

Northern Portugal

3 car tours • wine tour • 30 long and short walks



GPS

This is a sample from the
PDF edition of
Landscapes of northern
PORTUGAL

a countryside guide
Fourth edition



Paul and Denise Burton

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 136 pages, plus a pull-out touring map, in the full book.



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



Contents

Preface	5
Authors' note	7
Acknowledgements	8
Recommended books	8
Getting there and getting about	9
Picnicking	10
Picnic suggestions	11
A country code for walkers and motorists	14
Touring	15
Car tour 1: THE <i>VINHO VERDE</i> CIRCUIT	24
Car tour 2: HISTORICAL PURSUITS	29
Car tour 3: PENEDA-GERÊS NATIONAL PARK AND SIERRA DE XURÉS NATURAL PARK	35
Wine tour: PORTO AND THE RIVER DOURO	46
Plan of Porto (Ribeira)	48
Useful contacts	49
Walking	50
Guides, waymarks, maps, GPS	51
What to take	51
Where to stay	52
Weather	53
Things that bite or sting	53
Portuguese for walkers	54
Organisation of the walks	56
THE WALKS (● see explanation of symbols on page 50)	
● 1 Serra de Arga (Montaria • Alto das Cocanhas • Pedrulhos • Montaria)	58
● 2 Serra de Arga (Arga de Baixo • Porta do Lobo • Arga de Cima • Arga de Baixo)	64
● 3 São Miguel • Sobredo • Germil • Froufe • São Miguel	74

Local interest panels

Food, wine and markets	19
The Barcelos cockerel	31
Peneda-Gerês National Park	38
Agriculture and landscape	69
	3

4	Landscapes of northern Portugal	
●	4 Ermida • Bilhares • Ermida	80
●	5 Brufe • Cutelo • Carvalhinha • Cutelo • Cortinhas • Brufe	86
●	6 Brufe • Casarotas • Chã do Salgueiral • Marco de Anta • Cortinhas • Brufe	92
●	7 Branda de Travanca • Currais Velhos • Lage Negra • Bicos • Branda de Travanca	96
●	8 Bouças Donas • Branda de Bostejeões • Vitoreira • Bostelinhos • Bouças Donas	101
●	9 Soajo • Branda da Bordença • Adrão • Bogalheira • Rio Adrão • Soajo	107
●	10 Soajo • Murça • Soajo	114
●	11 Vilar — Avelar circuit	118
●	12 Circuit of Penameda from Nossa Senhora da Peneda	123
	Bus timetables	126
	Town plans	128
	Ponte de Lima • Ponte da Barca • Arcos de Valdevez • Viana do Castelo • Braga	
	Index	134
	Fold-out map	<i>inside back cover</i>

View from Cutelo to the village of Brufe and the granite peaks behind Covide in the distance (Short walk 5-3)





Getting there and getting about

Northern Portugal is well served by the Sá Carneiro International Airport just north of Porto, with **daily flights** from many European cities including London. Budget airlines like Ryanair and EasyJet fly regularly between Porto and London or Liverpool. The airport is conveniently located for travelling north by road to the Minho and Peneda-Gerês, and all the major car hire companies have airport desks. The most convenient way north by public transport is the 'Get Bus' service to Braga (www.getbus.pt). From Braga there are regular 'Salvador' buses (www.salvador-transportes.com) to Ponte da Barca and Arcos de Valdevez. Another, less well-known service, is run by Barquense Viagens (www.barquense.com). It runs from the Airport to Viana do Castelo, Ponte de Lima, Arcos de Valdevez and Ponte da Barca.


It is quite easy to **reach the region by car**. Travelling from France or from a Santander or Bilbao ferry, join the A52 motorway at Benavente and head west across northern Spain, passing Orense and carrying on almost to Vigo, finally heading south to enter Portugal at Valença. 2. A good alternative is to turn south at Verin and cross into Portugal at Chaves. The A24/A7 (partial toll) will take you all the way to Braga/Guimarães.

Once in the region, there is a good **express bus system**, with frequent services to the major towns. This is useful if you want to travel from Viana down to Porto, for example, but the limitations of the **railways** (slow) and **local bus service** (see timetables pages 126-127, but check for updates at the nearest tourist office when you visit) are soon realised when you want to explore the countryside. Buses do run along the Lima Valley as far as Arcos de Valdevez, but beyond that you need private transport. **Taxis** are available in the major centres, but the distances involved to get you to the start of a walk could be long. In some cases, taxis could be used in conjunction with buses, but you must arrange to be met for the return. Sharing a taxi with friends will obviously reduce the cost. **Car hire**, or **taking your own car** is, however, by far the best option for convenience.



Picnicking

On the following pages you will find some suggestions for picnics in the countryside, to enjoy while you are out touring (they are all keyed into the car touring notes and highlighted on the touring map with the symbol **P** printed in green). Take care where you park; don't damage the plants or flowers, and be sure not to block a road or track. It's a good idea to have stout shoes, a plastic groundsheet, and your sunhat to hand, if you are combining the picnic with a short walk.

