



BURGOS - CASTROJERIZ

In the solitude of the broken moors

NATURE
ON THE WAY
OF ST JAMES





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BURGOS-CASTROJERIZ

In the solitude of the broken moors

On this leg of 38 kilometres, the landscape you will pass through belongs mainly to that known as Limestone moors of *Castilla y León*.

Only on leaving Burgos crossing the riverside meadows of Arlanzon and further on descending from the moor to the streams Úbel, Hormazuela, Hontanillas, Garbanzuelo and Villajos, will you encounter a different environment, influenced by the water of these rivers and streams.

The homogeneity and monotony of this countryside does not indicate a lack of life: the widespread traces of nature on the moor tell us that if Nature is left alone it will recover, as long as the damage has not been too great.

*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.*

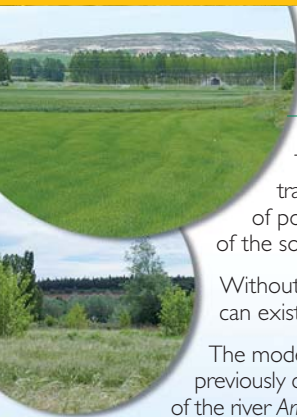
The object of these pamphlets is to give pilgrims, hikers and inhabitants of the Jacobean area some interesting notes on the nature and landscape of the Way.

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: BURGOS - RABÉ DE LAS CALZADAS



Arlanzon river meadows

The meadows and margins of rivers have traditionally been used for agriculture, and centres of population have grown up near rivers because of the source of water and wealth.

Without a supply of water neither villages nor cities can exist.

The modern part of the city of Burgos is situated on previously cultivated lands along the river. Before the flow of the river *Arlanzón* was regulated with reservoirs and dams, the city suffered various floods of considerable magnitude.

On leaving Burgos, the Way crosses and follows the river flood plain until *Rabé de las Calzadas* after passing the river *Úrbel* which joins the *Arlanzón* further down river.





The landscape of the river meadows is very characteristic with the line of vegetation along the banks, the cultivated fields nearby and the enclosing hills previously eroded by the river.

You will cross various rivers on this stage, and you will notice how the countryside of meadows and river copses is very similar, independent of which river formed them.





Companions of the riverside

The Arlanzón riverside still retains natural features which show a past of thickets, hedgerows and fields. For example, for the people of Burgos *La Milanera* means a fairground and market, but this name comes from a colony of Black Kites (*milano negro*) which installed itself every year in the poplar trees of the area. Bands of duck fly over the river meadows where journeying Lapwings visit for a few days in winter.

The river thickets and copses are now very depleted except for some White Willows and Narrow Leaved Ash here and there. In the hedges some groups of Elm (affected by grafiosis - a fungal infection) survive, although almost like bushes. The cultivated fields near the city have given way to urban and industrial estates.



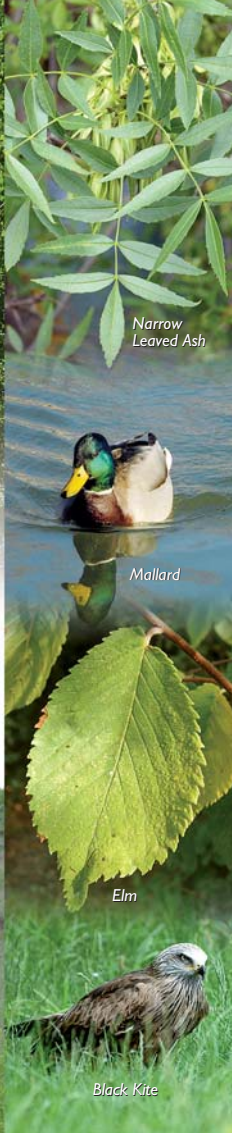
Lapwings



Black Kite

Elm leaf and seed

The Elms affected by grafiosis grow to bush height,
never achieving the stature
they did before the arrival of the disease



Narrow
Leaved Ash

Mallard

Elm



Black Kite



STAGE 2: RABÉ DE LAS CALZADAS - HONTANAS

Flax grows in the lime-clay soil and brightens the slopes in spring



Blue Flax



White Flax



Great Willowherb



Remnants of the Holm Oak forest on the moor

If you do the Way in summer you will very probably enjoy the company of the Great Willowherb flowers which are abundant in all the streams, rivers and marshy areas.



