



BELORADO - SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA

Between two waters



NATURE
ON THE WAY
OF ST JAMES





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BELORADO-SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA

Between two waters

After crossing the river Tirón by a bridge built of different kinds of stone, the hedgerows and vegetation along the edges of the Camino will be a cheerful sight... if the pruning and *cleaning up* have allowed them to grow and live.

Just at the halfway point of this stage, of some 24 kilometres, the scenery changes dramatically, on leaving the Ebro countryside and entering, for about 10 kilometres, the extreme northern part of the *Sierra Iberica* which has been closing in on us since Navarrete and Najera.

On crossing *La Pedraja* pass, you will walk for some kilometres between the Ebro and Duero basins, finally abandoning that of the Ebro which has been company for so long.

The changes in scenery and the variety of vegetation are what mark this stage.

*This series of pocket guides: **Nature on the Way of St James**, is fruit of the collaboration agreement between the Social Work Programme of Caja de Burgos and the Natural Heritage Foundation of Castilla y Leon.*

The object of these pamphlets is to give pilgrims, hikers and inhabitants of the Jacobean area some interesting notes on the nature and landscape of the Way.

The stages described are part of the the French Way as it passes through Burgos: Santo Domingo de la Calzada-Belorado; Belorado-San Juan de Ortega; San Juan de Ortega-Burgos; Burgos-Castrojeriz and Castrojeriz-Frómisa, covering the approximate 132 km of the Way in Burgos.

We hope that the reader will be able to appreciate and, above all, respect what Nature has to offer and thanks to these simple notes will enjoy and understand the Way a little better.



STAGE 1: BELORADO - VILLAFRANCA MONTES DE OCA





The pebbles of the Belorado Bridge

Before crossing the bridge over the river Tirón, called *El Canto*, by the wooden footbridge which runs parallel to it, we recommend that you walk down to observe the stones used to build the original bridge. You can get down to the left of the footbridge.

Do you recognize the different types of rock? They are very different and varied. Some of their names are given on this page.



Hard silicates



A broken stone reveals a conglomerate



Sandstone with river pebbles

Life on the Tirón

Born in the remains of the glaciers of the *Sierra de la Demanda*, the river Tirón receives the water of the river Oja to later flow into the Ebro. As it passes through Belorado it is still clean enough to have Brown Trout, which share the waters with the Iberian Desman.

Along its banks there are riverside copses formed by different Willows and Common Ash trees. This is the home of an endangered mammal. We are referring to the European Mink which in this area maintains the largest numbers in *Castilla y León*. It is very difficult to actually see Desmans or Minks, but it always gives satisfaction to have crossed a river in which they live.



Iberian Desman



Brown Trout

Common Ash



Large Grey Willow



Rosemary Willow



European Mink



White Willow



White Willow seeds



Dogwood

Blackthorn

Wayfaring Tree

Hawthorn

Briar Rose

Blackberry or Bramble

Hedges are nature's fortresses...

Various species of bush form the hedges that we find on the steep bank along the Way. In spring they are clothed in flowers which attract the insects to help in their polinization. In autumn they invite birds to come and eat their coloured fruits and so spread their seeds. The rest of the year they are a refuge for wildlife.

The hedges retain humidity, protect from the wind and are a home for an infinity of animals and plants.

So, why don't we leave them in peace?

After leaving the road behind in Belorado, you will see to the left these excellent natural hedges.

FRUIT

Hedge clearing

Honeysuckle



Dogwood

Blackthorn (Sloe)

Wayfaring Tree

Hawthorn

Briar Rose

Blackberry or Bramble

Where does the wildlife take refuge?

No less than thirty species of birds depend on the hedgerows. Some are very striking like the Bullfinches, the Yellowhammers and the Red-Backed Shrike. Others are more discrete, like the Nightingale. Cuckoos fly around with the intention of sneaking one of their eggs into another bird's nest.

A multitude of insects, small mammals and reptiles depend on the shelter of these bush fortresses. They are truly an environment full of life!