Some especially beautiful picnic sites are to be found alongside the river Lima, and these are also accessible by bus (see  symbol and timetables on pages 126-127). An 'Eco-way' opened in 2007 along the whole length of the Lima for walkers and cyclists.

To help you find a picnic spot that appeals to you, we have included photographs of several settings.

Picnic food is widely available in supermarkets and smaller shops, as well as in the local outdoor markets. Some regional specialities are described on pages 19-23, where you'll also find details of market days.



1 Viveiro Florestal (A; photograph below; map page 60)

This shaded picnic site with tables and benches (and other facilities in season) is easily reached from Car tour 1 and lies very close to the start of Walk 1. On reaching the village of Montaria (see page 58), take a left turn signposted 'Viveiro Florestal' and then turn left again immediately (similar signposting). There is a car park 0.5km down this road. The picnic area is just over the bridge ahead of you. You can take a pleasant walk by following the river a short distance upstream, where you will find old watermills and lovely rock pools — a good place to 'get away from it all' if the main picnic area is busy.

2 Mézio (A; map page 98)

This shaded picnic site with tables and benches (and other facilities in season) is accessible from Car tour 3. See page 96 (Walk 7) for details of how to get there. Park at Mézio (18.5km). The picnic site is on the

right, just after you fork left onto the minor road. Nearby is a PNPG visitors' centre.

3 Santa Luzia, Viana do Castelo

(A; plan pages 130-131)

On the hill to the north of Viana (Car tour 1), the church of Santa Luzia stands impressively, looking down over the town. It is an interesting place to visit, not just for the church, but also for the panoramic views. You can walk up, but there are an incredible number of steps to climb (the route starts from the railway station and is signposted). If you are driving, follow Avenida 25 de Abril, the main through road, and then take the Estrada de Santa Luzia by the hospital, which winds its way to the top. There is plenty of parking space, and refreshments are available. Behind the church is a partly shaded picnic area and, beyond that, you can stretch your legs. There is an old, fairly large, Celtic settlement nearby; it is only a few minutes' walk up the road, on the approach to the hotel, over to the left. You will be charged a small entrance fee to gain access to the walkway designed to facilitate viewing.

4 Cais do Rio Lima (A; photograph overleaf)

(photograph overleaf)

This partly shaded setting by the banks of the Lima is easily reached from Car tour 1. After Lanheses bridge (14.5km), look for a left turn at Vitorino das Donas, signposted 'Cais do Rio Lima' (18.2km). Turn left on this narrow surfaced road, and keep ahead at crossroads in 0.3km. Reach the *cais* (quay) in a further 0.3km and

There are some idyllic pools and shaded spots just upstream from the Viveiro Florestal (Picnic 1).





park. (From the Ponte de Lima underpass and roundabout, heading towards Viana, turn right after 7.2km). From the *cais* follow the track upstream to a Roman bridge, milestone and a short stretch of Roman road. Just over the bridge go left into a field, keeping round the field to the left and heading towards the river — up to 15 minutes on foot. By bus, use the Viana/Ponte de Lima service via Darque. Ask for ‘Cais do Rio Lima’ at Vitorino das Donas, then walk about 10 to 25 minutes.

5 Ponte de Lima (iA); photograph pages 26-27; plan page 128)
Park as indicated in Car tour 1 (on page 25) and cross the old bridge

to the opposite bank. There is a partly shaded official picnic site here, and a very pleasant park and garden as well. By bus it’s a 10-minute walk from the Ponte de Lima bus station.

6 Santa Madalena, Ponte de Lima (A)

Perched on a hill to the south of Ponte de Lima (Car tours 1, 2) sits the small chapel of Santa Madalena. Occupying a superb position next to the chapel is a restaurant fronted by a large terrace, from where there is a fine view over the Lima Valley. Nearby is a shaded picnic site. Car tour 1 describes the route to Ponte de Lima but, to reach Santa Madalena, be sure to follow the by-pass. From this road look out



Touring

The Minho is still relatively unexplored and peaceful, hiding a wealth of interest. But be warned, distances can take much longer to cover than you would expect, due to the winding and indirect nature of many of the minor roads, especially inland and away from the recent road improvements. The road surfaces themselves are on the whole fairly good, even the few remaining old cobbled stretches.

If you are hiring a car in Porto, the drive north is fairly straightforward, since the airport is on the north side of the city. 1. From Porto to Viana do Castelo the A28 motorway (electronic tolls, see below) links conveniently to the toll-free A27 to Ponte de Lima and then onwards, as the IC28, to Arcos de Valdevez and Ponte da Barca. The A3 toll motorway from Porto to Braga/Ponte de Lima/Valença also provides excellent access to the more inland parts. Avoid Porto and Viana at peak travelling times if possible — especially Porto, where you can expect constant traffic jams (a point to bear in mind if there's a flight to catch).

The inland road network in the north is well signposted, and the road surfaces are generally quite good.

