

# Downstream

a journey to dream of

Trails by the rivers Ulla, Tambre and Xallas



Thanks to all the local authorities, associations and individuals who participated in this collective project for the recovery of knowledge of our rivers.

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# Rivers of green water

I love the water, running gently back in the meandering visions of my Galicia, with its fertile lands and restful banks. As it makes its way towards the sea, full of wildlife dancing in the numerous waterfalls, looking forward to a fresh and playful spring, and whose winter floods contrast with the dried skins and dusty summer fruit bowls.

As it follows its course, delaying an anonymous entrance to the ocean, I draw the soft outline of a blue-green chlorophyll-like colour that guards its privacy. An accomplice to the many romantic, thirsty mills, guaranteeing the right to make hearty furnaces for the art of bread making, but now converted into shops and museums.

The water which is half in love; the lamprey wind, the salmon and trout splash. Fishermen patiently stalk, absorbed in the pleasant task of filling their baskets.

Many pools covered by the varied flora of the islands or trees that weep on the river banks. Forests of oak whose leaves give new life to the wind, layered green from feet to ears, capable of withstanding the wind. Or the birch and alder that comb every morning's fog on the river banks.

In the analysis of our rivers, full of legends and stories, is a good deal of the essence of the Galician people. On them also depends on the colour of our green earth and the sweetness of its landscape: sky and earth, atmosphere and hydrosphere making a pact with the love of the gods, harmony and beauty unsurpassed. The legends say that when God finished the work of the world, before it has finished its first orbit he put his hand on Galicia; each finger formed an estuary where freshwater and salt water come together as friends.

The art of bridge making has graced every corner, marking the route of ancient paths, the richness of its fauna and its strength, the people of the bank, now a living natural museum offering places of rest and leisure, innumerable meeting points and paths that reach the shores replete with stone steps, walkways or Pontellas.

If it were possible to draw the skeleton of our land, we would have a dramatic structuring, next to which the calculation of the celebrated writer Cunqueiro would seem poor - in Galicia, every village, every place has its own brook. Galicia is born in water, drained, connected by green meadows and vegas. Fog in the mornings shrouds naked nostalgia and makes the resistant trees on the banks mourn, born of qualities that are reflected in chemical compositions valuable in identifying the Celtic race that once occupied the land of Breogán.

The rivers of our lands are fortunate to flow in the regions surrounding Compostela, whose photographic and literary homages have realised their potential and wealth, although not yet fully exploited, such is the variety of resources that we are offered.

**José S. Montes Pérez**  
**President of Terras de Compostela**



*Picture: Photo by Xurxo Lobato donated by Feiraco*







# Introduction

Every morning a gentle fog floods the banks of the rivers in the lands of Santiago. The fog, so ethereal as to be almost magical, represents for Ramón Otero Pedrayo the soul of the Galicians. As the day progresses, the fog is consumed, drawing us closer and bidding us approach a space ideal for rest and reflection. Meanwhile we wander through the arteries of a land that offers a glimpse into the past, in particular via the fishing and the hot springs, and another perspective on the present, through walking and other kinds of active tourism, and perhaps also offers us a timeless message: the preservation of our rivers by promoting awareness.

These are the pillars of our touristic proposal which are articulated in a series of routes that can be enjoyed by car, motorbike or bicycle. We also invite hikers to explore three hiking routes and in particular the walk along the river Sarela. We present this publication as an open invitation for you to choose from some of the most beautiful landscapes Galicia has to offer.

These are the three main river basins; the Ulla, the Tambre and the Xallas. Numerous tributaries flow into each of them, but we choose the most unique: Sarela and Sar (Ulla), Sionlla, Dubra, Barcala (Tambre) and Xallas. Here are some characteristics of each route:

## **Ulla: Path of beauty and fantasy**

One-day car route. Marked hiking trail. Active tourism activities: kayaking and rafting. Salmon fishing preserves.

## **Between the rivers Sar and Sarela is Santiago de Compostela**

### **A path of archiepiscopal and civil legends**

Half-day car route. Marked hiking trail

### **Tanneries in the Sarela river**

Marked hiking trail.

## **The river Tambre: Slow & solemn among the trees**

One-day car route. Active tourism activities: kayaking and rafting. Swimming areas. Marked hiking trail. Trout and reo fishing preserves.

## **Xallas: Place of the waterfall**

Half-day car route. Swimming areas. Trout and reo fishing preserves.