Red-Backed
Shrike

Bullfinch

Yellowhammer

Cuckoo



Blackbird (female)



Many birds seek food and shelter in the hedgerows

Nightingale

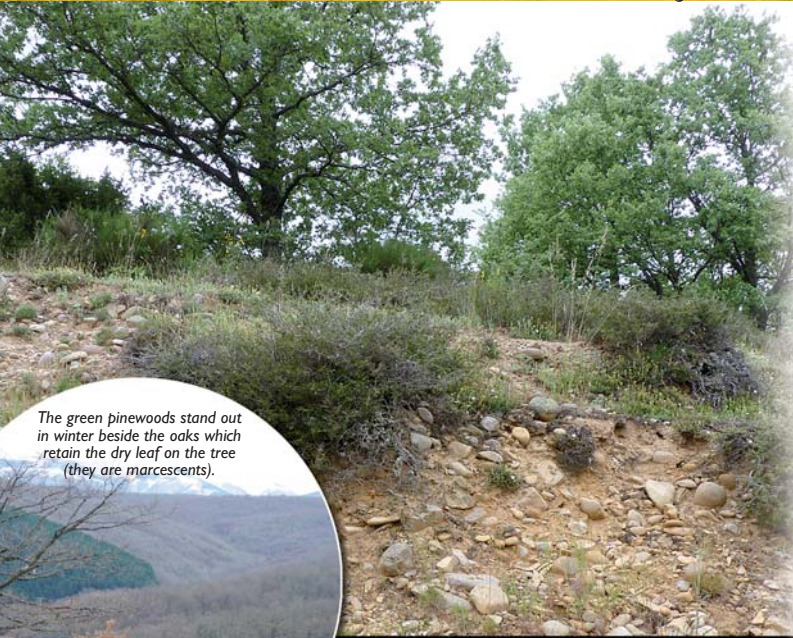


The Black-veined White Butterfly depends on these places to live



Scots pine

STAGE 2: VILAFRANCA MONTES DE OCA - SAN JUAN DE



The green pinewoods stand out in winter beside the oaks which retain the dry leaf on the tree (they are marcescents).



In the whole area around La Pedraja pass there is much silt, clay and silicas which make the soil acidic.

The different tones of green correspond to different species of tree

In the more humid areas we can find beech trees.

Pyrenean Oak

ORTEGA



The Iberian Mountains

As we begin the climb from Villafranca Montes de Oca we will see a radical change in landscape. After crossing a border of scrub we come into the extreme north-west of the *Sierra de La Demanda*.

The woods that you pass through until the *Sierra de Atapuerca* are in keeping with the type of landscape known as *Sierras Ibéricas*, which, as well as their physical characteristics, unite many uses of the forest, the most important being grazing and forestry. The villages can be found in the valley bottoms and the climate determines the vegetation within this area.

With sufficient humidity and coolness, Beech and Oak are triumphant; while in drier regions the Holm Oak, Juniper and Pine can better stand the lack of water. You won't see Juniper on this part of the Way, but you will find Oaks, some Beech, Scots pine and, further on the Holm Oak of the *Sierra de Atapuerca*, which marks the north-west limit of the *Sierras Ibéricas*.

Until *Atapuerca* you will continue in this ever-changing and very varied environment.

Advance notice of the wood



Heather



Halimium




Tree
Heather



Broom
(Cytisus)



Bell Heather



When a wood disappears it gives way to other plants which form what we call scrubland. Depending on the type of soil and climate, the species will be different. In this area, because of the acid soils and fairly high precipitation, we will find, above all, Heathers, Brooms and Halimium.

The scrub invades abandoned fields to make way for trees and also appears after fires or extensive tree felling. In any case it is the stage before the formation of the forest with a grand quantity of flowers which bees take advantage of to produce honey.





Worker
bee



Heather honey



Cornish
Heath



Rockrose




Spanish
Heath



Broom
(Genista)



St Dabeoc's
Heath



When you can't see the trees for the wood

Numerous species of trees form *La Pedraja* wood. On this land, appropriate to the Beech, we also find Oak and Scots pine which were planted some 50 years ago.

You can also find occasional Birch, Field Maple and European Rowan.

In some areas you will see how the Beech grows alongside Pines and Oaks forming an interesting mixed forest.



