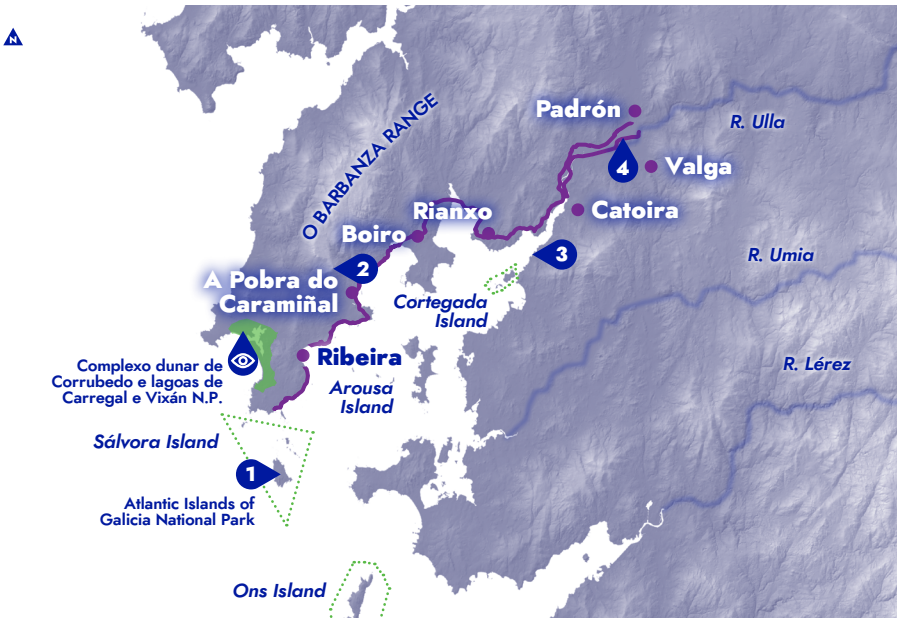
42°37'28.8"N 8°57'35.1"W

Mount A Curota, which is part of the O Barbanza range, is one of the highest points in this coastal district. From its summit, at 596 metres above sea level, the entire Arousa estuary can be seen and admired at its best. It is common to meet free-roaming horses on its slopes.









DON'T MISS

3. Mouth of the River Ulla

42°38′3.8″N 8°45′39.5″W

At its mouth, where the River Ulla empties into the Atlantic Ocean, it forms a wide plain that opens out towards the sea as wide areas of marshland. Salmon swim up this river at breeding season. These fish are born in freshwater, grow up in the sea and return to the rivers to reproduce.

4. Ulla-Deza River System

42°43′11.7″N 8°40′10.7″W

This Galician river system extends over more than 1,000 ha and is part of the Natura 2000 network. It is made up of the River Ulla and its tributaries, such as the Deza. Close to where the River Ulla and River Sar meet, Eurasian tree sparrows, the smallest of the European sparrows, can be spotted.



Natural Park

42°34′45.8″N 9°3′0.1″W

The Dunes of Corrubedo and Carregal and Vixán Lakes Natural Park has one of the biggest moving sand dunes in Galicia, around 15 metres high, and two lakes, one freshwater and the other brackish. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.

South of Arousa

Maritime stretch

The southern arm of the Arousa estuary is formed by the coast of the O Salnés district. Unlike the north, in this area the coastal plain is very wide and bordered by Mounts A Escusa and Castrove. The beaches include the Area da Secada, on the Arousa Island, which is forested. It is also a place with important ecological areas, such as the Umia-O Grove Inter-Tidal Complex, which extends over 2813 hectares and is of great ornithological interest as at low tide a wide field of eelgrass is uncovered.

DON'T MISS

Cortegada Island

42°37'5.6"N 8°47'7.3"W

In the interior of this island, which is part of the Atlantic Islands National Park, there is a two and a half hectare wood of bay trees, the largest in the south of Europe, which almost certainly results from the bay trees colonising abandoned farms.

1. A Toxa Island

42°29'21.5"N 8°50'55.3"W

A Toxa is one of the most outstanding spas in Galicia. On this island are medicinal springs that were declared of public use in the year 1868. Today there is a project to recover the *burro fariñeiro* (Galician breed donkey), which has already been successfully bred.

2. A Lanzada Beach

42°26'50.2"N 8°52'32.1"W

This beach occupies the western section of the O Vao isthmus, which makes O Grove a peninsula. The snowy plover, the most threatened bird on the coast of Galicia, nests in this area. The Galician Government has a Conservation Plan to recover the population of this species.

3. Mount Siradella

42°28'12.5"N 8°52'51"W

At almost 200 metres high, Mount Siradella is the highest peak on the O Grove peninsula. It offers views of the Umia-O Grove Inter-Tidal Complex, a wetland of international importance, that is Galicia's most important wintering ground for waterbirds.

4. Arousa Island

42°34'5.8"N 8°53'27.9"W

This island, together with Sálvora and Ons, is one of the four island habitats on the Iberian Peninsula where the *Linaria arenaria,* sand toad flax, a coastal plant species in danger of extinction, can be found. In the south, *cons* (large granite boulders) can be seen that were moulded by the sea.




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Enchanting

Guidoiro Areoso

How is it possible that so many megalithic tombs can be found on a small island in the middle of an estuary? Geology has the answer: some 3,000 years ago the sea level was some 5 to 7 metres below the current level and the coastline hundreds of metres longer, so that very probably Guidoiro Areoso island formed part of a peninsula leading to Arousa island. This explains how the materials to build these megalithic monuments were brought there.



Dolmen on the beach of the islet of Guidoiro Areoso (A Illa de Arousa)
42°32'26.4"N 8°54'4"W



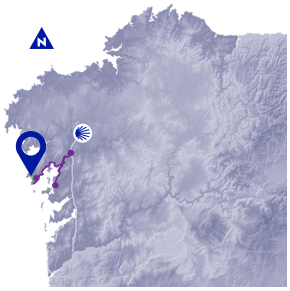
In Addition

The natural park closest to the sea of the six existing in Galicia measures almost a thousand hectares:

Dunes of Corrubedo and Carregal and Vixán Lakes Natural Park

42°34′45.8″N 9°3′0.1″W

This park has unmoving dunes and one moving dune, which is carried towards the interior by the southwesterly wind while the northeasterly wind moves it towards the coast. A plant species grows that is endemic to Galicia, *Omphalodes littoralis,* grows in the systems as do plants like the sea daffodil, which stores water in its bulb. Lake Carregal is connected to the Atlantic Ocean and is one of the most unusual ecosystems in the park, with a great variety of molluscs. Numerous waterbirds nest on Lake Vixán, such as the gadwall duck. One of the most unusual reptiles in this area is the western spadefoot, which has eyes with vertical pupils and only comes out at night. It is characterised by the black spades on its hind feet, which it uses to dig burrows in which to hide. Other protected species can also be found here, such as otters, turtles and lampreys.







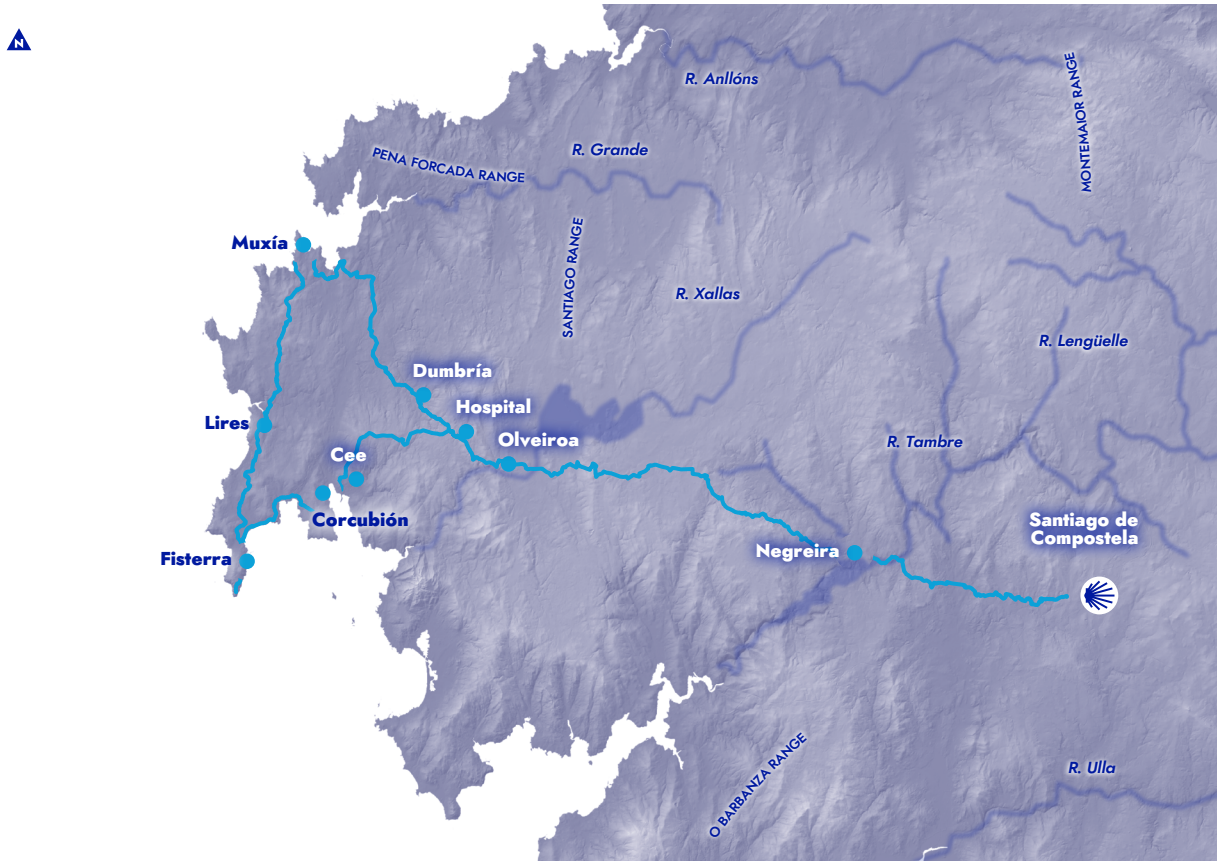
The Fisterra and Muxía Way

From its starting point in Santiago de Compostela, this route crosses the Tambre and Xallas rivers before heading toward the Costa da Morte (literally, the Coast of Death). This is an area in which violent storms and the force of the waves have formed a landscape of cliffs and dune systems, where the vegetation has adapted to the salinity. Geographical accidents like the capes of Fisterra and Touriñán stick out from the coast. It is here that, twice a year, the last sunset on mainland Europe can be seen.