*"O Ulla is a fertile land decorated with vines, fruits and vegetables" (Reimóndez Portela, Sinde Lema y Espiño Matos, 'El Camino a Santiago por el Sudeste')*

Ponte Ulla

# 1. Ulla: Path of beauty and fantasy

## The orchard and garden of Compostela

Fellow travellers the first step on the road is the so-called the orchard and garden of Compostela, the Val do Ulla. When you walk through the market Santiago you can imagine vendors of other times proudly offering the fruits of their daily labours. The current stall holders, and those of the past, are fortunate to live in a land as fertile as that of the Ulla. Some wise travellers have regarded the banks of the Ulla as an almost ideal garden.

Therefore, we must start our journey downstream dreaming of the beauty Anton Losada saw in the Ulla, due to the exceptional area between the bridges of Ledesma and Ponteveda, which receives the names of Val do Ulla, A Ulla or O Ulla.

In the western half of Galicia, near its capital, Santiago de Compostela, the river originates on the border between the provinces of A Coruña and Pontevedra, and terminates in the mouth of the Ría de Arousa. The area on the left bank begins with two parishes in the municipalities

of Pontevedra: Vila de Cruces (Gres) and Silleda (Cira) and continues on the right bank with the lands of A Estrada, and upstream with the municipalities Boqueixón, Vedra and Teo.

The fertility of the landscape has made this region known as the garden of Compostela. It is celebrated for a multitude of produce and activities; for the variety and quality of its fruits and vegetables, the wine of the Ribeira do Ulla (Sub-appellation of Rias Baixas DOC), the famous aguardiente spirit, freshwater fishing (mainly salmon and trout), the carnival generals (Generales of Ulla), and even some musical instruments like the requinta, a transverse flute. These are some of the main symbols of the region, crossed by several routes of the St. James' Way. This beautiful valley should be seen from the quartz mountain of Pico Sacro, the symbolic predecessor of the Cathedral of Santiago, or from the banks of the second largest river in Galicia, the Ulla.











*"Camino de A Ulla de bellezas y ensueños"  
(Antón Losada Diéguez, 'Obra completa')*

*Ponte Ledesma*

## The bridge of the defence

*Leave Santiago de Compostela on the N-525 towards Ourense. At Susana turn left on the AC-960 heading towards Sergude. 16.6 km later we arrive at Ponte Ledesma (N 42° 47'39 .89 “, W 8° 20'12 .67”).*

The first stop on our route of beauty and dreams is Ponte Ledesma. This was the scene of a bloody battle between Galicians from Trasdeza and Southern Galicia against Napoleon's troops in 1809. A small monolith next to the bridge commemorates this episode of resistance, but in reality the battle was slaughter.

From the 4<sup>th</sup> of March skirmishes occurred around Ponte Ledesma, and on the 9th the first major struggle occurred, in which more than 260 French troops were killed for a loss of only six Galicians. However, the Napoleonic troops crossed the river during their retreat to Santiago and killed 64 civilians, including several women.

A rematch took place on the 19th, the difference on this occasion was that opposing the French were the men of Bernardo “Cachamuíña” González. Again the French

vented their anger upon civilians in the region, leaving 22 dead, again including several women, and ended up chasing Cachamuíña's men for several days. Cachamuíña would later find fame as the liberator of Vigo, following which he was appointed governor of the town. The writer Xosé María Castroviejo, referring to the famous carnival of the region with its generals explains that in the early twentieth century:

*“The main part was a struggle between the peasants and Napoleon. The francesada left great memories in Galicia, due to the fights between Napoleon and the peasantry. Even as a child I was surprised to hear the stories about the Val da Ulla hunters, with dog names such as Ney and Soult”*

***Xosé María Castroviejo, Memorias Dunha Terra***

Antonio López Ferreiro, historian and canon of the Cathedral of Santiago, thought it possible that Ponte Ledesma - which takes its name from the parish in Boqueixón of San Salvador de Ledesma - was of Roman origin. This hypothesis was more myth than reality, but





Monolith referring to the battle with the French

very widely held in Galicia. However, what is certain is that the first evidence of the bridge's existence is contained in the will of Gonzalo Rodríguez de Bendaña, dated the 22nd February, 1276. He left in this will salary for fifty workers in order to construct the bridge. The nine-arched bridge appears to date from the late 16th century, with some restoration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This bridge is now known as a good place for various water sports. At the foot of bridge in a field where the yearly Ledesma festivities are held, we find the ideal location to start an exceptional kayak or canoe ride to Ponte Ulla, especially in summer when the water levels are low. At other times of the year, when the river flows more rapidly, it provides for some adventurous rafting.