Maps do not always show minor roads or tracks — especially in the more remote areas. The touring map in this book indicates main roads, other roads used in the tours, and tracks that are considered suitable for rental cars. Should you require a more detailed map, the 'ForWays' Minho map (available at Porto airport) is good for following the main routes and has good street maps of Viana and Braga. Turinta publish an excellent series of maps of Portugal and have specific sheets for the north and Porto. The excellent Northern Area map published by the Automóvel Club de Portugal (the Portuguese 'AA') is extremely detailed and kept well up-to-date.

It is usually cheaper to arrange and pay for **car hire** through one of the main hire companies before you leave home, but shop around. There are also excellent fly/drive offers, especially outside the main tourist season. When hiring a car you will be given the option of including the hire of an electronic toll payment device (normally €1.50/day). Dual carriageways are increasingly subject to these tolls and if you do not have such a device activated in your car you

16 Landscapes of northern Portugal

will have to call into a post office to pay the accumulated tolls — this is clearly inconvenient if you are travelling to remote areas. To avoid the hassle it is usually best to hire the ‘box’ and have the tolls added to your car hire bill.

Take care when renting; before setting out check the car (have you got a spare tyre, jack, enough petrol, etc?), and clarify the rental conditions and insurance coverage. Take time, however tedious, to read the terms of the agreement. It is imperative to ensure that ‘collision damage waiver’ (CDW) is included in the insurance, to cover damage to your hire car if repair costs cannot be recovered from a third party. Tyre and windscreen damage are the responsibility of the hirer (including punctures), so check carefully before you drive off — including the spare. Don’t hesitate to refuse a car if you’re not happy with it. Always carry the agency’s phone number with you, and take some water, food and warm clothing in case of breakdown. The wearing of seat belts is compulsory, and the local people comply outside the main towns — but there seems to be some unspoken agreement that they aren’t necessary in built-up areas. Always wear your seat belt!

Service areas exist on the A28 just to the north of Porto



and to the south of Viana. The A3 has two service areas between Porto and Valença. **Petrol** stations are fairly frequent along the main roads, but there are only the occasional petrol stations in country areas beyond Arcos and Ponte da Barca. If you are heading inland, go with a full tank of petrol. Some grades of petrol may be unfamiliar: *sem chumbo* 95 and 98 (usually green or white labelling on the pump) are the lead-free grades; *gasoleo* (black labelling on the pump) is diesel. Diesel is slightly cheaper than petrol, so if you are going to be doing a lot of driving and are hiring, bear this in mind.

Drive carefully, as the road is regarded as a pavement, especially in country areas. Be extra vigilant for animals and the ox-carts encountered in country areas. Be aware also that roads, even main roads, almost invariably narrow appreciably where they cross bridges, and sometimes where they pass through small villages — and there are often *no warnings*. Conflicting or absent road signs and road markings can be disconcerting at times, so take extra care (a stop sign may not necessarily be accompanied by a white line on the road, for example). There are also some confusing and overly intricate road intersections (largely an inheritance from the days when

roundabouts were not used and, because no-one knew whether traffic from the right had priority, they simply clogged up!). Now that it is clear that traffic already on the roundabout has priority, they are being built everywhere and have become prime sites for local authorities to place ever more remarkable works of art. Do beware, however, that the roundabout still confuses some local drivers; it is not uncommon to see a driver turn clockwise round the island in order to take the left exit!

Branda da Bordença, a deserted village below Advão, is passed on Car tour 3. Walk 9 takes you through this delightful spot, also





Viana do Castelo — the main square and fountain, seen from the archway of the old town hall. Right: engraving above the church doorway at Bravães

in about 0.5km turn left towards the river down Largo Dr António Megalhães. Then bear right towards the old bridge shown overleaf, along Passeio 25 de Abril. There is parking by the road before the bridge and down to the left just beyond it (Picnic 5; **A**), *but not on market days*.

Leave Ponte de Lima by continuing through the town along Rua do Rosário and Rua do São João, towards PONTE DA BARCA.


*If it is market day, turn right here, then left at the next roundabout in 0.9km, onto the Ponte de Lima bypass. Then turn left at another roundabout in a further 1.5km to Ponte de Lima centre — noting that a right turn at the same point leads up to Santa Madalena (Picnic 6; **A**). Park either side of the dual carriageway. Return to the bypass and turn left to continue to Ponte da Barca.



Turn left on meeting the bypass road (27.2km) and ignore signs off to the motorway. Now you begin a most beautiful section of the tour, in the **Lima Valley**. Spreading vine tendrils form lovely arches and create a vibrant green mantle over the countryside in spring. Shafts of sun, lighting up the hillsides, complete the enthralling pastoral vision. Reach **Bravães** (39.3km **♣**); its 11th-century Romanesque church lies a further 0.5km along, on the left.

You may care to make a short (0.7km) detour to visit this establishment, which gives technical support to the whole *vinho verde* area.

Afterwards, return to the N101 to continue towards Arcos de Valdevez, passing under the new IC28 road to Ponte de Lima after about 1km.