Mar de Fóra beach (Fisterra)
42°54'23.45"N 9°16'27.74"W

Ferocious Winds and Seas

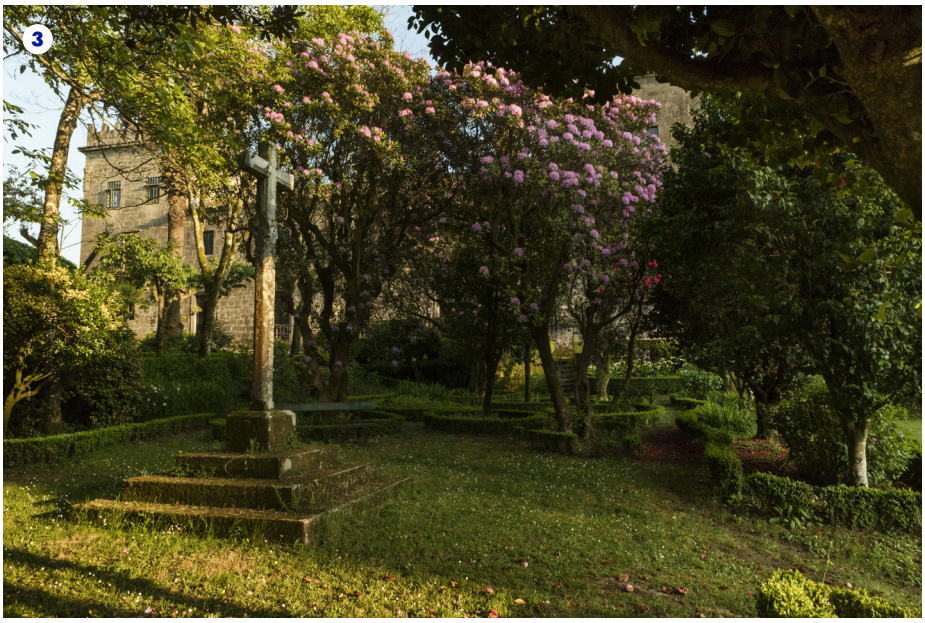
The climate has shaped the land from Compostela to the Costa da Morte. Inland, humidity and frequent rain have formed a landscape of agriculture and forestry. On the coast, the force of the waves, rain and wind have cut into the relief, forming cliffs, beaches and dune systems. The River Xallas flows into the sea as a waterfall that drops from a great height on one of the sides of Mount Pindo, one of the most interesting geological features in Galicia.





Fervenza do Ézaro (O Ézaro waterfall) (Dumbría)
42°54'45.38"N 9°7'7.08"W







From Santiago de Compostela to Negreira

Distance: 20.9 km

The first stage of this route starts at the end of all the other Ways. Without leaving the urban area of Santiago de Compostela, landscaped areas can be found with outstanding trees and odd specimens like A Perona, a Nordmann fir 22 metres tall that was planted here by Eva Perón in June 1947. The River Tambre is the reference point of this section, hidden in riverside woodland. Small waterfalls accompany the wayfarer, where it is easy to see trout and birds looking for food.

1. Alameda Park

42°52′42.70″N 8°32′56″W

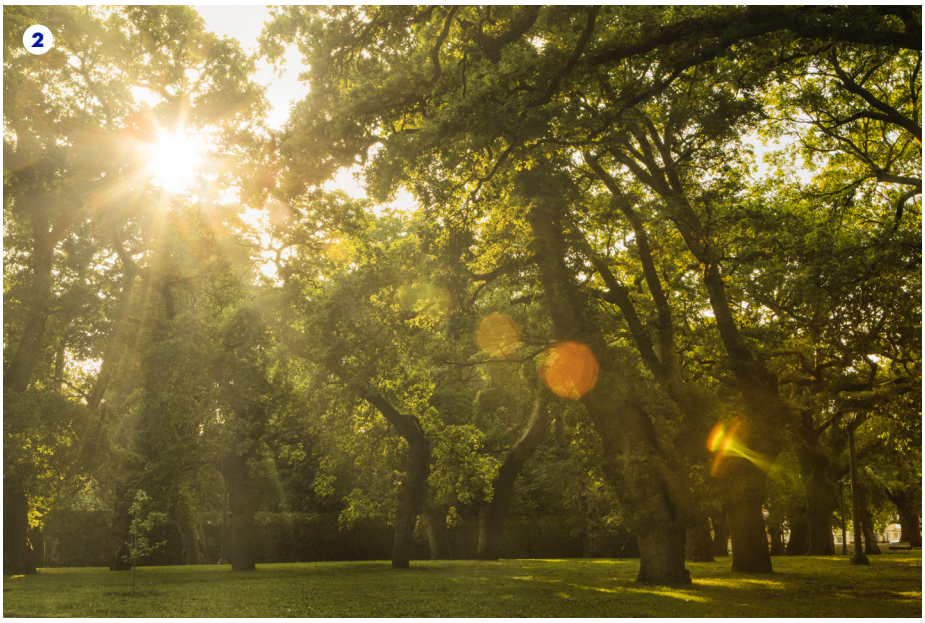
This park in Santiago contains some botanical treasures, such as a centuries-old redwood tree and a silver lime tree in the Campo da Estrela (literally, Field of the Star). In the centre of the park is the *Carballeira de Santa Susana,* an oak wood dating from the 16th century, with specimens over 300 years old.

2. *Carballeira de San Lourenzo*

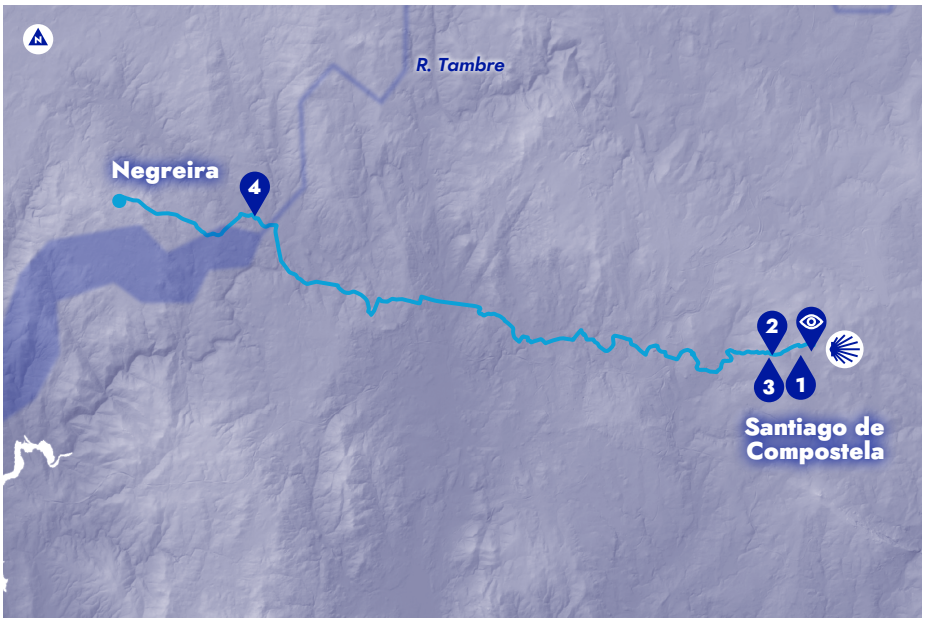
42°52′42.21″N 8°33′23.53″W

One of the attractions of the Pazo de San Lourenzo estate is its botanical garden. One example is its oak wood, whose ancient leafy trees inspired some of Rosalía de Castro's poetry. For Galicians, oak woods are a place for meeting people, getting together and having parties.









DON'T MISS

3. Pazo de San Lourenzo Gardens

42°52'40.9"N 8°33'26.6"W

Magnolia and beech trees, hydrangeas and camellias are just four of over a hundred species of plants that can be found in this 19th century garden. Its design is still in the romantic style of the era, with areas of fruit trees and woodland. For details, see www.pazodesanlorenzo.com.

4. River Tambre

42°54'19.8"N 8°41'42.9"W

Along the course of the River Tambre a significant sample of the fish fauna found in the inland waters of Galicia can be found, such as trout, brown trout, eels and even lamprey. It is also a habitat for mustelids, such as the European polecat, which eats small rodents, amphibians and reptiles.



Pazo de Fonseca Ginkgo

42°52'45.3"N 8°32'45.8"W

The ginkgo, a species originally from Asia, was brought to Europe in the 19th century. This tree is catalogued as being 140 years old; it is over 20 metres tall and its trunk measures 3 metres around. There were two specimens in the garden but one died recently.