## The other side: Gres

On the other side of the bridge in Gres is the Chapel of San Ramón and the Isles of Gres: San Ramón, Os Namorados, Pachín, As Palletas and Mónica. There is a a recreation

**There are four companies offering services in the Tambre and Ulla:**

AMEXTREME: [www.amextremekayak.com](http://www.amextremekayak.com)

FERVENTIA: [www.ferventia.com](http://www.ferventia.com)

DESAFÍO E OCIO: [www.desafiocio.com](http://www.desafiocio.com)

TURNAUGA: [www.turnauga.es](http://www.turnauga.es)

\* Data obtained by e-mail sent to companies of active tourism registered on the website of Turgalicia in 2011

area on the islands, complete with a bandstand built for the yearly celebrations. This spectacular archipelago of

islands linked by wooden walkways and steps has been recently created, due to increased sedimentation of the river as a result of Portodemouros reservoir.

Also in Gres near the bridge, in the municipality of Vila de Cruces, you can visit the headquarters of the Xosé Neira Vilas Foundation, located in Casa do Romano. An 18th century farmhouse, it was formerly a hostel for pilgrims continuing their journey to Santiago, after visiting the convent of Carboeiro and the sanctuary of O Corpiño. The Foundation has a library for public use and a small museum displaying fishing apparatus used in the river Ulla and farming equipment used on the nearby land.

Xosé Neira Vilas often welcomes visitors himself, retelling stories about his own experiences in Ponte Ledesma, aptly narrated in his book 'Memorias dun neno labrego' (Memoirs of a rural child). His book is an indispensable guide to traditional Galician society.



The Library and Museum are open Monday to Saturday in summer from 18.00 to 20.00, and in winter from 17.00 to 19.00. Admission is free.







Cira Tower



A Pesqueira in O Xirimbao

## The golden age of the Ulla

Before continuing our journey downstream from bridge to bridge until we reach Gundián, let us first remember the golden days of the river Ulla.

One sign of the abundance of fish in the river Ulla in centuries past is common usage of Pesqueiras to capture many different fish species, as mentioned in many ancient texts. The Pesqueiras can still be seen in certain sections of the river Ulla, often linked to the mills.

There is a document, owned by a family from Padrón, from the year 1121 which mentions the Pesqueiras de Herbón in the river Ulla. In addition, another documented dating from 1514 or 1515 shows data on the properties, channels and Pesqueiras belonging to the Count of Altamira in the vicinity of the Cira tower (Silleda) near Ledesma:

*“des la Ponte Ledesma para çima en lo rio da Ulla*

*muchas canales que teen muitas feytas, que todos son del conde mi señor e non le renden nada, en que se oubese quen por el conde fezesse renderian cada ano mill duzeas d’angias e andorinas [=salmóns novos] e peyxes, e perdense ansy.”*

Five centuries ago then, the wealth of fish in the river was exceptional. However, if we look back to somewhat more recent times, the learned José Andrés Cornide y Saavedra recounts in his memoirs (that detail a trip from A Coruña to Madrid he completed before 1767), the abundance of the trout, salmon, shad and lamprey present in the river Ulla. Among the causes of the current near-total disappearance of species such as salmon, fishermen blame discharges into the river from the Touro mines, the hydroelectric dam at Portodemouros (opened in 1968), untreated polluted water discharged directly into the river, and overfishing - formerly by the use nets and explosives.



Details of the rivers Ulla, Tambre, Xallas and Sar on the Cornide map



Fishermen with salmon in a boat on the Ulla (Courtesy of Museo da Pesca, Casa Suarez)





Woodcut by F. Miranda in the series 'Galicia Pintoresca'  
published in 'La Ilustración Cantábrica' (1882)

## The natural progression of the five bridges

### The train arrives at the bridge of Gundián.

*Take the AC-240 road towards Santiago (Ponte Ulla). We advise going first to Ponte Ulla, and from there to the viewpoint of Gundián, although you might prefer to go to the viewpoint first (N 42° 47'7 .64 ", W 8° 23'35 .27").*

We continue our journey from Ponte Ledesma with the intention of visiting the Gundián viewpoint, which is hidden on the left hand side just at the end of a sharp turn next to the railway bridge. We recommend you go first to Ponte Ulla and head back towards the viewpoint, due to the otherwise dangerous nature of the turn-off. The viewpoint is also the starting point for the hiking trail through the Ulla basin.