At Arcos de Valdevez★ (47.5km WC; town plan page 129) turn left at the first roundabout to cross the river, then turn right just after the bridge; there is parking by the river (limited on market days). Here you can stroll upstream

Left: terraces at Avelar; seen on leaving the village during Walk 11.

Below: Ponte de Lima is a very attractive market town with a lovely old square opening out onto the south side of the medieval bridge. If you take a look at the old keep house just downstream from the bridge (setting for Picnic 5) you will find the markings for flood levels — a remarkable testimony to the bridge builders' craft that their work has survived such tests over the centuries.

alongside the river with pleasant views across to the old bridge near the town centre (Picnic 8; photograph pages 36-37).

Continue the tour by following the N101 as it winds up, out of the Lima Valley, to the pass at **Portela** (66km). You now drop down into the **Minho Valley**, with beautiful views to the north across to Spain. Soon you are in an area of very extensive viniculture; much of the planting is now across the fields rather than just around the perimeter. This facilitates harvesting and spraying, but is also a reflection of the increased importance of viniculture and the decline of arable farming — a strange reversal of what happened when maize was introduced (see 'Agriculture and landscape, pages 69-73). After 80km you will pass the Brejoeira estate on the left; pause to look through the gates at the beautiful house and gardens. Turn right at the traffic lights (83km) on the N202 towards Melgaço; you are now heading into the Alvarinho *vinho verde* sub-region.

To the left you will get glimpses of the Minho River and Spain beyond it. When you come to traffic lights at **Melgaço★** (106km WC), turn left and drive into the town centre, bearing left and left again (in front of the Novo Banco). You will come to a small tree-lined square with parking. It is well worth walking up into the old centre; you will find the Solar Alvarinho de Melgaço just along from the tower at the top of the town. Here you can sample up to six Alvarinhos free of charge! There is a display and museum explaining the whole process, and brochures from the local estates which can be visited.





Staying in manor house accommodation (see 'Useful contacts' on page 49) is one of the most pleasant ways to visit the Minho; this is Casa da Fonte Tornada in Lindoso (Car tour 2)

A good selection of wines is also on sale.

Now you should return on the N202 towards **MONÇÃO** (possibly visiting one of the estates on the way), taking care at 125.5km to look for the turning to **MERUFE** and **SISTELO**. Turn left on the N304 and follow signs for **MERUFE** and **SISTELO**. In 130.5km, where the road forks, keep right uphill. There are panoramic views along this high level road, which leads through woodland and old villages. **Merufe** (138km) is an elongated village spread alongside the road.

As the mountains become more rolling and the terrain less harsh, begin the descent towards Sistelo, across the valley to the right. Cross the bridge at the head of the **Rio Vez** (146km), from where there is a fine view down towards Arcos. Beyond the bridge, Sistelo is seen perched on a ridge, surrounded by amazingly steep terraced slopes.

Pass through **Sistelo** (149km ✕); the views along the next stretch are especially fine. At **Cabreiro** (153km) note the left turn (156.5km) to Vilar and Avelar (Walk 11). Take care at the junction left to Mézio (169km); the right of way is uncertain.

Continue back into **Arcos** (172km) and then, at the roundabout by the new bridge, join the N202 back towards **VIANA** along the north side of the river Lima. Follow signs back to **Viana** (234km).

(An alternative to the N202 is to take the new IC28 back to Ponte de Lima. Join this by *crossing* the new bridge at the roundabout as you leave Arcos. Turn right at the next roundabout just after the bridge and head back towards Ponte da Barca, to join the IC28 after 2km. At Ponte de Lima you can continue back to Viana on the A29 dual carriageway.)



Walking

Northern Portugal offers fine opportunities for walking, especially in the magnificent Peneda-Gerês National Park (see pages 38-41). Shaped like a horseshoe, the national park lies against the eastern border with Spain. It includes several mountain ranges within its boundaries, but our walks are confined largely to the central Serra Amarela and the Serra da Peneda to the north. Here the huge granite mountains, rising to a height of 1416m (4650ft) at Pedrada, may at first appear barren and hostile, but they present a much kinder face when you walk amongst them. Rushing, tumbling streams, Romanesque bridges, old watermills, huge granite tors, soft green valleys, isolated villages, a host of wild flowers and interesting bird life are ingredients which combine to create visually stunning landscapes for you to discover.

When you are out and about in the mountains, please accept some words of caution. Distances in the mountains are very deceptive, and points that look close can sometimes take many hours of walking to bridge. Only do the walks described here (or established, waymarked walks created by the Park Authority), and never try to get from one walk to another via old trails shown on *any* maps, as they may no longer be viable (see 'maps' below).

There are walks in this book for everyone. All are **graded** (with a quick overview in the Contents) as follows:

- very easy (usually one of the short options for a main walk)
- easy-moderate, with up to 500m/1800ft overall height gain. Generally good conditions underfoot
- moderate-strenuous. More than 500m/1800ft overall height gain and/or walking on rough tracks
- challenging. Longer walk with extensive exposure to higher altitudes. Good navigational skills required. For experienced hillwalkers only.