From Negreira to Corcubión

Distance: 54.6 km

At Negreira, the route crosses the River Barcala, a tributary of the River Tambre, which forms a valley of granite soil with broad areas of pastureland. Cattle farms are dotted around the landscape for the entire stage, especially on the banks of the River Xallas, another of the important rivers of the Atlantic basin of Galicia. Before reaching the sea, the Xallas feeds the A Fervenza reservoir, one of the largest in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula. On the final stretch of the route, the Way arrives at the Corcubión estuary, with Cape Fisterra silhouetted on the horizon.

DON'T MISS

Mount Pindo

42°53'20.2"N 9°6'48"W

This massif, over 600 metres high, is recognised as a National Geological Point of Interest. At the bottom, where there is little substrate, a few specimens of the dyer's oak, *Quercus lusitanica*, manage to survive.

1. Mount Aro

42°57'23.41"N 8°57'50.81"W

From the top of Mount Aro, at an altitude of 550 metres, the valley of the River Xallas and the A Fervenza reservoir, which was built in the 1970s, can be seen. The dam and the wetlands that surround it attract numerous water birds, including grey herons and mallard ducks.

2. Corzón Lookout Point

42°57'47.90"N 8°59'57"W

Scrubland, mainly gorse and heather, covers this mountain, which has a granite substrate. Its slopes have been repopulated with maritime pines. It is normal to find the burrows of rabbits and other rodents, which are easy prey for the civet cats that come out to hunt after dark.

3. River Xallas

42°57'45.7"N 9°1'6.6"W

The River Xallas flows into the sea from a waterfall almost 40 metres high. On the riverbed common trout can be found, which are characterised by the red and black spots on their flanks. The adults reach 15 to 25 centimetres in length and they can live to an average age of 10.

4. Mount Armada

42°57'45.7"N 9°10'32.8"W

From the top of Mount Armada pilgrims have their first view of the sea on the Costa da Morte, glimpsing the Corcubión estuary. At the foot of the mountain, after going through a mixed forest made of eucalyptus, pine, oak and chestnut trees, the town of Cee can be reached.




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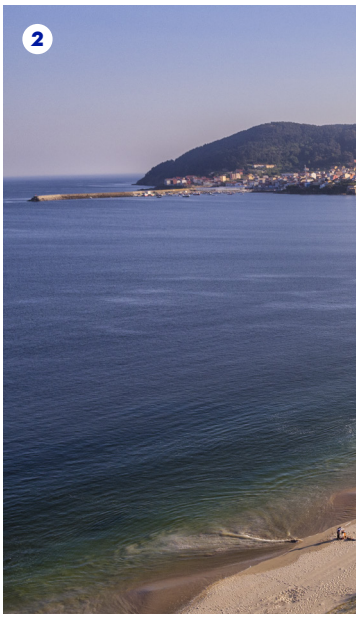


From Corcubión to Fisterra

Distance: 14.2 km

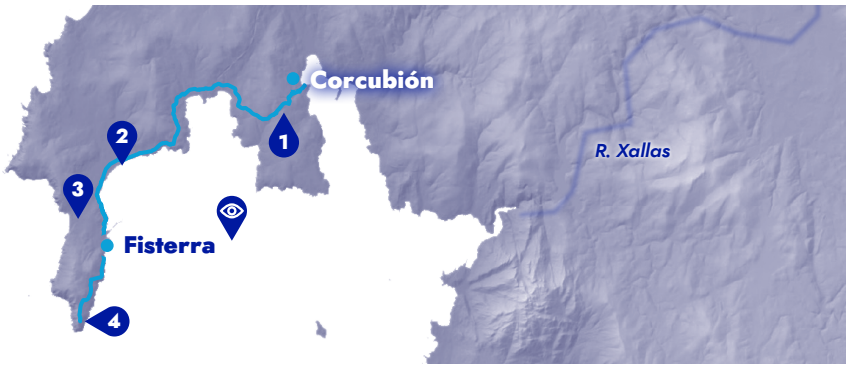
In this section, the Way runs along the Corcubión estuary to Fisterra and its Cape, one of the most western points on the Iberian Peninsula. The climate in the south of the Fisterra district is characterised by abundant rain. In winter, northeasterly winds and storms pound this area. When this happens, meteorological phenomena of the area become a unique spectacle.















1. Campo de San Roque

42°56'14.2"N 9°12'3.8"W

In this area, between April and August, it is possible to see the flowering plant *Centaurea corcubionensis,* an endemic species discovered and named by Manuel Laínz, a Jesuit botanist. This Endangered Species grows spontaneously close to the coast. It has pink or purple flowers.

2. Langosteira Beach

42°55'23.9"N 9°15'32.5"W

This beach is known for the great numbers of pod razor, a bivalve mollusc that is much appreciated for its culinary value, which lives on the sandy bottom. It feeds on phytoplankton and buries itself at a shallow depth in this area. Fisterra shellfish gatherers dive into the water to collect it by hand.

3. Mar de Fóra Beach

42°54'33.6"N 9°16'28.6"W

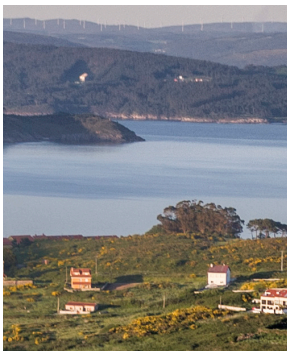
This sandy beach has a dune system with botanical species such as sea thrift (*Armeria maritima),* known popularly in Galician as *herba de namorar* (literally, herb of love). In winter beached cetaceans can often be seen, especially bottlenose dolphins, dolphins and long-finned pilot whales.

4. Cape Fisterra

42°52'57"N 9°16'20"W

This cape is a huge block of granite, the first rock formed in Galicia over 300 million years ago. It is one of the most notable coastal geographical accidents in southern Europe and a place well known for spotting pelagic and migratory birds like shearwaters, storm petrels and northern gannets.

DON'T MISS

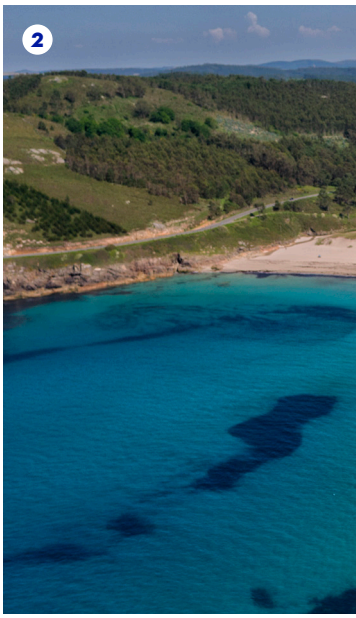


Corcubión Estuary

42°54'21.96"N 9°16'46.56"W

The Corcubión estuary extends from Cape Fisterra toward the east in a wide bay. In the estuary are the Lobeiras islands, a small archipelago of three granite islets that are the Western continuation of Mount Pindo. The largest of the islands has an area of only 3 hectares.









From Fisterra to Lires and Muxía

Distance: 27.8 km

The stage from Fisterra to Muxía runs along the Costa da Morte. From 21st March to 25th April and from 13th August to 22nd September, this is the place where the last sunset on mainland Europe can be seen. This phenomenon is due to the changes in the path of the terminator, the line that separates the illuminated day side from the dark night side of the Earth. Throughout the year, the point where it intersects with the meridians changes, altering the last point at which the sun sets.





1. Mount Facho de Lourido

43°4'33.51"N 9°13'36.27"W

From the lookout point on this mountain, over three hundred metres above sea level, a broad expanse of coast can be seen. Here, the winds blow in huge storms in winter, with waves that can reach over ten metres high and winds that can blow hard, at speeds above 100 kilometres an hour.

2. Lourido Beach

43°5'14.7"N 9°13'21.4"W

The Lourido beach is a semi-circular beach with fine sand of sedimentary origins. This natural complex has a large dune that is still almost entirely covered in vegetation. On the side away from the sea, where there is more organic matter, sand-dune mushrooms can be found.

3. Mount Corpiño

43°6'31.7"N 9°13'5.1"W

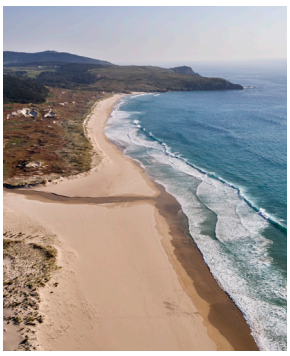
It is the highest point of the peninsula where Muxía is located. It forms a 70 metres-high lookout point with views over the Camariñas estuary. Here, the silhouette of the Cape Vilán lighthouse can be seen, on one of the most treacherous stretches of water for shipping in southern Europe.

4. As Pedras da Barca

43°6'45.50"N 9°13'12.53"W

Salinity, variations in temperature and the absence of a protective substrate have caused the meteorisation of the granite, that on the Costa da Morte has led to rock formations like A Pedra dos Cadrís and A Pedra de Abalar. Galician tradition has transformed these curious formations into legends.

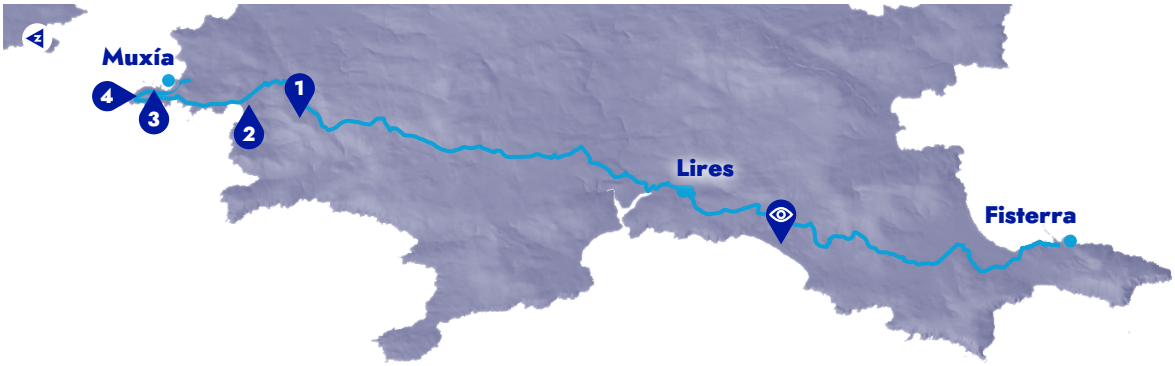
DON'T MISS



O Rostro Beach

42°58'3.1"N 9°15'55.4"W

This fine sandy beach, open to the sea, is almost 2 kilometres long. On the O Rostro dune system grow plant species like the shore dock, *Rumex rupestris*, an endangered species. On the landward side, the dune is covered in much denser vegetation, making it a habitat for birds, invertebrates and reptiles.