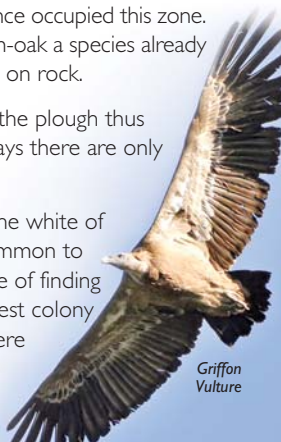
What do we see from Praatorre spring

On leaving Rabé de las Calzadas we will start the slow climb to the moors. To the right you will see Praatorre spring from which you may contemplate how the original countryside has been transformed.

On the slopes behind the spring there is still the odd Portuguese Oak of good stature, remains of the woods which once occupied this zone. Further on you will come across stands of Holm-oak a species already seen in Atapuerca which is capable of growing on rock.

A very long time ago these lands were put to the plough thus committing the forest to memory and in our days there are only a few trees left in scattered spots.

You can also observe an eroded area where the white of the lime-clay (marl) stands out all year. It is common to see Griffon Vultures circling above in the hope of finding some livestock carcass. Just think that the nearest colony of this species is some 40 kilometres from where you are standing.



Griffon
Vulture

From the meadows to the heights How were the moors formed?

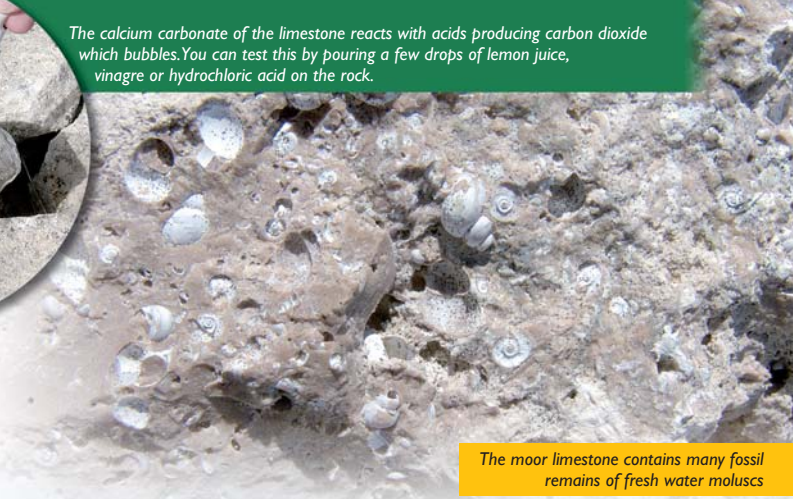
The limestone moors of *Castilla y León* are a very characteristic landscape feature which will accompany you during the next kilometres until just before Frómista.

There are no peaks, but vast elevated plains, crossed by rivers which cut into the landscape, leaving the material under the surface visible on the slopes.

The moors were formed by millions of years of accumulation of sediments brought down from the mountains surrounding the Duero basin and deposited on the beds of huge inland lakes with no access to the sea.

The limestones formed protecting the lime-clay layers and the gypsums which had formed earlier. The evenness of the landscape on the upper part of the moors indicates the lake bottom. The water then rose above this.





The calcium carbonate of the limestone reacts with acids producing carbon dioxide which bubbles. You can test this by pouring a few drops of lemon juice, vinegar or hydrochloric acid on the rock.

The moor limestone contains many fossil remains of fresh water moluscs

After this, the entire Iberian Peninsula tilted and the ever increasing erosion of the recently formed river Duero and its tributaries emptied the lakes into the Atlantic, leaving the moors as witnesses to the draining of the basin.

The slopes are the edges of the wounds inflicted on the moors by the rivers and they show us the sequence of past sedimentation.



Life on the moors is hard

These moorlands seem only to have wind, cold or heat depending on the season, the occasional thicket and few trees. They can seem desolate, but if we are quiet and still, these great open spaces can offer us agreeable surprises at any time of year.

The wind blows almost constantly with sufficient force to discourage anyone. This ever-present wind is what has stimulated the installation of wind farms.



Kestrel hovering



Montagu's Harrier
(female)



Common Vole

Some birds play with Eolo, like the Kestrels which remain stationary in the air, or the Harriers, which plane very low hardly moving their wings. Both birds of prey scan the countryside looking for prey such as Voles.

Some years the numbers of Common Voles increase dramatically causing social alarm but afterwards things return to normal naturally.



