

Canary Island Walks

80 long and short walks on 9 islands



GPS

This is a sample from the
PDF edition of

Canary Island Walks



Noel Rochford
with additional notes by Sunflower Books

This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, the introductions to each of the main sections (Picnicking, Car Touring and Walking) with an example of each. There is a total of 200 pages in the full book.



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The giant ferns (Woodwardia radicans, see panels on pages 125 and 151) at Los Tilos — one of the special reasons for walking on La Palma



Introduction

This book covers some of the best walking on all seven Canary Islands, as well as the outlying islets of La Graciosa and Lobos. Enough ground is covered to keep most walkers exploring for a good week to 10 days — to have an enticing first taste of each of these islands.

There are walks in this book for everyone.

Beginners: Start on the walks graded ‘easy’, and be sure to look at the short and alternative walks — some are easy versions of longer hikes.

Experienced walkers: If you are used to rough terrain and have a head for heights, you can tackle any of the walks in this book. Of course, you must take into account the season and weather conditions. For example, in rainy weather some of the *barranco* walks will be unsuitable; in strong winds or snow do not plan excursions to the mountains! And always remember that **storm damage can make these routes unsafe at any time!** Remember, too: always follow the route as described in this book. If you have not reached one of the waypoints after a reasonable time, please go back to the last ‘sure’ point and start again.

Experts: There’s nothing here to really *challenge* you. But if you fall in love with one of these islands and get the relevant ‘Landscapes’ guide, I can guarantee some will test your mettle!

All walkers: Be sure to check the update service described on the inside front cover of the book before you travel.

Grading, waymarking, maps, GPS

There is a quick overview of each walk’s **grade** in the Contents. But many of the walks have shorter and/or alternative versions. In the Contents we’ve only had space to show the *lowest grade of a main walk*: for full details of grading, see the introductory remarks about the walk itself. Here is a brief overview of the three gradings:

- very easy — more or less level (perhaps with a short climb to a viewpoint); good surfaces underfoot; easily followed
- easy-moderate — ascents/descents of no more than about 300-500m/1000-1800ft; good surfaces underfoot; easily followed
- moderate-strenuous — ascents/descents may be over 500m/1800ft; variable surfaces underfoot — you must be sure-footed and agile; possible route-finding problems in poor visibility

Any of the above grades may, if applicable, be followed by:

• **danger** of vertigo — you must have a very good head for heights

Waymarking and **signposting** have been brought up to ‘Euro’ standards on all of these islands, although the waymarking is often faded and specific signposting may vary. There are three types of waymarking:

- *Red and white* waymarks indicating GR routes (‘Grandes Recorridos’: long-distance footpaths);
- *Yellow and white* waymarks indicating PR routes (‘Pequeños Recorridos’: short trails of up to six hours);
- *Green and white* waymarks indicating SL routes (‘Senderos Locales’: local trails, up to about 10km long).
- For all these routes, two parallel stripes (=) mean ‘continue this way’; right-angled stripes (⌋) indicate a ‘change of direction’; an ‘X’ means ‘wrong way’.

Trail numbering often differs in the national parks, and **trail maps** are usually available at their visitors’ centres. We show trail numbers existing at the time of publication on our walking maps. But new trails are being cut all the time (and

existing trails sometimes closed), so you may find some not on our maps — nor even on the maps from visitors’ centres.

The **maps** in this book are based on Openstreetmap mapping (see page 2), but have been very heavily annotated from notes and GPS work in the field. It is a pity that we have to reproduce most of them at only 1:50,000 to keep the book to a manageable size; quite a few walkers buy both the paperback *and* our downloadable pdf files so that they can print the maps at a larger size in very sharp focus — but you can always enlarge them on a colour photocopier.

Walkers’ signposts at La Caldera on Tenerife (Walk 26): at the top is a standard GR sign; its wine-red livery is repeated on the signs below, where the GR131 coincides with the yellow/white PR trail to Mamio and the green/white SL La Orilla trail. You may also see orange stripes (not shown here): they are for mountain bikers.



Free **GPS tracks** are available for all these walks: see the *Canary Island Walks* page on the Sunflower website. Please bear in mind, however, that GPS readings should *never* be

relied upon as your sole reference point. Conditions can change at any time — especially on these islands, where mountainsides come down overnight from landslides ... or eruptions! Those of you who cannot be bothered to use GPS on the ground might nevertheless enjoy opening the GPX files in Google Earth to preview the walks in advance.