This is a great location from which to appreciate the technical challenges involved in completing the two nearby railway bridges. The **AVE bridge**, finished in 2011 and the **Gundián bridge** that opened in 1958. We'll discuss those in more detail later on as our main interest here lies in the geological origins of the legendary **San Xoán da Cova pass**, located at the foot of the bridges. It seems almost miraculous that the Ulla broke the quartz vein, a geological scar produced as the result of a clash

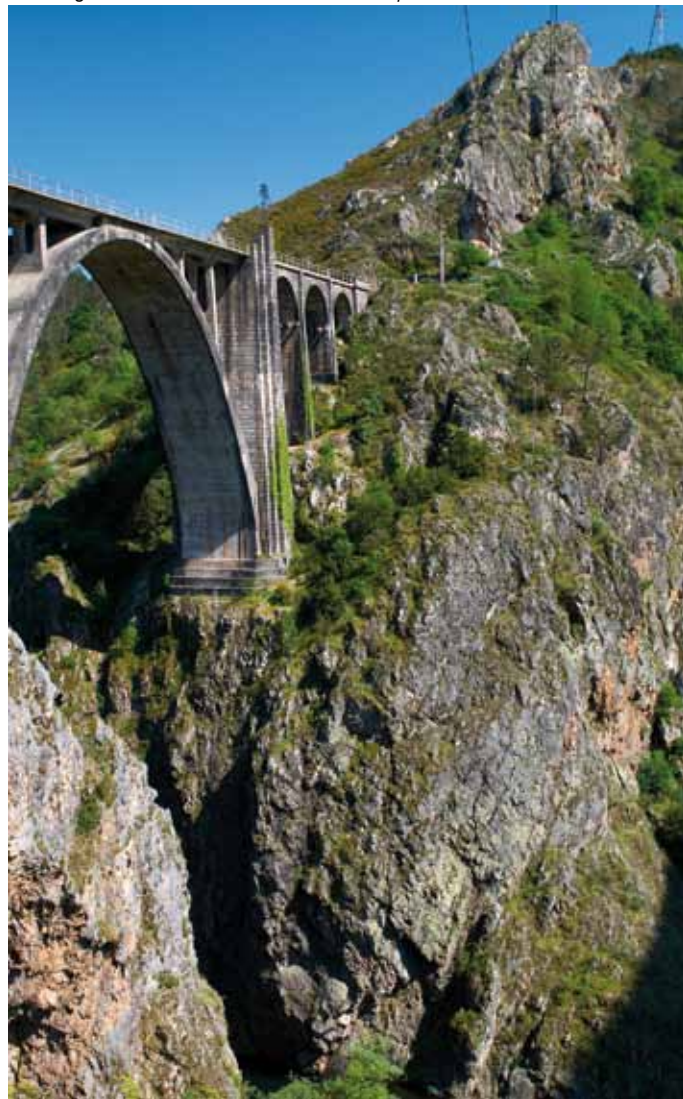
between the Gondwana and Laurasia supercontinents between 365 and 300 million years ago. The size of the vein varies between 40 and 100 meters in width and is approximately 10 miles long (from the Cira tower to the Pico Sacro).

Gundián is on the left bank of the river, and belongs to the province of A Coruña, although it may seem like it ought to belong to Pontevedra like the other lands that surround the river, such as the parish of San Miguel de Castro. However, there is an explanation for this. Gundián belonged to the convent of San Xoán da Cova, which stood on the right bank of the river at the foot of the viewpoint and the old rail road bridge. The convent, which was abandoned, was demolished by the floods of 18<sup>th</sup> February 1571 that also swept away the A Ulla and Sarandon bridges.

On the other side of the river stands the chapel of Nosa Señora do Gundián, which you can access by crossing the old rail road bridge on foot, or by the stone bridge of Ponte Ulla by car. The Chapel is known for hosting a unique night procession in honour of the Virgin that departs from the church of Ponte Ulla on the night of the 7th September, and a special procession (romería) on the 8<sup>th</sup>.