Just check the grade to see if it suits you, and if the grade of the main walk is too high, be sure to look over all the shorter versions. **If you are an inexperienced walker**, or just looking for a gentler walk, then go for the walks graded 'easy'. Look, too, at the picnic suggestions on pages 10-13; these particularly beautiful settings often present the opportunity for a short walk nearby. **Experienced walkers** should be able to tackle all of the walks in this book, taking into account, of course, the season and the weather conditions.

If a walk is very long, do be sure of your fitness before you attempt it. Don't tackle the more strenuous walks in high summer; do protect yourself from the sun, and carry an ample supply of water and plenty of fruit with you.

Always remember that storm damage or bulldozing could make some of the walks described in this book unsafe. Always err on the side of safety; if you have not reached one of our landmarks after a reasonable time, then you must return to the last 'sure' point and start again. Path-clearing and maintenance is sadly lacking in some areas. Undergrowth invades with remarkable rapidity, making for slow progress.

Guides, waymarks, maps, GPS

Official guides are not readily available, but none is needed for the walks in this book. Most of the walks use well-established footpaths, trails and tracks, and are easily followed.

An ever-growing network of GRs (*grandes rotas*, long-distance hikes) and PRs (*pequenas rotas*, day walks) is being established, and you may well come across new red/white and/or red/yellow **waymarks** (Walks 3, 4, 5, 6 and 12 are all at least partially marked). Where waymarks are useful, we draw your attention to them. Otherwise, to avoid any possible confusion, *it is wiser to follow our directions at all times, in preference to any route markings.*

The **maps** in this book (scale 1:40,000) are the most useful you will find for walking. They are based on Portuguese government 1:25,000 military maps incorporating surveys from around 1995, updated by us in the field. Even at the larger scale, the originals do not include all minor tracks/trails. The maps are published by the Portuguese military, the Instituto Geográfico do Exército (www.igeoe.pt). For the walks in this book you would need sheets 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 27, 28, 29 and 30 of the M 888 series, available from your usual map supplier. GPS users note: M 888 is the latest series available — projection: UTM (29T), datum: *European 1950*.

Free **GPS track** downloads are available for all our walks: see the Northern Portugal page on the Sunflower website. Please bear in mind, however, that GPS readings should *never* be relied upon as your sole reference point, as conditions can change overnight. *But even if you don't use GPS when out walking, it's great fun opening our GPX files in Google Earth to preview the walks in advance!*



This village of ruined abrigos, Branda de Berzavo, a testimony to the time when these hills were used extensively for summer pastures, is seen on Walks 7 and 8. Isolated abrigos continue to be maintained in the higher areas, but gone are the days when whole villages were needed.

If you go through your list of answers, you will eventually get a yes — with a vigorous nod of the head — and it will be a lot more reliable than just sign language.

An inexpensive phrase book is a very valuable aid from which you can choose other ‘key’ phrases and answers. Remember, too, that it is always friendly to greet people you may meet on your walks with a ‘good morning’ or ‘good afternoon’ (bom dia/**boh**m dee-ah) or (boa tarde/**boah** tar-day).

We do use some local terminology in the descriptions and, to avoid repetition in the walk notes, below is a list of these **local words** and their meaning:

- Abrigo* a rough stone-built shelter, most commonly found in the uplands (photographs above and on pages 40 and 96)
- Espigueiro* a stone or wooden structure for storing maize; usually on ‘toadstool’ supports and with slatted wooden or stone side walls (photographs pages 88, 108-109)
- Eira* a flat, paved area used for drying and flailing maize; frequently these are found near the *espigueiros*

Organisation of the walks





























The walks in this book are largely focused on the central and northern areas of the Peneda-Gerês National Park. You might begin by considering the large fold-out

touring map inside the back cover. Here you can see at a glance the overall terrain, the road network and the location of the various routes. Quickly flipping through the pages, you will find that there is at least one photograph for each walk. Having selected one or two potential excursions from the map and the photographs, look over the planning information at the beginning of each walk. Here you'll find walking times, grade, equipment and how to get there and return. If the grade and equipment specifications are beyond your scope, don't despair! There's almost always a short or alternative version of the walk and, in most cases, these are less demanding of ability and equipment.

When you turn to the walking notes, you'll find that the text begins with an introduction — to give you the flavour of the walk, and a comment on special points of interest. The route is then described in detail, with the text supplemented by the 1:40,000 maps.

Note that the times given are **neat walking times** and include only brief pauses, where you might stop to recover breath. They do *not* include photographic or picnic stops, or *any* stop of indeterminate length. *Add at least 50 percent to the total time shown at the top of the walk and, if you prefer to walk at a leisurely pace, double it.* There are many time checks in the text, but these are *not* intended to be matched minute-by-minute throughout the walk. The most reliable way to use the book is to note the *time difference* to the next point on the route. Don't forget to take transport connections at the end of the walk into account, particularly if you are meeting a taxi or friends. (As a reminder, we have put in a suggested time allowance for most of the main walks.) The most important factor is consistency of walking times, and we have made an effort to check our times at least twice. You'll soon see how your pace compares with ours and make adjustments for your stride ... and the heat!