Where to stay and public transport

If you're visiting one of the islands for a general break, it's likely that you've already booked your accommodation — perhaps as part of a package deal. If you hire a car, it doesn't matter much where you stay. But if you've no car and you plan to do some walking, stay close to good bus connections!

Below are the websites of the bus companies serving the seven islands, where you can check timetables and routes (at the top of each walk the appropriate bus line is shown). Some of these websites have interactive maps where you can even find the nearest bus stop to your accommodation.

Lanzarote: www.intercitybus-lanzarote.es

Fuerteventura: www.tiadhe.com

Gran Canaria: www.globalsu.net

Tenerife: www.titsa.com

Gomera: www.guaguagomera.com

La Palma: www.tilp.com

El Hierro: www.transhierro.com

Weather

Island weather is often unpredictable, but there are a few signs and weather patterns that may help you forecast a walking day. All these islands are blessed with year-round walking weather. Winters are warm, with temperatures of around 20°C/68°F, and summers — even July and August — generally not unbearably hot (unlike the southern European mainland or the Greek islands, for instance).

Weather patterns in the archipelago are influenced by two **winds**: the northeasterly trade winds (the *alisio*) and the easterly or southeasterly wind from the Sahara (the *calima*). Two other winds blow very infrequently: a northwesterly wind from the north Atlantic and a southwesterly wind from the tropics. Both carry heavy rains and storms. Rainfall varies: the westerly islands see the most rain, whereas Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, with no high mountains to catch the clouds, are much drier ... but can be very windy.

The northeasterly trade wind, the *alisio*, which prevails for much of the year, is easily identified by low-lying fluffy clouds — which add so much character to your photographs ...

Walk 1: TIMANFAYA — THE TREMESANA ROUTE

Distance: about 3km/2mi; 2h walking time (but allow about 4h)

Grade: ● easy, almost level walk

Equipment: stout shoes, fleece, raingear, sunhat, suncream

Refreshments: bars and restaurants in Yaiza

Transport: 🚌 to/from the ‘Supermercado Yaiza’ bus stop (Playa Blanca bus, Line 6), or 🚗: park in the car park west of the church (28° 57.114'N, 13° 45.952'W)

Important: This is a *free* guided

walk limited to groups of eight, all of whom must be over 16 years of age and sensibly shod. The groups fill up quickly! *Before you travel*, log on to www.reservasparquesnacionales.es (English pages) and *pay careful attention to the information given* or you may be unable to take part. When I took the walk years ago, the route was linear; these days a circular route is on offer (see map). It doesn't matter; both cover much the same ground.

Do take this walk — as early in your visit as possible. You will learn so much that will add to the pleasure of your stay on Lanzarote — after you have learned to ‘read’ the landscape. Not only are the guides schooled in vulcanology, but they can answer many more questions besides. ***Book this walk before you travel; the places fill up very quickly!***

You may wonder why visitors are not allowed to walk freely in Timanfaya. There are several reasons. Firstly, some of the lava ‘tunnels’ have a very thin crust — your weight could collapse them, leading to a nasty accident, far from help. A second reason is a matter of aesthetics! The park is picture-postcard perfect: the rolling volcanic slopes all appear to be dusted with a smooth coating of caster sugar — a *patisserie* of pristine, freshly-iced cakes.

The rangers are very house-proud: they may well tell you that just one footprint in this sand changes its colour, and that it can take three years for a footprint to disappear, no less jeep tracks! But the single most important reason is conservation. It can take lichen, the first of the vegetation, on which all subsequent growth depends, *hundreds of years* to take hold.

Your day starts by assembling at the PLAZA IN FRONT OF YAIZA CHURCH at 09.15 (the time and venue may change; all details will

Lichens — the ‘pioneer’ plants

Timanfaya is one of the best areas in the world to study lichens: they can be seen evolving on the naked rock in extreme conditions of heat and cold, their only source of moisture the water in the rock itself and the humidity of the northeasterly trade winds.

In the absence of water to cause erosion, lichens break down the lava, helping to develop soil which can sustain more demanding forms of plant life. Lichens grow most readily on relatively flat surfaces (where they can trap the greatest amount of moisture; see bottom photo on page 26) and in the crevices of northeast-facing slopes, where they catch the moisture off the trade winds.

Some tiny lichen which you might not even notice (so please keep to the designated path!) bear hairs that provide life-giving moisture to the animals and birds which survive in the park.