*The bridge of Gundián and San Xoán da Cova's pass*



On the west side of the chapel there is a miraculous spring where the Virgin of Gundián appeared. It is traditional to bring sick young children to the fountain, wash them in the water and leave their garments as an offering to the Virgin.

From the chapel we can climb to the viewpoint of San Miguel de Castro, a half-hour walk. It offers a view of the Pico Sacro mountain and the landscapes of the Ulla valley. At the foot of the old railway bridge, in middle of the river, legends say that there is a cave built by Mouros who lived in the Pico Sacro a few kilometres away. The cave was said to be used to by the Mouros to provide their horses with water. One of the most exceptional experiences our journey has to offer is travelling by kayak or canoe downstream to the San Xoán da Cova's pass and looking up to wonder at the rail road bridge located in the rugged quartz vein.



*The chapel of Gundián*



*The village of Ponte Ulla*



*The church of A Madalena*



## The village of Ponte Ulla

Following the road, after almost a kilometre we get our first glimpses of the houses of Ponte Ulla. It may seem surprising but in a span of around only one kilometre there are no less than five bridges: the two railway viaducts mentioned earlier, the old stone bridge which gives its name to the village, and the bridges of the old road and the motorway joining Santiago to Ourense.

The stone bridge dates from 1835 and was built to replace the boat journey that for many years had linked the two riverbanks. This bridge was built to replace one that had been destroyed in 1708 during a flood. There was in fact an even older bridge, one of medieval origin, that had also been destroyed by a flood in 1571. It is believed that this medieval bridge dated as far back as 1197, and that before that date there was another bridge of Roman origin. What is even more impressive is the technical genius used to cross this ancient natural pass.

Next to the historic Ponte Ulla bridge is the parish church of Santa Maria Madalena, which dates from the Middle Ages and preserves an apse in the Romanesque style. Close to the village there is also a Pazo (a typical example of Galician architecture), the Pazo de Vista Alegre. It was originally built by the Torre family, members of the bourgeoisie in Santiago from in the time of Archbishop Diego Xelmírez. Completed in 1708 with the aim of achieving greater social recognition for the family, it is today used as a restoration workshop.

*Pazo de Vista Alegre*



*O lugar de Ponte Ulla*



TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Length: 12 Km  
Highest point: 134 m  
Lowest point: 36 m  
Difficulty: Media  
Drop: 9,5%  
Duration: 4 hours

	ENVIRONMENT	1	2	3	4	5
	ITINERARY	1	2	3	4	5
	DISPLACEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
	EFFORT	1	2	3	4	5

LEGEND

- Hiking trail
- Roads
- Fishing preserve
- Recreational area
- Museum
- Viewpoint
- Motorway
- Rivers
- Bridge
- Mill
- Pazo
- River activities



A day on the banks of the Ulla  
(PRG-36. Trail of San Xoán da Cova)

We began our journey in a place of extraordinary symbolism: on one side of the rail road bridge that crosses Ulla, on passing Gundián, San Xoán da Cova. Where the stories say the tunnel built by Queen Lupa’s soldiers ended.

Follow the N-525, and in the centre of Ponte Ulla take the AC-240 that takes us to the beginning of our trail starting next to the railway.

The route is well marked but it should be noted that in its first section it is temporarily affected by the AVE construction works. It presents practically no difficulty for the walker because the trail is totally downhill and the path in perfect condition.

The trail goes through the municipality of Vedra on the

left bank of the river. It is somewhat wild in the first few kilometres, but once we reach the Agronovo recreation area it is peaceful.

Along the way we pass by the village of Ponte Ulla with its important monuments, including the church and the manor of Vista Alegre, and subsequently by the recreational areas of Agronovo, Ximonde and finally Cubelas which marks the end of the trail.

During the fishing season, in the early hours of the morning, we can normally see a good number of fishermen trying to capture the precious Ulla salmon. A colourful landscape of willows, alders, laurel, and oaks and help make the journey very pleasant; constantly accompanied by the soundtrack of the river and birdsong.