Many of the **symbols** used on the walking maps are self-explanatory, but below is a key to the most important:

	motorway		spring, waterfall, etc		railway station
	main road		height (50 m intervals)		castle, fort
	secondary road		watermill		specified building
	motorable route		church.chapel		quarry, mine
	track		shrine or cross		stadium
	path, trail		cemetery		abrigos village
	main walk		picnic tables		campsite
	alternative walk		best views		picnic suggestion (see pages 10-13)
	walk on watercourse		bus stop.car parking		map continuation
			walk start.waypoint		

Walk 1: SERRA DE ARGÁ (MONTARIA • ALTO DAS COCANHAS • PEDRULHOS • MONTARIA)

See also photo pages 10-11

Distance: 11.8km/7.3mi;
2h57min (*allow 5h*)

Grade: ● moderate-strenuous. There is a climb of 250m/820ft initially, followed by a descent, then another climb of 150m/490ft to the highest point. The tracks and trails used are mainly good, but there are some short difficult sections.

Equipment: sturdy shoes or boots, long-sleeved shirt, long trousers, sunglasses, binoculars, sunscreen, fleece, raingear, picnic, water

Transport: 🚗 From the crossroads at Lanheses (0km) head north towards Âncora on the N305. Pass through Vilar de Murteda and, as the road levels off, turn right (8.2km) to the signposted village of São Lourenço Montaria. Keep ahead to the pleasantly shady

central square (9.7km) with the church and 'Junta Freguesia' (Parish Council Office); park in front of the latter (41° 47.472'N, 8° 43.472'W). Montaria is an attractive village, well worth exploring.

Short walk: Montaria — Viveiro Florestal — Montaria (7.7km/4.8mi; 1h59min; ● easy; equipment and transport as the main walk). Follow the main walk to the 1h05min-point at ③, then keep straight ahead. Stay on this track to head down to the **Viveiro Florestal**. Cross the bridge and walk up the road, to the junction at the 2min-point.

Longer walk: São João d'Arga (15.9km/9.9mi; 4h09min; ● fairly strenuous, with total ascents of 600m/1970ft). Follow the main walk to the 1h27min-point at ④, then see the panel on page 62 to add this detour in the main walk.

The Serra de Argá is a small but striking range of mountains on the north side of the river Lima between Viana do Castelo and Ponte de Lima. Composed of granite, and with a treeless summit reaching almost 800m, it looks like a huge barren flat-topped mound, but it has the distinction of being highly visible for miles around. This walk will show you that the Serra de Argá is not as barren as it appears from a distance. Right from the start, you climb through woods, and further on encounter old watermills dotted along the streams. As you climb higher the landscape becomes harsher, with granite peaks and tors providing a natural exhibition of surreal sculptures. At the highest point on the main walk you will get extensive views down to the coast. From here you could take a detour to an interesting old monastery, São João d'Arga, before returning and rejoining the main route. The last stretch takes you alongside a beautiful gorge on the river Âncora.

Start the walk from the village square in **Montaria** (283m; ●): head up the cobbled road with a yellow and red waymark, to the left of the JUNTA FREGUESIA. When

you come to a tarmac road within two minutes, turn right. Two minutes later, just after a 'SERVIÇOS FLORESTAIS' sign, turn right on a waymarked track (4min). Initially