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be given when you book). The maximum group size is eight people, and usually there are two groups. Each starts at one end of this linear trail, and the drivers exchange minibus keys halfway along. (Where there is only one group, probably you will do the circular walk shown on the map.)

Starting from Yaiza, your guide may point out two old houses that survived almost six years of eruptions beginning between nine and ten o'clock at night on September 1st, 1730. (See what the parish priest wrote about it in the panel 'Yaiza's Volcanic Gardens' on page 50.) Nearby is a raised water tank with a large tilted 'apron' surface to collect water — a *mareta*. The tank below is much smaller than the 'apron'. These are less common than *aljibes* — sunken water tanks with flat roofs.

How could some houses have survived and, more surprisingly, why was no one killed in the eruptions that obliterated 14 villages in what was once one of the most fertile areas on the island? Probably because the first material vomited out was 'AA' lava, which moves very slowly; families were able to load up their camels and get away. In an eruption, three types of lava spew out: *lapilli* (fine ash), *malpais* or AA-type lava (scoria), and 'bombs'. Bombs are solid and hard; they fly on average 30 to 300m away from the volcano. Bombs can be tiny (you'll be given one to examine) or huge — perhaps 5m/15ft high!

It's exhilarating to enter the national park on a clear day, when the Fire Mountains glow red above the sea of jagged 'AA' lava. The park's emblem, the Timanfaya 'fire devil', was designed by César Manrique.

When you **start the walk** (●), **Tremesana** (also called *Termesana*) will be the first volcano you come to. You will see many fig trees here, most of them encircled by drystone lava walls. All this land was once private; now the national park has an arrangement with the farmers: the trees remain in private hands, but the farmers are obliged to use certain paths to reach their plots. Some of these venerable old fig trees have a circumference of 12m — 40ft!

A very strange construction stands near the fig trees: a scoria-walled enclosure with a 1m/3ft-high 'bed' of *lapilli* on top. What on earth could it be? Called a *pasero*, it's for drying the figs. Since scoria is full of holes, air can circulate all round the fruit. And on the subject of lava walls... those



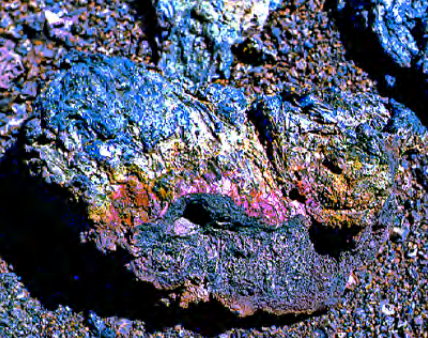


in this part of the park were built over 100 years ago by the men who built the walls in the Salinas de Janubio — ‘master stone-masons’, who can build a fairly high drystone wall using just one thickness of rock. (Try it yourself on one of your other walks — goodness knows there are plenty of rocks around to play with...)

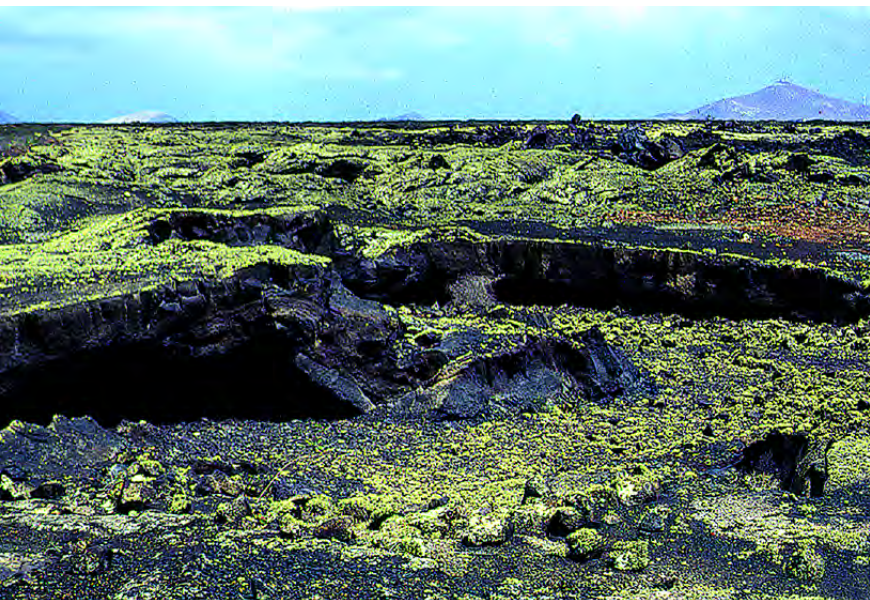
The colours in the rocks are dazzling. And they vary enormously depending on their

mineral content. Red comes as no surprise, but the sapphire-blue to mauve hues are particularly striking. Look at an example, as in the photo overleaf: you’re likely to see that one part of the rock has been formed beneath the earth and another after coming into contact with the air — this is often evident from the shape as well. The part that solidified underground comes out almost black, but the part that came into contact with the air is