Enchanting

Instituto Fernando Blanco de Cee Botanical Gardens

The gardens of the Fernando Blanco High School in Cee are the town's botanical treasure. Here there is a great variety of centuries-old trees whose size is monumental. Among the different species are cedars of Lebanon and Atlas cedars, Lawson cypresses, Himalayan cedars and magnolias. There is also a Greek fir and a Nordmann fir. All the trees have plaques, making them easy to identify.



Nordmann fir tree at the Instituto Fernando Blanco de Lema (Cee)

42°57'17.11"N 9°11'12.82"W



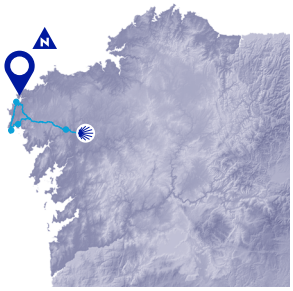
In Addition

This stretch of the Galician coast, with the Corme and Laxe, Camariñas, Lires and Corcubión estuaries, is the wildest part.

1. Costa da Morte Special Conservation Area and Area with Special Protection of Natural Values

43°9'48.2"N 9°12'44.3"W

This protected area includes 100 kilometres of coastline, where, because of the great marine biodiversity, there is a strong tradition of fishing and shellfish gathering. The vegetation includes species that are found in coastal areas, such as a navelwort, *Omphalodes littoralis,* that is in danger of extinction. Another outstanding species is *Sphagnum pylaisii,* a protected moss that grows on permanently wet ground, like bogs, which form a plant substrate that helps other kinds of plants to grow. We should also note the number of birds to be found here, as almost 300 different species have been recorded and a long list of birds that are not common to Galicia, such as the snow bunting, which reproduces in the tundra and on the coasts of Scandinavia, the glaucous gull, whose nearest colony is in Iceland, and Richard's pipit, a Siberian species. And finally, it is possible to see whales, due to their migratory movements, and bottlenose dolphins, which are attracted by the wealth and variety of food available.







The English Way

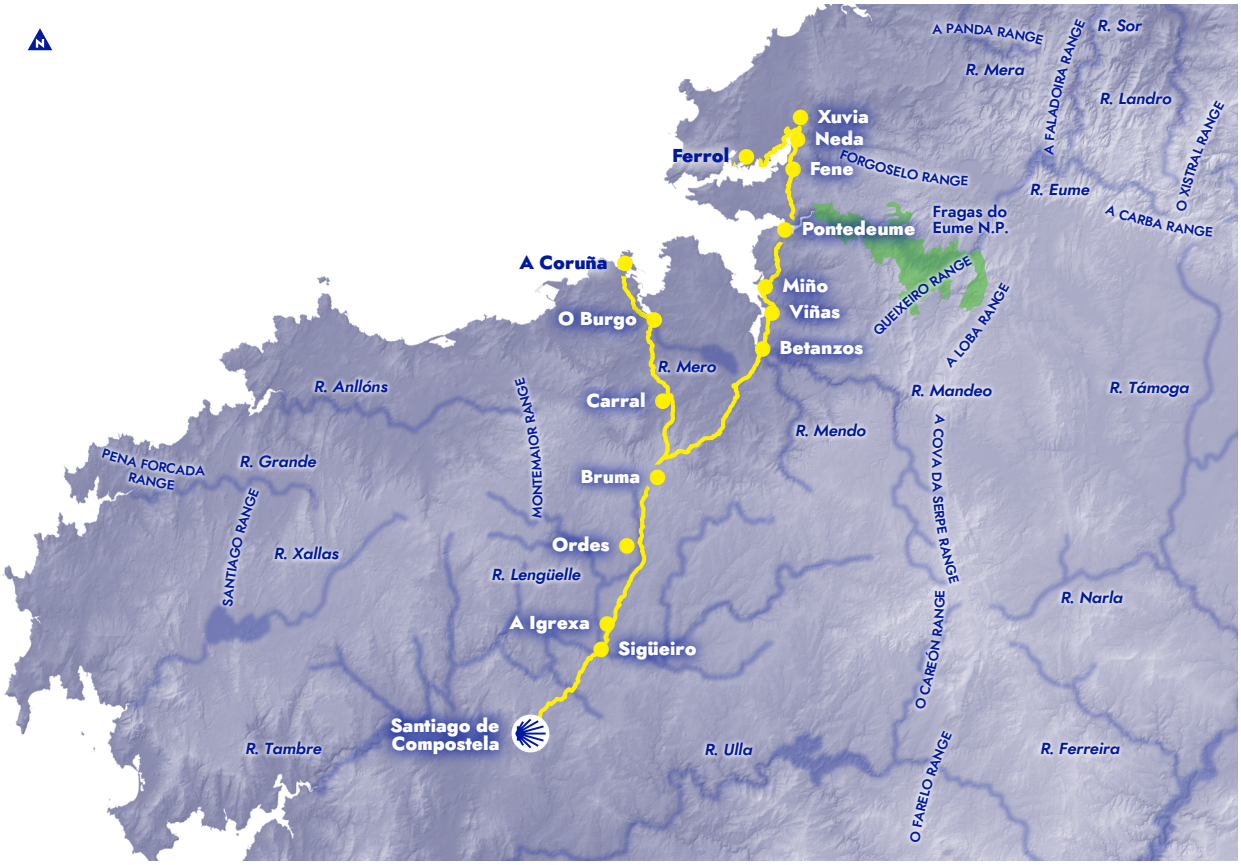
Throughout history pilgrims have come by sea and then walked what is known as the English Way. In Galicia this route has two starting points: Ferrol and A Coruña. These are two coastal cities with estuaries on the Artabrian Gulf. In this area the sea has a great influence, as shown by its humid ocean climate, with moderate temperatures all year round and abundant rainfall.

Tower of Hercules from the Aquarium Finisterræ (A Coruña)

43°23'1.3"N 8°24'31.3"W

Pilgrims Who Came by Sea

After the first few kilometres in the city, the Way enters the land of As Mariñas Coruñesas, with gentle slopes and deep, fertile farmland. In this district there are protected areas, such as the wetland ecosystems of the Miño and Betanzos marshes, which are of great botanical interest due to their halophile vegetation. The route then climbs up to enter the district of Ordes, where cultivated fields and repopulated forests alternate all the way to Santiago.





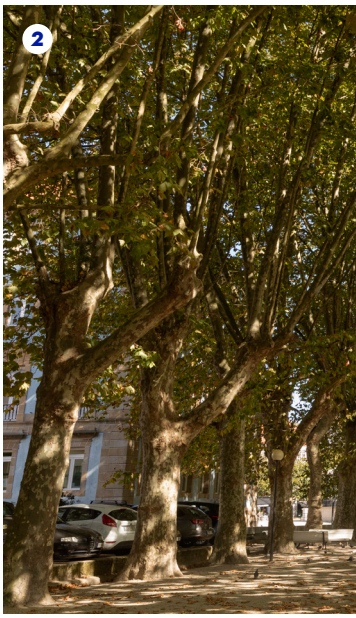
Alameda de Ferrol
(a promenade between rows of poplars)
43°28′57.4″N 8°13′58.8″W

From Ferrol to Pontedeume

Distance: 28.3 km

The first stage of the English Way is bordered by a landscape that has been greatly transformed by mankind. From Ferrol, the route skirts the estuary over almost flat terrain. It crosses several rivers that flow into the estuary, such as the River Grande de Xuvia and River Belelle. Before entering Pontedeume, it meets the River Eume, which forms a deep canyon with steep slopes. The final stretch crosses one of Galicia's six natural parks: the Fragas de Eume Park.















1. Gardens in Ferrol

43°28′50.6″N 8°14′22.9″W

The Herrera Gardens were designed in the 1860s. They are composed of some old magnolia trees and hedges with seasonal flowers. On the right the San Francisco Gardens can be found, which were recently remodelled, with paths, wooden pergolas and aromatic plants.

2. *Alameda de Ferrol*

43°28′57.7″N 8°13′58.1″W

This was the first public *alameda* in Galicia, created in 1784. When it opened, there were 210 poplars, mulberry trees and 7 lines of trees marking the northern boundary of the arsenal. Today there are some fifty species of trees growing here, some of which are very tall, including cedars and magnolias.

3. River Belelle

43°30′10.8″N 8°9′28.6″W

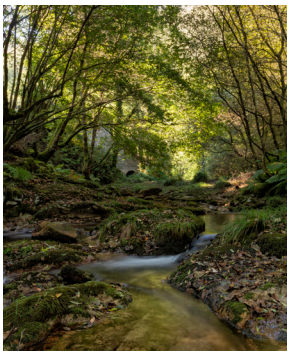
In the municipality of Neda the waters of the River Belelle form a waterfall up to almost fifty metres high. The marshes at the mouth of this river have thionic fluvisol. This is a kind of acid soil which contains sulphuric or sulphurous materials, down to one metre below the surface.