Walk 1: Serra de Arga (Montaria circuit) 59

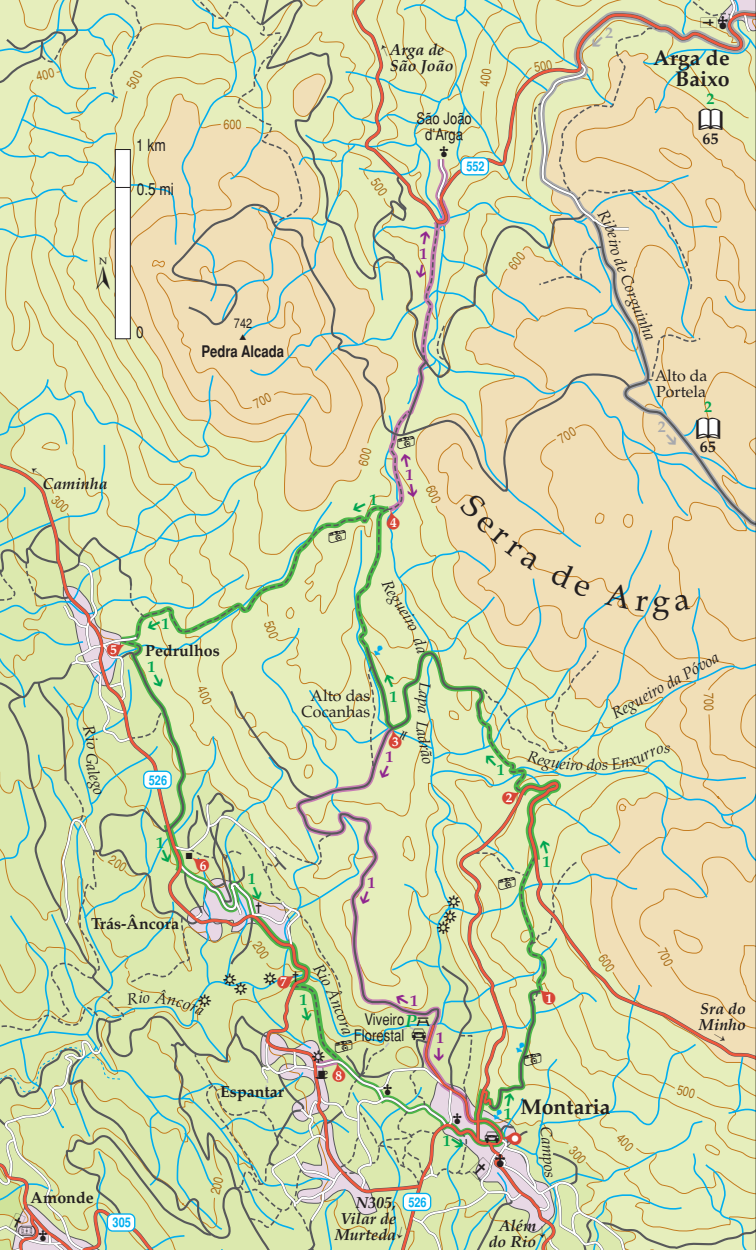
the track is broken tarmac but soon, as you turn in left above some forestry cottages (**6min**), you are on a grassy trail. Half a minute later, turn left in front of a **WATER TANK** and climb steadily up

the wooded hillside, away from the village, now on a mainly granite-paved trail.

The trail levels off again briefly (**14min**), and here you begin to get extensive views down to the

In 2h47min you're surrounded by lush greenery, as the path runs above a pretty gorge carrying the Ancora River.





coast and Vila Praia de Âncora. Pass a small WATER TANK on the left (19min) and in another couple of minutes head into mimosa woodland. In 25min keep on ahead, ignoring the waymarked path off to the right. A MINUTE

LATER, BEAR LEFT (1), dropping down slightly onto a grassy trail, where you will continue walking on the level. Ahead you enjoy views over to the valley and higher ground which feature later in the walk.

Having passed a distinctive rocky outcrop on your left, keep right over a gentle rise (which may be overgrown), to meet a road (31min). Turn left downhill here. The road takes you down past a sharp left-hand bend (36min). Some 250m/yds past this bend (40min), **TURN RIGHT DOWNHILL ON A ROUGH TRACK (2)**. Bear right again after 100m and continue downhill to a stream (**Regueiro dos Enxurros; 44min**). This is a pleasant, shaded spot for picnics, with an excellent rock pool for swimming just 20m upstream.

Cross the stream and follow the white arrow pointing you uphill to the right, taking a rough track round the hillside. The track levels out (48min) and you now contour round the hillside, towards the head of a valley, crossing another stream on a bend (**Regueiro da Lapa Ladrão; 57min**). The track continues on the other side of this valley and leads you round to the beginning of a large open area (1h03min). Take note of a small **STONE BRIDGE** on the left as you come into this flat area.

Take care two minutes later, where the track ahead is almost at the top of a gentle rise. You need to take a track leading off to the right just before crossing the dry stream bed (just to the right of the small stone bridge). Turn right (north) on this **DIRT TRACK (3; 1h05min)**, as indicated by a red/yellow waymark on a post. The track/path takes you into the jaws of a deep, barren and stony valley.

Some 400m/yds further on the dirt track starts to ascend, and you will see some remains of granite pavement. This old trail is waymarked too — in double stripes of red upon yellow. But

around here the granite pavement has been damaged by traffic for the construction of a water tank, which you soon pass, on your right. The route now takes you steeply up through a valley where granite dominates, to create a compelling landscape — barren and bleak, but not entirely without vegetation. Soon, looking ahead at the huge granite tors, you might just spot one resembling a tortoise.

At the point where the **STONE TRAIL ENDS** and becomes a dirt trail that begins dropping down to near-level terrain (1h27min), look out for a **PATH OFF TO THE LEFT (4)**; it's faint initially) and follow this sharply left up the hillside.* There are no waymarks at this stage, but the path will lead you to the top of a **SMALL PASS (1h34min)**. The views from here to the west and the Atlantic demand a pause as you recover your breath from the last short ascent.

From now on it's almost all downhill! You drop over the pass onto a fine granite trail with occasional yellow waymarks. You pass an old watercourse off to the left (1h49min); this was designed to channel water round the hillside for irrigation and to drive the watermills. Carry on downhill, still on granite pavement, until you meet a track just below the second house of **Pedrulhos (2h03min)**. This house seems to have dozens of dogs, but they are all securely chained!