Left: the vivid colours in the rocks are due to oxidation. Below and opposite: it's easy to recognise the difference between jagged AA lava (shown on the preceding page) and smooth pahoehoe lava (opposite, top). The solidified lichen-splattered crusts of pahoehoe lava eventually break up into great blocks, sometimes revealing the underlying tubes, as in the photo below.



more red from oxidation. Some rocks are blue from cobalt mixing with oxygen and others gold from sulphur. (The guides know, from the colour of the hillsides, which way the wind was blowing during the eruption. They may point out a cone with yellow streaking on only one side — indicating both the wind direction *and* a second passage of sulphurous wind as the rock cooled, which makes the gold colour even paler.)

Caldera Rajada (1; ‘Split Mountain’) lies north of Tremesana. If you thought volcanoes always ‘blew their *tops*’, then this one comes as a surprise. It split its *side*,

and the resulting volcanic tube (*jameo*) reaches out just to the edge of your path. When tongues of lava flow from the point of eruption, they drag along the surface of the ground. The surface lava cools rapidly and solidifies, but molten lava (magma) continues to flow beneath the crust. The magma sinks gradually (either because the eruption ceases or because the flow follows a natural depression). Thus a cavity or ‘tube’ sometimes forms beneath the crust and the depressed lava flow. Volcanic tubes vary in size — this tube from Rajada formed inside and over a *barranco* and is

Right: one type of pahoehoe lava is called 'ropey' for obvious reasons. The liquid magma flowing beneath a thin crust wrinkles the still unsolidified surface into shapes resembling rope. The name 'pahoehoe' is Hawaiian. Bottom: after a long day carrying tourists, these camels are making their way home via Yaiza.



very high. The ceilings of tubes vary greatly in thickness, too: some are very thick, while if you tap the tops of others, you'll hear how hollow they are. (At the end of the walk you'll climb inside a tube and see the 'stalactites', where the lava dripped as it cooled.) The famous tubes at Cueva de los Verdes and Jameos del Agua resulted from the eruptions of Monte Corona, a volcano north of Máguez.

Near the end of the walk you pass **Montaña Encantada** ('Enchanted Mountain') ... a cartographic misnomer. The fig farmers in the area paid a watchman to sit atop this mountain and

sing out ('*Canta!*') if anyone was stealing their fruit, so the mountain became known locally as *Montaña Canta*. But the map makers were from Madrid... Around here you will pass terrain where *malpais* and *pahoehoe* lava intermingle; their different surfaces make them instantly recognisable. There's a 'bubble' on show, too: called a *hornito*. The island of Lobos, off Fuerteventura (Walk 8) is famous for its *hornitos*.

The linear walk ends at **Pedro Perico** (2); the circuit runs in a clockwise direction, back to **Tremesana**. Then it's all aboard the minibus, back to **Yaiza**.



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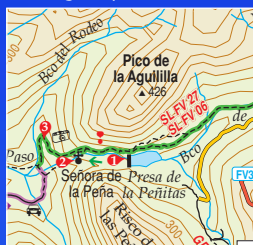
— SUNDAY TIMES

Canary Island Walks First edition

area covered by this book



walking maps



walks locator maps



Few places in the world can offer the kaleidoscope of natural beauty found in the Canary Islands. What one island lacks, another has in plenty. Moreover, this archipelago has **ideal weather for walking all year round**: winters are mild, and summers are not swelteringly hot as they are in some walking destinations around the Med. This book is a 'taster' of popular walks from Sunflower's acclaimed 'Landscapes' guides for the Canaries.

- 80 long and short walks on the 7 main islands and 2 offshore neighbours
- island statistics and maps showing walk locations
- topographical walking maps
- online GPS tracks for all the walks
- 'stories and snippets' with each walk — from island food and flora to legends and customs
- online update service

Sunflower Books
www.sunflowerbooks.co.uk
UK £16.99 USA \$22.00

ISBN 978-1-85691-544-1