4. A Magdalena Beach

43°25′4.8″N 8°10′20″W

This beach, which belongs to the municipality of Cabanas, is located to the north side of the mouth of the River Eume. It is a little over a kilometre long and has fine white sand. At its entrance grow various species of trees, among which we should mention a stand of maritime pines.

DON'T MISS



River Belelle Mycological Park

43°29′15.5″N 8°7′23.7″W

This is the only mushroom park in Galicia. It was created in 2002 to study the growth of macromycetes in forest ecosystems that are both natural and repopulated. Both toxic and edible species are documented to grow here, such as fly amanita or the chanterelle.









From Pontedeume to Bruma

Distance: 44 km

This stage enters As Mariñas Coruñesas and Terras do Mandeo Biosphere Reserve, the only one in the province of A Coruña. It has a total area of 116,274 hectares, both on the land and in the sea. There are 49 habitats of regional interest, 12 of them classified as 'priority' in the Habitats Directive. Among the land uses, pasture, arable farming and forestry (which occupies half of the area) should be emphasised.





1. Metrosideros Excelso

43°24'28.18"N 8°10'19.86"W

This species comes from New Zealand. It is grown in parks and gardens and tolerates being by the sea. Its flowers have red stamens. In the Torre de Andrade garden is a specimen catalogued as outstanding that is 25 metres tall and is estimated to be a hundred years old.

2. River Baxoi

43°21'5.09"N 8°12'13.55"W

The marshes of the River Baxoi are located in an ancient flooded river valley. They are separated from the Betanzos estuary by the Praia Grande de Miño dune complex. Together they form a beach-dune-marsh intertidal complex classified as a Geomorphological Area of Interest.

3. Betanzos Estuary

43°17'17.5"N 8°13'2.6"W

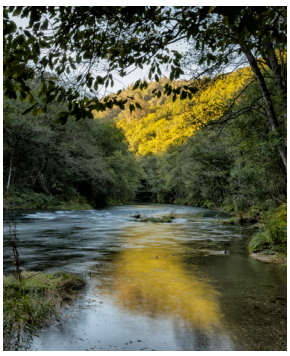
This estuary is the best example of intertidal systems on the clay plateau of the Artabrian Gulf, as there is a great variety of fauna and vegetation and it is almost eight kilometres long. Dozens of species of birds come here, such as the grey plover and osprey, both of which winter in Galicia.

4. Vineyards in Betanzos

43°17'0.9"N 8°12'36"W

It was normal to find vineyards in Betanzos until the arrival of grey mould in the 19th century and then phylloxera. Recently they have been recovered and now grow on deep, well aerated ground. The vines belong to the Protected Geographical Indication of Betanzos.

DON'T MISS



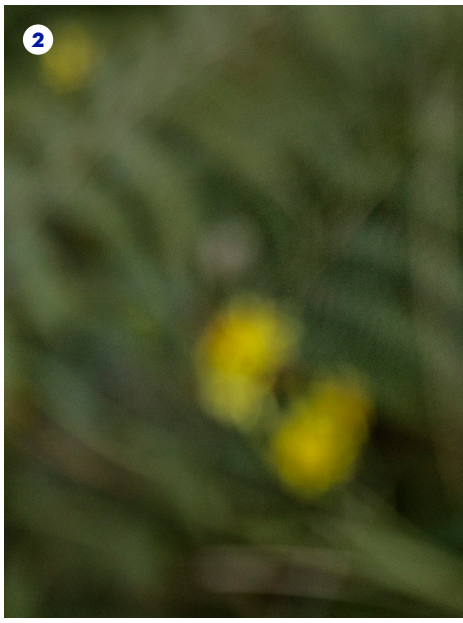
Natural Park

43°25'39.5"N 8°7'42.6"W

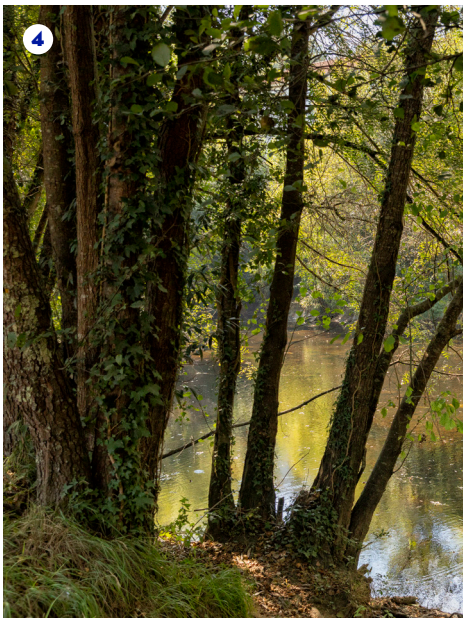
The Fragas do Eume Natural Park is the best conserved Atlantic forest in Europe. It contains species of ferns that date back to the Tertiary era, when the climate in Galicia was tropical or subtropical. For details, see the website of the Department of Environment of the Xunta de Galicia.











From Bruma to Santiago de Compostela

Distance: 40.3 km

The two variants of the route meet in Bruma. The last few kilometres to Santiago run through the district of Ordes, in the valley of the River Tambre. The terrain is composed of schistose materials from the Ordes hills *(Serie de Ordes)*. As they erode easily, flat surfaces predominate in this area. This is an agricultural area, with wide natural grasslands and artificial pastures. Among the trees, pines and repopulated eucalyptus, a species introduced into Galicia in the 19th century, predominate.

1. Gorse

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

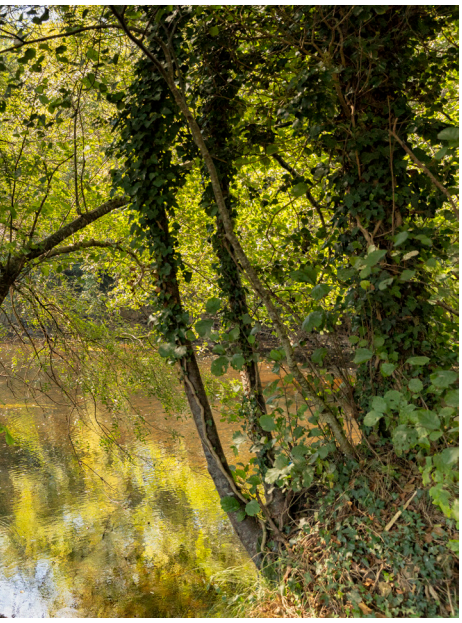
Among the species of gorse in Galicia two are more widely found: common gorse, which blooms in spring, grows in cleared lands, and the much smaller dwarf gorse, which flowers in summer. Both are recognisable for their dark green spines and yellow flowers, called *chorimas* in Galician.

2. St. James Wort

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

Jacobaea vulgaris is a wild flower that grows by the roadside, in meadows and on abandoned farms. It flowers at the end of spring and summer and the arrangement of its yellow flowers is similar to the daisy. In many languages its common name refers to the apostle James.







DON'T MISS

3. Fields of Turnips

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

Turnips, together with turnip greens and turnip tops, belong to different species of the *Brassica* genus, which are commonly used in Galicia as vegetables. The turnip is the root, which is mainly used as cattle feed. Turnip greens are the young leaves. And turnip tops are the flowering sprouts.

4. River Tambre

42°57'57"N 8°26'43.8"W

The Way crosses the River Tambre at Sigüeiro and in its fishing grounds common trout are caught. This fish is the most widely distributed of the salmonid family. Its main source of food is the invertebrates that live on the benthos, on or near the bottoms of aquatic ecosystems.



Crops in the Area

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

Mesía, Ordes and Oroso are municipalities where the population specialises in raising milk cows. For this reason, there are wide natural grasslands, artificial pasture and fields where fodder is grown. Potatoes and other vegetables are also grown for human consumption.

From A Coruña to Bruma

Distance: 32.8 km

This variant crosses an area that has been greatly changed by mankind. It starts in the city of A Coruña, which faces the Atlantic Ocean, forming a low peninsula. It then goes to the O Burgo estuary, a birdwatching site offering a considerable variety of species. After leaving behind this more urban landscape, it is bordered by single family dwellings and fields of fodder crops. In the forested landscape, pine and eucalyptus grow, interspersed with some scrubland.

DON'T MISS

A Coruña Estuary

43°20'36.2"N 8°22'14.2"W

This is an estuary with several beaches and granite cliffs. It is separated from the Betanzos estuary by the Dexo Coast, a Natural Monument since 2000. The O Seixo Branco cliffs, which are crossed from top to bottom by a vertical white seam of quartz, should be mentioned.

1. Elm Trees in the San Carlos Garden

43°22'8.22"N 8°23'27.34"W

Listed in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees, this formation is composed of the species *Ulmus x hollandica,* a cross of the two species of elm that grow naturally in Galicia. Their trunks are sturdy and thick. The branches form large crowns, often measuring over 20 metres in diameter.

2. Canary Island Date Palms

43°21'56.68"N 8°24'15.51"W

In the Méndez Núñez Gardens are two groups of Canary Island date palms. The biggest specimen can be found among the rosebushes. Its trunk or crown shaft measures 20.6 metres and shows the scars made by the leaves after falling off. Its crown reaches 27.2 metres in height.

3. O Burgo Botanical Garden

43°19'16.2"N 8°22'25.9"W

The garden is on the O Burgo estuary and includes a lagoon connected with it. Here there are Galician native species of trees, such as ash and black alder. There are also exotic species, including silver wattle and horse chestnut. For details on visiting the garden, see the website of the Culleredo town council.