*Old passenger boat in the Ulla  
(Photo Courtesy of the City of Vedra)*

## The tradition lives on: boats and camellias

*On leaving the village of Ponte Ulla by the AC-240, go towards Pontevea at the first roundabout. In four kilometres there is a turn leading to the Agronovo recreation area (N 42° 45'15 .88 “, W 8° 24'29 .75”), and almost immediately, after about 700 meters a sign indicates the Pazo of Santa Cruz de Ribadulla nearby (N 42° 46'17.44” W 8° 25'33 .53”).*

We now cross a stretch of river where the old traditions are still alive. In the Agronovo recreation area we can revive in the summer months, the times of when the old boats crossed the Ulla. On the other hand in the Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla we can see the beautiful flowering camellia surfacing amongst ponds and ancient trees.

## Boats of the river Ulla \*(weekends of July and August)

There are many ways to cross the river without building a bridge. In the 1960s you could see small boats Ulla sailing down the river at will. This almost forgotten tradition has recently been revived by the recent construction of five boats (four small one for four or five people, and one large for ten people) to serve those people interested in becoming freshwater fishermen for a day.

The history of the boats of the river Ulla is very interesting. In 1571 the bridges of A Ulla and Sarandón collapsed, due to rising water levels. This happened again in 1708 for the same reason. There was no choice other choice but to replace the bridges with boats to cross the river, at six strategic locations (Ponte Ulla, O Vao, As Regas, Sarandón, Cubelas or Covelas and A Dorna). Traffic of goods and people was intense because it was a necessary step on the journey from Santiago to Ourense.

The old Ponte Ulla bridge was reconstructed in the year 1835, and the Sarandón in 1930, eventually causing the disappearance of the boats. In recent years however, boats have been used for the extraction of silt from the river. The boatmen were witness to countless stories, since their boats were natural meeting points, but stone bridges are passed in silence.

Boats are available in the Agronovo recreation area at weekends in July and August between four and eight o'clock in the afternoon. The price is three Euros per hour.

More information is available in Casa dos Peóns, the Vedra Tourist Information Office: 981 512 482 / 669 450 804



*A small boat available for hire in the Agronovo recreational area (Courtesy of the Vedra City Council)*





## The water of the Camellias

Next stop is the lavish and aristocratic Pazo of Ortigueira, better known today as the manor of the Marquis of Santa Cruz de Ribadulla. Ortigueira is the place where the Pazo and the parish church were built. The Pazo was formerly called the Tower of Ortigueira and had been purchased in the early 16th century by a Canon of the Cathedral of Santiago, one Juan Ibáñez de Mondragón. He was responsible for building the church and the first gardens, and the promenade lined by olive trees in the shape of a cross, around the year 1525.

Passing the entrance to the Pazo we encounter an austere exterior, joined to the church for by a striking arch. Next to this arch is the baroque Fonte da Coca. The greatest treasures here are actually around the Pazo: its gardens and park. Designed by Juan Ibáñez de Mondragón and enlarged in the times of Juan Ignacio Armada (who led the Literary Battalion of Compostela in the War of Independence) and later by Ivan Armada, who introduced trees such as Camellia, hitherto little known in Galicia. Today this stately home is included in the Camellia network of Galicia.

We advise visiting a corner of the park with its round pond, woods with solemn and lofty trees of various species.

We'd also recommend visiting the spectacular waterfall in the stream of Tomonde stream, a well-known resting place for the aristocracy. Next to the Fonte da Nogueira, we see the stone benches where Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos wrote the introduction to the appendices to 'Memoria en defensa de la Junta Central' ('A Report on behalf of the Central Board') on political activities in the War of Independence. On staying at the manor house in the spring of 1811 he remarked that they were, "the best days of my life."



**The gardens of the Pazo of Ortigueira are open to visitors at the following times:** weekdays from 09.30 to 13.00, and 15.00 to 20.00. Saturdays from 11.00 to 13.00 and from 16.00 to 20.00, and on Sundays and holidays from 15.00 to 20.00. Entry costs 3 Euros

*Photo Courtesy of the City of Vedra*





## The force of water: the Mills of Raxoi

*Leaving the Pazo, take the N-525 road towards Santiago. After about 3.5km turn left to Raxoi (after passing the sign for Galegos to your right.) The first information board that refers to the Muíños set back from road, so we advise driving slowly so you don't miss it (N 42° 46'17 .44 “, W 8° 25'33 .53 “).*

In the past many mills existed in the river Ulla and its tributaries, taking advantage of the strong currents to

convert grain into flour, a process that was slower but less tiring than doing it by hand. These buildings became meeting points for conversation, for love affairs and parties.