Hen Harrier (female)

Hen Harrier (male)

*Montagu's Harrier breeds on these lands
in spring and summer.
In winter, Hen Harriers may be seen.*

Montagu's Harrier (male)

Male Kestrel

Walking through bread and beer



Calandra Lark

On both sides of the Way the most frequent cereals are Wheat and Barley although from time to time, leguminous fodder crops like Sainfoin and Common Vetch appear. All of these crops are annuals and the agricultural cycle is completed within a few months, which conditions the lives of the the animals and plants which live here.

Almost all year round the wheatfields are inhospitable and cold with hardly anywhere for animals to hide apart from the rock piles (*majanos*). These structures are the result of centuries of rock picking from the ploughed fields. The farmers leave the rocks on the field edges and they become large piles, home to the local wildlife. Little Owls and Wheatears are relatively easy to see on top of the *majanos* watching the passing pilgrims and the fast flight of the Calandra Larks.

*Majanos: piles of limestone
rock from the moor*





Grey Wheatear

There are also wild cereals...
"Wild Oats" and "Wall Barley"



Little Owl



Common Vetch



Barley

Wheat

Wall or Mouse
Barley

Wild
Oats

Small game

Triangular structures with hanging buckets may attract your attention at some distance from the Way. They are drinking and feeding places erected by hunters to encourage the presence of the Red-legged Partridge. It is a sedentary bird and while there are slopes where it can escape to and feed on insects it will live on these moors.



In spring and summer Quail are not unusual, and will suddenly fly up into the air almost as we step on them as they rely on their plumage for camouflage among the wheat stubble. They settle in wheatfields situated in cooler areas.





Red-legged
Partridge

COTO PRIVADO
DE CAZA

Private
Hunting



Iberian Hare

Both Quail and Partridge are relatives of the Hen and are easy to see or hear. More difficult to come across is the Iberian Hare which will more probably be observing you from its "form"



STAGE 3: HONTANAS - CASTROJERIZ





The hillsides fall to the river

The valley which leads you to Castrojeriz has been sculpted by the Garbanzuelo stream. Its work can be clearly seen in the slope or hillside where the Way runs.

The big rocks that you see have broken away from the limestone of the moors, that great cap of stone which covers them if farming needs have not piled them up into the *majanos* which you have seen previously.

The marl and gypsum underneath, being softer, erode more easily while the limestone on top endures until it breaks off and falls downhill.

The erosion is relentless in its alliance with the weather.



The ruin of El Torreón stands among the rocks fallen from the moor.

Saint Antón is the patron of animals

In this church they cured, or at least tried to cure, the so called "Saint Anthony's fire or fever". This illness called ergotism was very prevalent in the Middle Ages and was caused by eating cereals infected by the ergot fungi which grows on rye and related plants. The fungus is replete with alcaloids which have a halucinogenic effect similar to that of LSD and can lead to gangrene in the extremities of the unfortunate victims.



Ergot fungi in rye



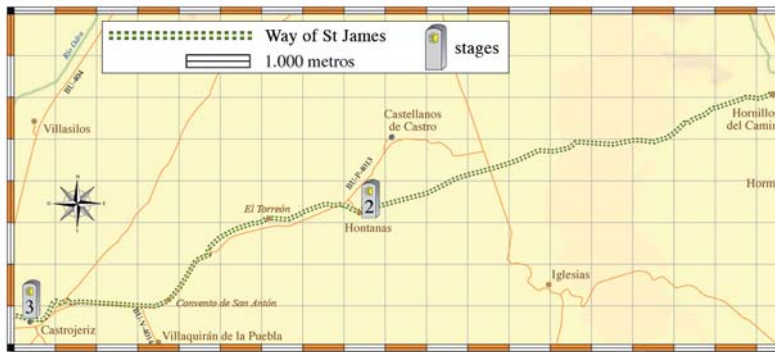
Oak leaves were sculpted on the capitals of churches although almost none of these trees remain today





Castrojeriz

In 1850, Pascual Madoz, on writing of Castrojeriz, said: "on the plains of such grandeur which are commonly called moors, and in their depressions or sides many limestone quarries can be found for the purpose of building and making lime, and many gypsum mines: These moors, of great extension in many parts, have much waste ground with no other use than to serve as grazing for livestock; sage, lavender, thyme and camomile are abundant here, which makes the honey which is collected from the hives in this area, perhaps the best that is known."





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!



Worker Bee



*Salvia
lavandulifolia*





For more information:



BURGOS - VALLADOLID - PALENCIA

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