Accompanied no doubt by the canine cacophony, **TURN SHARP LEFT (5)** below this house on a footpath. This leads in one minute to a **SMALL DAM**, where you take

*But if you are doing the longer walk to São João d'Arga, keep right here, and turn to page 62 to continue.



São João d'Arga

The monastery of São João d'Arga nestles in a wooded valley on the north side of the Serra de Arga and makes a worthwhile out-and-back extension to the main walk.

Follow the main walk to the 1h27min-point at **4** but, instead of turning left uphill, carry on round to the right. Sometimes you will have to negotiate some slightly boggy stretches (growing amongst the mosses around here is the fly-eating *Drosera rotundifolia*, but it needs a good eye and a careful search to find it). You will emerge on the old trail again and reach the top of a pass (**9min**). The view behind you, down to the Lima Valley and the sea, is reason enough to pause for breath. Here you cross over a track and continue straight on down towards the monastery along the waymarked trail.

The protection of the valley allows the vegetation to grow tall

again and, shortly, a spinney of fire-damaged pines is passed as you descend. Notice (**16min**) a second, similar valley over to the right, and be sure not to confuse it with this one on your return. You enter a birch woodland (**23min**), and soon you may spot the blue-flowered *Omphalodes nitida*. As you emerge into a clearing (**27min**), turn left to join the surfaced road. Turn right and cross the bridge. Follow the road into a gentle climb, but where the road bends right two minutes later, continue ahead to the abandoned monastery of **São João d'Arga** (**32min**). Many of the granite-built cloisters remain intact, and the monastery is still the site of annual pilgrimages in August.

To return, retrace your steps up the valley to the track at the top of the pass. Cross it and rejoin the main walk at the 1h27min-point (**1h12min**).

Most of the streams flowing off the Serra de Arga have watermills, some, like this one near the 2h47min-point, still working today.

the footpath down to the right. Cross over a **SMALL BRIDGE** and then head up a granite-cobbled track to the left (*ignore* the yellow arrows pointing right) and you will quickly be on a dirt track.

The track takes you out to a tarmac road (**2h21min**), which you follow to the left. Straight away you pass a turning left to the **OLD SCHOOL (6)**; take the *next* left, after about 100m/yds, heading up a granite-cobbled track (at this point the tarmac bends right downhill). You pass alongside a wavy **BRICK WALL** on the right as you walk into the village of **Trás-Áncora**. After 300m/yds, by a lamppost, turn left at a T-junction, still on granite cobbles.

The route takes you round a small valley. On the far side you pass in front of a house with large plate glass windows. Continue until this granite track drops down to a tarmac road (**2h33min**), just by a small **SHRINE** in the wall on the left. Turn left on the tarmac, cross a bridge (**2h38min**) and immediately pass a **STONE CROSS (7)** on the right. Look for a path up left, some 50m/yds beyond the bridge and follow this uphill.

This path rises quite steeply above a beautiful gorge carrying the **Áncora River**. At the **TOP OF THE PATH (8; 2h47min)** you enjoy fine views down over waterfalls. Here the path joins a dirt track. Our route is ahead and slightly left, but first make a small



detour to the right (*not included in the main walk times*). You will come to a tarmac road in two minutes — with a lovely group of old watermills and, just along the road to the left, a welcoming **CAFÉ** with splendid views from its patio.

Return to the **TOP OF THE PATH (8)** and follow the dirt track ahead into the pines, ignoring the waymarked turn to the left. Almost immediately you come to a large clearing with a **BANDSTAND** and **CHAPEL** (note the fascinating inscription on the chapel door). Carry on along a cobbled track on the far side of the clearing; this leads you through fields and down to the paved road. Turn left on the road and walk back to the square in **Montaria (2h57min)**.



SUNFLOWER LANDSCAPES

'The hallowed blue books'

— SUNDAY TIMES

Northern Portugal Fourth edition

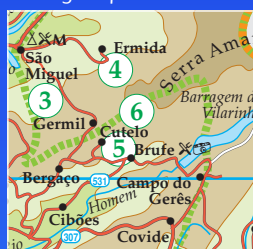
area covered by this book



walking map



touring map



The **car tours** and **walks** in this book explore northwestern Portugal — arguably the most beautiful part of the country. Here, in the province of Minho, the lush greenness of the coastal lowlands, the Costa Verde, contrasts sharply with the mountainous interior — one of Europe's last wilderness areas. While emphasising excursions in the country's only national park, the Peneda-Gerês, the book also describes more gregarious pursuits — visiting local markets, sampling vintages at the Port wine lodges, and cruising on the river Douro.

- 30 long and short walks
- topographical walking maps
- free downloadable GPS tracks
- satnav guidance to walk starting points for motorists
- 3 car tours and fold-out touring map; suggested wine tour
- plans of Porto, Braga, Viana do Castelo, Arcos de Valdevez, Ponte de Lima, Ponte da Barca
- strolls to idyllic picnic spots
- public transport information
- update service for the latest news

Sunflower Books
www.sunflowerbooks.co.uk
UK £13.99 USA \$19.00

ISBN 978-1-85691-527-4



9 781856 915274