Rowan



Beech leaves in autumn



Common Maple



*Silver
Birch*



Scots Pine



*European
Beech*



Pyrenean Oak



*Young Pyrenean
Oak leaves*

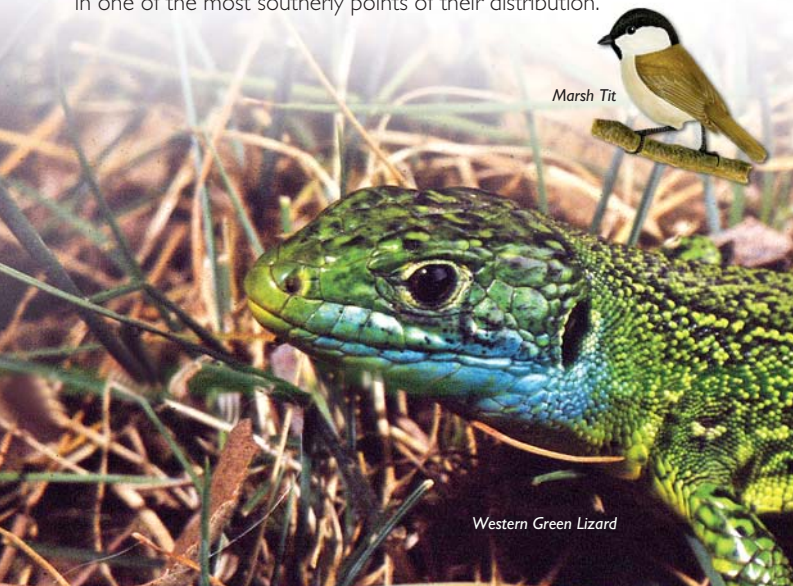
Forest Life

From October onwards it is easy to see enormous flights of Woodpigeon over the Iberian mountain passes. More difficult to spot are the Goshawks, main preoccupation of the Jay, which hides acorns in autumn to eat during the winter. When they don't remember where they have hidden their larder, the seeds germinate and new trees sprout.



In spring it is easy to see the Tree Pipit, with their parachute-like jumps, calling the attention of passing pilgrims and other Pipits to say where their territory is.

The fact that we are in a humid forest is demonstrated by two animals: the Marsh Tit and the Western Green Lizard. Both species are here in one of the most southerly points of their distribution.



Western Green Lizard



Tree Pipit



Goshawk

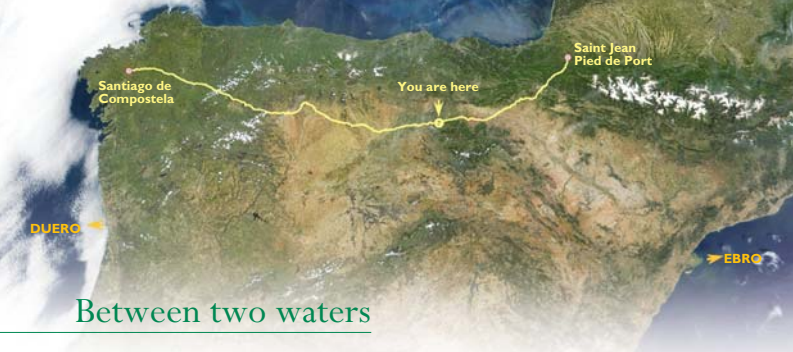


Great Spotted
Woodpecker



Jay





Between two waters

Where the water isn't at all sure which sea it will finally arrive at

From this point and for approximately 5 kilometres, until just before *San Juan de Ortega*, you will cross several times the imaginary line which geographically separates the basins of the two largest rivers of the peninsula: the *Ebro* and the *Duero*.

From this point
the Duero basin begins

From *San Juan de Ortega* the Way continues over the greatest water catchment area in this country: the river Duero basin, with 55.000 km² and which flows to the sea in Oporto, Portugal.

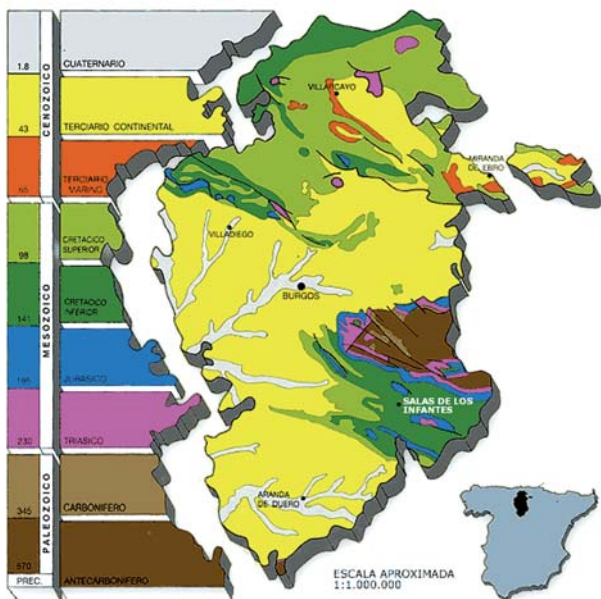
In the direction we are going, the water which falls to our left will arrive at the Atlantic Ocean by way of the Duero, and that which falls to our right will arrive at the Mediterranean Sea by way of the Ebro, which opens to a great delta in Deltebre.