4. O Burgo Estuary

43°18'56.6"N 8°21'38.4"W

By O Burgo Bridge, next to the Way, Mediterranean gulls and pied wagtails can be seen. After crossing the bridge, the route arrives at O Temple, where two types of barn swallows can be seen: house martins in summer and crag martins, which is the only type found in Spain year-round.




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Enchanting

Fragas do Eume

The force of the waters of the River Sesín was used by mankind to transform agricultural and livestock products. Where it runs through the natural park there are many cascades from which it gathers speed before flowing into the River Eume.



Bridge over the River Sesín in the Fragas do Eume Natural Park (A Capela)

43°25'8.4"N 8°4'1.6"W



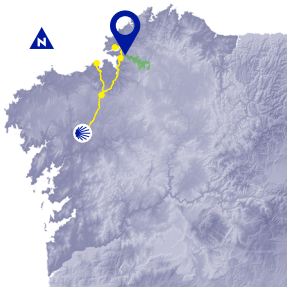
In Addition

An incomparable Atlantic coastal forest awaits you just a few kilometres from the English Way:

Fragas do Eume Natural Park

43°25'39.5"N 8°7'42.6"W

Fragas do Eume was declared a natural park in 1997. It contains several types of deciduous forest, of which oak woods and riverside woodland, and some stands of chestnut trees, are the most important. Its flora includes threatened species of pteridophyte, including *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense, Woodwardia radicans* and *Culcita macrocarpa*. The latter is the only fern tree that is native to Galicia. Among its fauna is a wide variety of nesting raptors, such as the northern sparrowhawk, northern goshawk and peregrine falcon. In this area there is a notable number of mammals, some of which are carnivores, such as the wildcat, stone marten and European polecat. This place is also one of the few where the whiskered bat has been recorded. Among the invertebrates is a mollusc included in the European Union Habitats Directive: the Quimper snail.







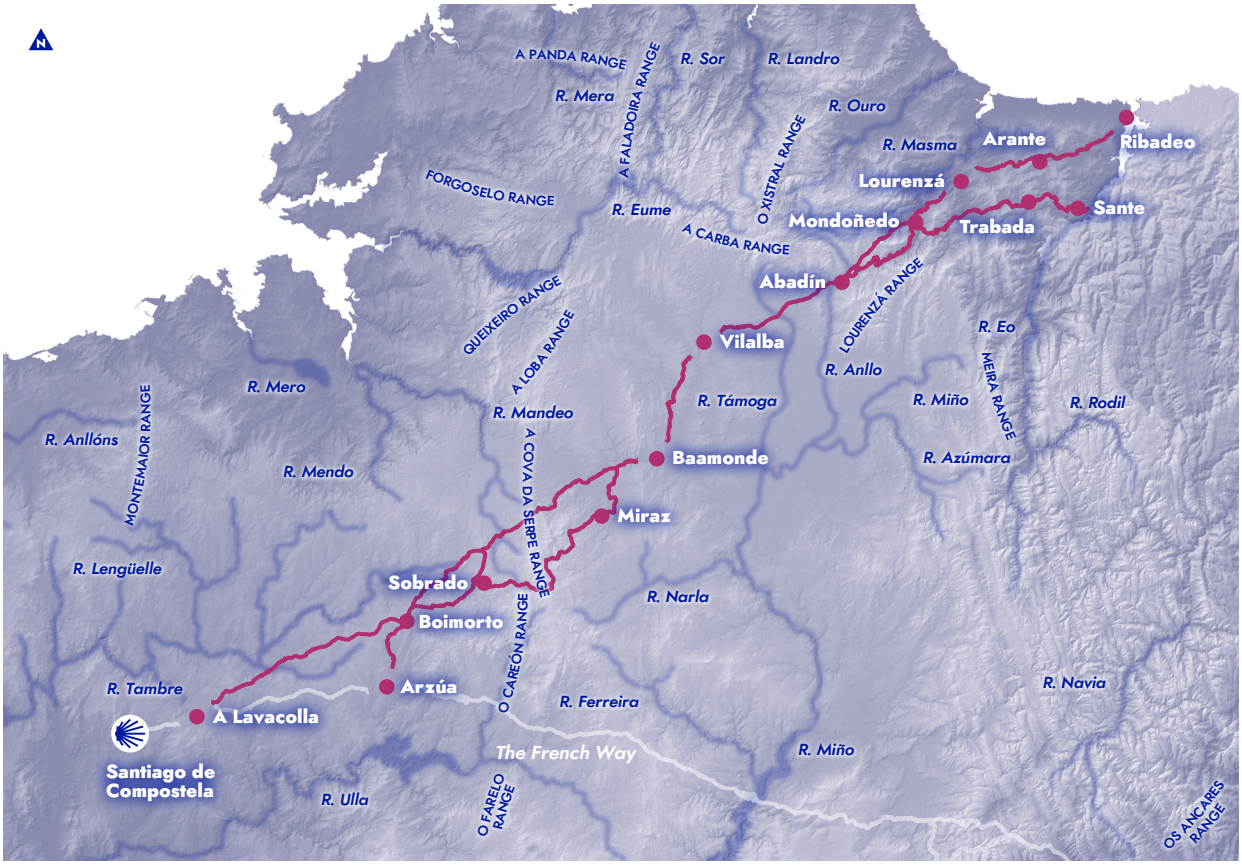
The Northern Way

This Way runs through a mixture of landscapes. At its start in Galicia it follows the Mariña Lucense coast, which has a humid ocean climate, with mild temperatures and slightly less rainfall than the west of the region. It skirts mountains like those in the O Xistral range, where it is common to see feral horses. In A Terra Chá, it is flanked by wide areas of arable land and grassland but there are also remnants of natural forests, repopulated forests and scrubland. It finally links up with the French Way in Arzúa.

Feral horses in the O Xistral range (Abadín)
43°26'9.6"N 7°33'10.1"W

The Most Northerly Way

This is the Way that runs closest to the Cantabrian Sea. In Galicia it starts on a coastal plateau that rises above sea level and then drops down as it goes west. One of the most accepted theories to explain the height of this platform is the collision of the Euro-Asian and Iberian tectonic plates during the Tertiary era. Numerous cliffs, small islands and outcrops of rock resulting from erosion by the sea can also be seen along the coast.





Pancha Island, off the western shore of the mouth of the Ribadeo estuary

43°33'19.1"N 7°2'31.9"W

From Ribadeo to Vilanova de Lourenzá

Distance: 28.8 km

This Way enters Galicia after crossing the Ribadeo estuary. The first stage crosses the district of A Mariña Lucense, where there are three types of terrain: the coastline, valleys covered in Tertiary and Quaternary sediment and a series of hilly formations that separate it from the district of A Terra Chá. There is an alternative starting point for this route, crossing the River Eo at Abres. The two routes will join later in Mondoñedo.

DON'T MISS

Cantabrian Platform

43°33'22.9"N 7°3'9"W

This surface was covered in water in the past and was shaped by the abrasive action of the sea. Continental sediment of various kinds, redistributed with marine sediment, can be seen on it.

1. Ribadeo Estuary

43°32'34.6"N 7°2'12.8"W

The natural importance of the Ribadeo Estuary has led to a number of protective measures. It is an excellent place for birdwatching. From September to April seabirds like the black-necked grebe, which is rare in Galicia, can be seen living on bodies of calm water.

2. Cantabrian Sea

43°32'39.2"N 7°1'59.2"W

This sea hides fossilised forests where the structure of the wood is well preserved and allows to identify which tress grew in the north of Galicia in the distant past. They were formed after the final glaciation, when the ice melted and the coastline advanced, creating sandbanks that covered the vegetation.

3. River Eo

43°26'28.1"N 7°6'0.3"W

This river forms part of the Río Eo, Oscos and Terras de Burón Biosphere Reserve. In Porto de Abaixo, close to where it joins the Ribadeo estuary, birds like the common kingfisher can be seen. This is a small bird with blue plumage on its back and head and orange plumage on the underside of its body.

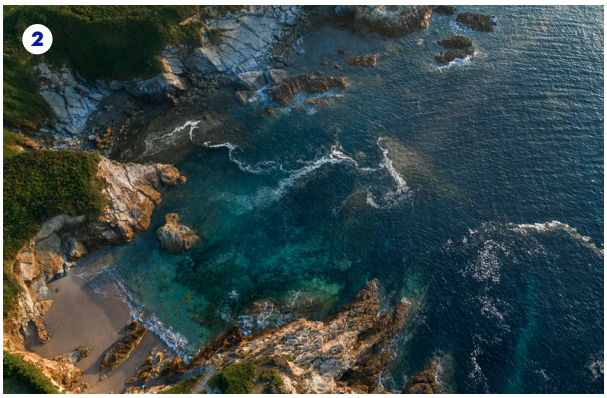
4. River Baos

43°28'22.6"N 7°17'59.6"W

The Way crosses the River Baos at Vilanova de Lourenzá. In the wood on the riverbank alder trees predominate but there are also willows. These trees hold the banks of the river together when the water level rises and also act as a filter to prevent the hypertrophication of the water.




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From Vilanova de Lourenzá to Vilalba

Distance: 45.9 km

On the right hand of the Way to Vilalba there are numerous high points separating the coast from the Lugo plateau. Of particular note are the peaks of the O Xistral range, a mountain chain where peat bogs formed. This is a very unusual habitat on the Iberian Peninsula; it develops on flat land or gentle slopes that are not directly connected with the subsoil. Among its fauna are the viviparous lizard, which lives only in mountainous areas. In Galicia it has only been recorded in these mountains and the Os Ancares range.















1. Alto da Xesta

43°23′20.53″N 7°25′47.53″W

Around Alto da Xesta, in Abadín, fog is frequent during the summer. This mist is produced when a mass of hot moist air from the coast rises up over geographical features. While going up, the warm air cools down, making water condense. As a result, visibility is reduced.