In a straight line from here
there are 397 kilometres
to the mouth of the Ebro and
460 kilometres to that of the Duero

A hydrographic basin or catchment area is the part of the territory which collects all the water to finally unite it in a river or lake. It is demarcated by the dividing lines of the waters, which are the lines of peaks which separate the basins.

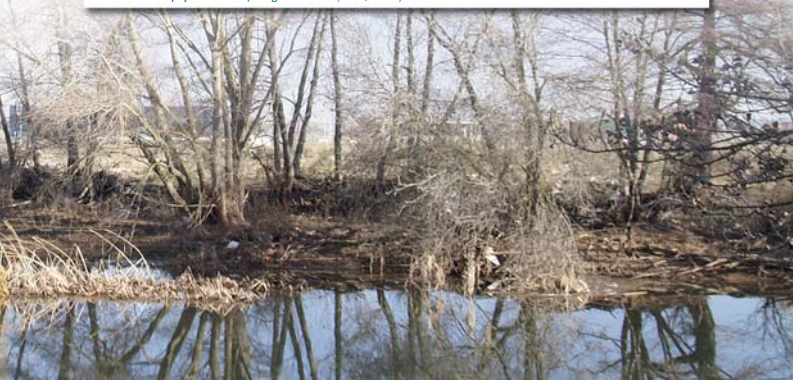
GEOLOGICAL MAP OF BURGOS PROVINCE

Photograph courtesy of NASA



A large part of Burgos province belongs to the Duero basin, corresponding to the continental tertiary.

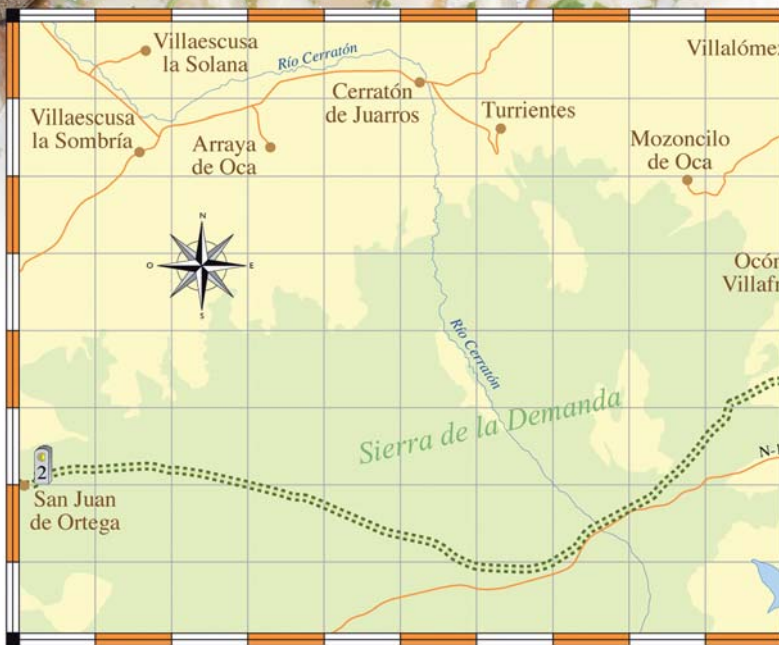
Based on the physical atlas of Burgos Province (ITGE, 1988)



Coming up like mushrooms!

In the woods in this part of the Way gastronomic treasures can be found which have achieved popularity for their scientific name. We are talking about the Boletus, which are the most appreciated mushroom in Europe. Their home is in the pine and oak woods. As thousands of people come to hunt for them each year, their collection is controlled.

There are many more mushrooms than these. Some are edible, others poisonous and the majority indifferent. All deserve to continue brightening up the Pilgrim's Way, for which we should respect their presence





Russula

Pine Mycena

Toadstool

Saffron Milk-cap

There are some plentiful mushrooms but difficult to know their species, like these Emetic Mushrooms (Russula).

Have you seen mushrooms on a pine cone? This is the home of the Pine Mycena.

The typical toadstool (Amanita muscaria). Fly Agaric is poisonous but adds colour to the woods.

The Saffron Milk-cap is much appreciated in Catalunya.

On your journey to Santiago you can count on the continued company of the wildlife that has evolved in the countryside as a result of the works of Nature and Man.

Good Journey!



Boletus





For more information:



BURGOS - VALLADOLID - PALENCIA

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