2. Tree Tunnel

43°21′49.5″N 7°29′23.7″W

Near the church of Santa María in the village of Abadín, the Way passes close to a stand of oak and bay trees. The trees form a kind of leafy, vaulted roof that shades the path. Just beyond this, the route crosses the River Anllo, a tributary flowing into the River Miño on its right bank.

3. Vilalba's Pravia

43°17′52.80″N 7°40′54.63″W

This ancient sycamore is in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. It can be found 100 metres from the Way, in the centre of Vilalba. Because of pruning, its height varies between 11 and 15 metres. From its heart grow four stout branches that form an umbrella-shaped crown.

4. Magdalena River Beach

43°18′6.6″N 7°41′11.2″W

In this area is a wood of oak and birch trees that is typical of the A Terra Chá district. Ornamental and forest species have also been planted around here. On the left bank of the river there is still riverine vegetation with osiers and male and female ferns, in addition to typical trees.

DON'T MISS



Cova do Rei Cintolo

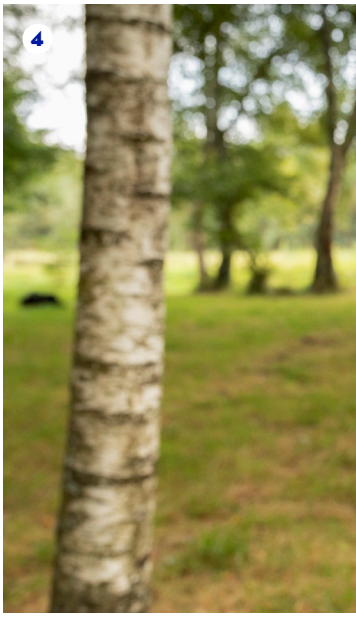
43°23′38″N 7°22′11.8″W

In this cave, there are speleothems such as stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones and shawls. The galleries are a refuge for several kinds of bats, including *Rhynolophus* and *Myotis*. For details on visiting the cave, see the website of the Mondoñedo town council.









From Vilalba to Baamonde

Distance: 19.9 km

Vilalba is the heart of A Terra Chá. This is the largest district in Galicia and its name (literally, flat lands) comes from its plane terrain, which is really unusual in this country. The level surface allowed clay sediment to collect. It is surrounded by mountain ranges, like O Xistral and Meira. Because of its favourable topography and damp climate, this district is mainly agricultural, with crop farming and wide areas of meadows and grasslands.





1. River Labrada

43°14'4.2"N 7°43'52"W

The area around the River Labrada mainly consists of grasslands, where it is possible to spot the Seoane viper. This reptile can be only found in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. This species is venomous and although its toxicity is not very high, a bite requires medical treatment.

2. The Chapel Chestnut Tree

43°10'25.8"N 7°45'34.5"W

In Baamonde there is one of the smallest chestnut tree of those catalogued in Galicia, just 12.5 metres tall. Its trunk has a hollow in it more than two metres high. Local artist Víctor Corral carved a chapel dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary into the hollow, which is now protected by a metal grille.

3. River Parga Recreation Area

43°10'17.4"N 7°45'20.4"W

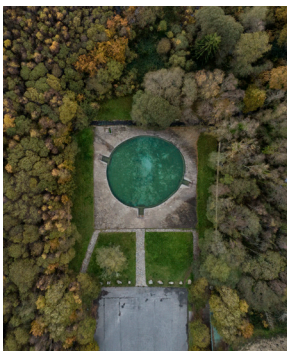
The River Parga forms part of the Parga-Ladra-Támoga protected area, which includes the hydrological network that crisscrosses A Terra Chá. When these rivers cross flat terrain like this, they tend to overflow, flooding the surrounding area. There are many alder and birch trees on its banks.

4. Birch Trees

OFTEN FOUND IN THIS STAGE

These are deciduous trees that grow to 20 metres tall. Their bark is smooth andpearly white colour. Their leaves appear in March and April and they flower in April and May. This is a very abundant species in A Terra Chá, where it can be found in marshy areas and on the banks of the rivers.

DON'T MISS



Charca do Alligal

43°19'46.4"N 7°45'6"W

In Codesido, in the municipality of Vilalba, is a medicinal hot spring: the O Alligal Pool. Its waters contain calcium bicarbonate and very slight mineralisation. They are suitable for treating rheumatism and chronic skin diseases, such as psoriasis and eczema.









From Baamonde to Arzúa

Distance: 62.2 km

After leaving the village of Baamonde, the Way enters the deciduous forest that surrounds the chapel of Santo Alberte, where there is a spring of water that is said to cure speech-related problems. Climbing up to the A Cova da Serpe range, the countryside changes completely, since it goes from grassland to rocky slopes dominated by scrubland. Finally, surrounded by fields and cattle farms, it enters Arzúa, the village where it joins the French Way.

1. Sobrado Lake

43°2'12.8"N 8°0'33.8"W

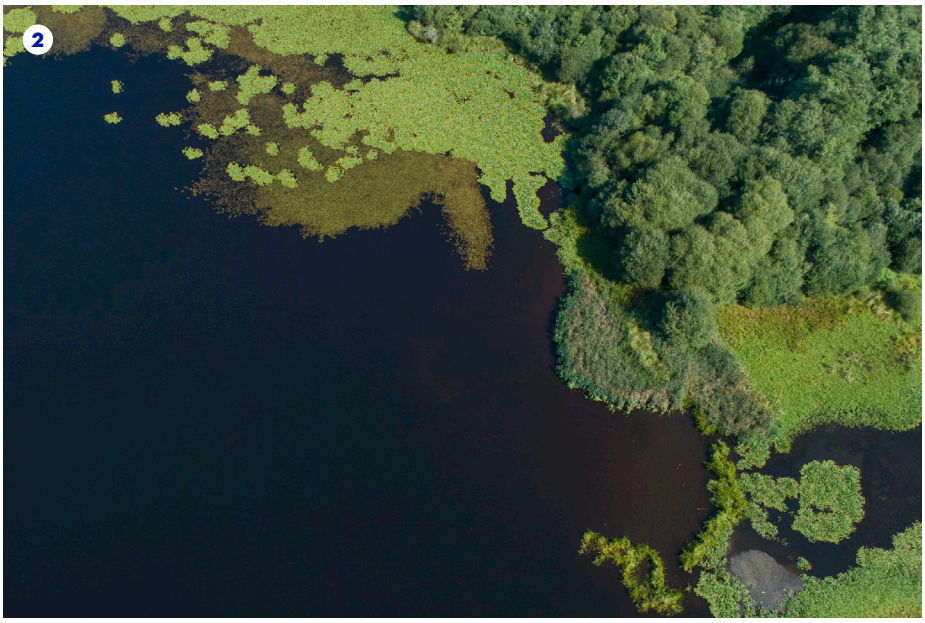
To supply the monastery with water, the monks of Sobrado dammed the River Tambre. The result was this lake, one of the places where *Nitella flexilis,* a freshwater alga can be found. Its presence demonstrates the high quality of the water and it remains permanently submerged.

2. Wood on the Banks of the Lake

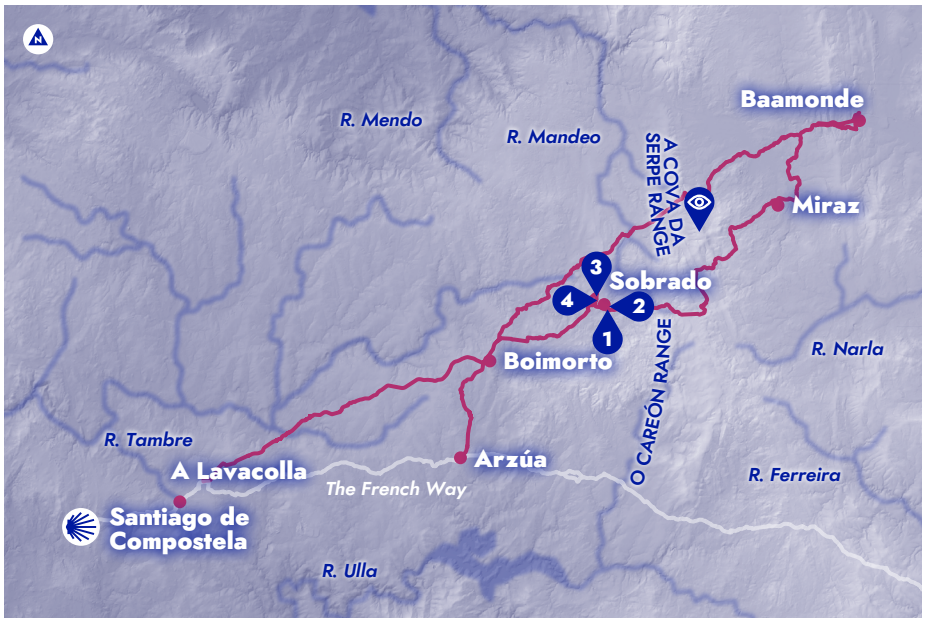
43°2'20.56"N 8°0'27.71"W

Although it is man-made, Sobrado Lake is well integrated into the landscape today. This lake is sorrounded by a riverside woodland with a varied number of species of native trees, all of them deciduous: birch, common alder, willow, ash, oak and black elder.









DON'T MISS

3. *Carballeira da Casa do Gado*

43°2′47.84″N 8°1′13.30″W

The common oak is a deciduous tree that grows to a large size and is found almost everywhere in Galicia. It lives a very long time, sometimes over a thousand years. As well as ancient specimens of this species, the Casa do Gado oak wood contains chestnut and birch trees.

4. The Porta Ash Tree

43°2′37.15″N 8°1′11.20″W

On the track towards the Casa do Gado is a stand of four ash trees, listed in the Galician Catalogue of Outstanding Trees. One of them towers above the rest at almost 31 metres tall. The diameter of its crown is limited by the other three trees so that it only measures 10.85 metres.



Galician Ridge

43°5′35.5″N 7°54′55″W

What can be called the Galician Ridge runs from north to south. It is a mountain chain separating the coast from the interior that acts as a barrier against the weather. It rose up at the end of the Tertiary period and its peaks are never more than one thousand metres above sea level.

Enchanting

Cova do Rei Cintolo

In the limestone massif of Mondoñedo there are at least 15 caves. The biggest of these is the cave of King Cintolo, which is six and a half kilometres long. Those who visit the cave will find various levels of galleries that go down to a depth of 75 metres.



Entrance to Cova do Rei Cintolo (Mondoñedo)
43°23′42″N 7°22′9″W



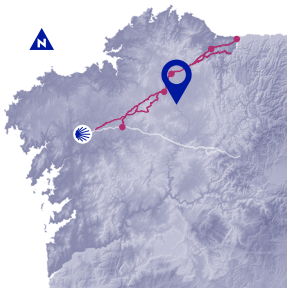
In Addition

Several municipalities on the Northern Way form part of an extremely important protected area:

Parga-Ladra-Támoga Special Conservation Area and Area with Special Protection of Natural Values

43°5'54"N 7°37'33.5"W

This area is also known as the "A Terra Chá Wetland Complex". It measures 5,013 hectares and includes the major rivers of the upper basin of the River Miño. The terrain of this area is characterised by its horizontality and low permeability, which leads to the formation of ponds. Some of these are seasonal and depend on the rain but others are permanent, like Cospeito and Caque lakes. Among the vegetation are Atlantic endemic plants like *Eryngium viviparum,* which grows on flat land or clay depressions where temporary pools form. There is a great variety of fauna here, including mammals like the Pyrenean desman, bivalves like the freshwater pearl mussel and various species of odonata, like the *Coenagrium mercuriale, Oxygastra curtisii* and *Macromia splendens*.





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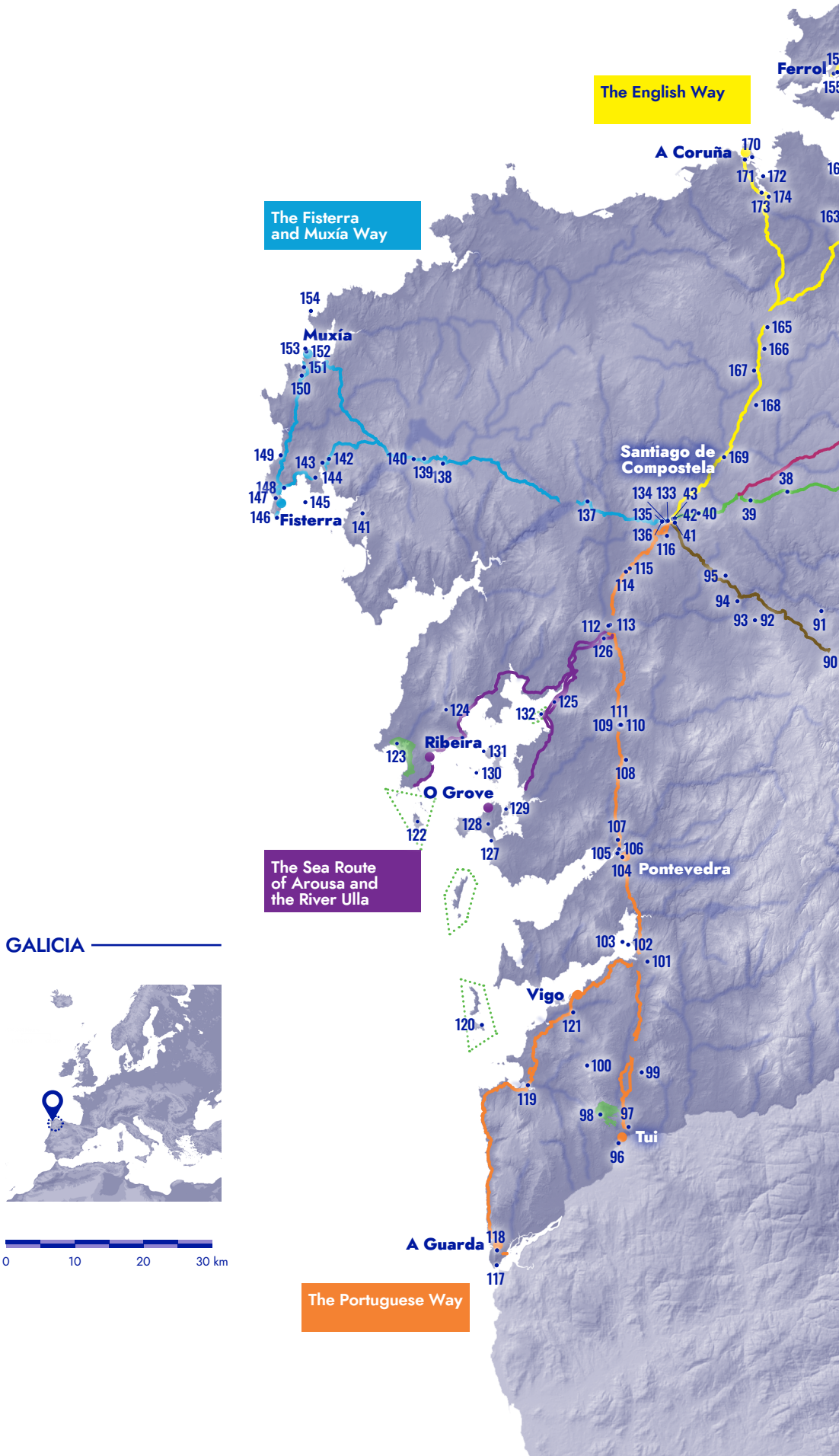
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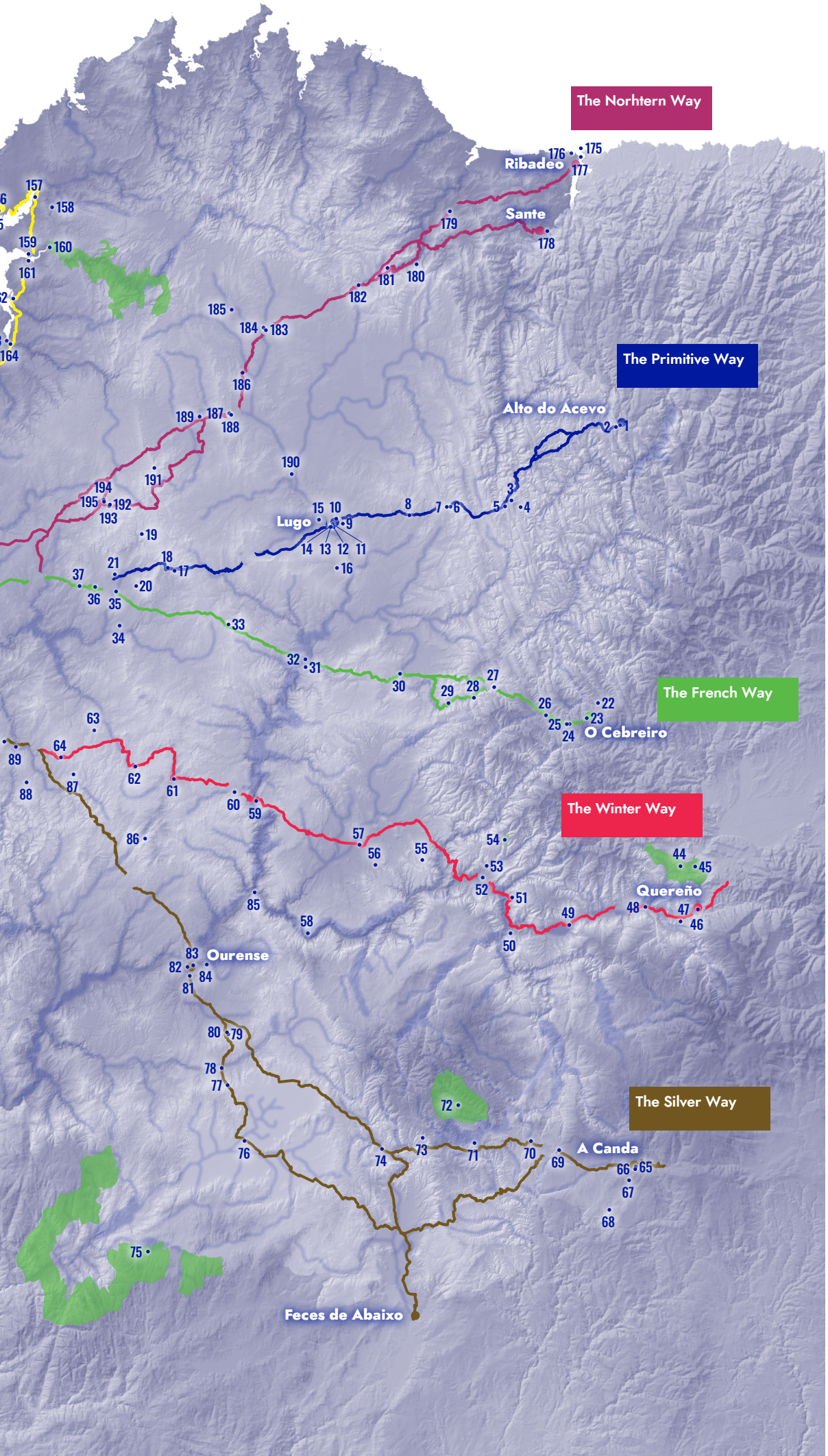
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