Flour mills such as the one owned by the Counts of Ximonde in San Miguel de Sarandon (Vedra), besides which, upstream, there are Pesqueiras designed to catch salmon, and there is also a type of mill less commonly seen, the Reboredo near Ponte Ulla. This mill has five stones, each for used for a different purpose, for rye, corn,

or wheat and even one for grinding sulphur, which was used for the manufacture of gunpowder. It is also known as a 'Muíño Albeiro', so called because it is where the finest flour was produced.

Many more mills in the tributaries of the main river. For example, the origin of the Gundín brook in O Pico Sacro or St. Cristovo, which is so called because it passes through the vicinity the village of San Cristovo de Merín, where in the past more than sixty mills operated. In the A Pena stream in Raxoi (San Pedro de Vilanova, Vedra) the

Vedra Council has restored four mills and the surrounding areas, and created the information board we suggested visiting above. A functioning mill can be seen by prior appointment.



*Interior of a functioning Mill (Courtesy of Henrique Neira)*

A visit to a one of the working mills of Raxoi can be arranged by calling the Casa dos Peóns, the Vedra Tourist Information Office: 981 512 482 / 669 450 80.







Fishermen on the Sarandón bridge (courtesy of the Museo da Pesca de Casa Suárez)

## Sarandón bridge

Leaving the parking space next to the entrance to the mill information area, we follow the road back and at the junction we first turn left, and then right and head towards the main road leading to Pontevea (AC-241). Later we find a junction with a left turning to Sarandón. The Fishing Museum is next to Ponte Sarandón (N 42° 44'51 .55 “, W 8° 26'56 .52”).

### The low bridge

This bridge is more interesting from a technical point of view, due to the technical difficulties encountered in the construction, than from an aesthetic architectural view. We know that in the year 1180 there was already a bridge in Sarandón crossing the river Ulla, but the present one was completed in 1930 and cost (at the time) 185,000 pesetas. We previously discussed the flood damage in Ponte Ulla in 1571 and 1708, and the use of boats as an alternative means of crossing.

After many difficulties, a new bridge opened in A Ulla in 1835, but the bridge of Sarandón took almost a century more. It is believed that Sarandón old bridge had had six arches and a small chapel dedicated to San Miguel, but the last flood left mere remnants of the abutments and foundations.

Some of the locals still remember that during the construction of the current bridge warning the engineers that it was too low: in times of major floods the river rose almost level with the platform. The design was project was not altered, and the time of the inauguration there was a great

flood. The bridge was not damaged but on many occasions it has been possible to reach the river's surface from the platform with the tip of an umbrella.

### The ‘Curious’ fishing museum

Before crossing the bridge and leaving Vedra behind, we find a small jewel of a museum, the Museo da Pesca. It is part of a small collection of rural buildings known as Casa Suárez. It houses a small collection of objects related the world of fishing there, old images of salmon rods and hooks that are nostalgically remembered by the collector himself, Manuel Suárez.

Among the most interesting pieces are braided silk Hardy fly-reels, bamboo cane rods ringed with agate stone and silk wire, fly reels made a blacksmith mimicking the style of Hardy, and finally with an unused original box of Hardy flies from the 1950's. In the photographic section we can choose from images of the famous baptism of the rods before the start of the Couso season, Franco in Ximonde, fishermen gathered at the headquarters of Ximonde Xeral to give but a few examples.

To arrange a visit to the museum call: 981 512 548, and more information, visit: <http://www.casasuarez.com>

Exhibits in the Museo da Pesca de Casa Suárez





## Two Nobels in Ulla



Researcher Michael Reynolds, cited by Carlos Casares in 'Hemingway in Galicia', recalls Ernest Hemingway's trip to Galicia in 1929. The American author was later to win the 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature.

He visited Galicia with his second wife, Pauline, and stayed in the Swiss

Hotel in Santiago (Mazarelos Square). On the days when he was not writing or editing they would fish in the river Tambre or Ulla.

A letter recovered by Reynolds says that, "on the 12th of August, with new sunglasses, newspapers and a bag full of tomatoes and onions for lunch, they spent the day fishing on the river Ulla, and went as far as the top of the reservoir. On the way back home they used the track that would later become the rail road, they stopped to prepare trout with Parma ham. Then, after getting two punctures

and repairing them by the light of a torch they finally returned to the hotel at a quarter past eleven at night".

While it is interesting that an author like Hemingway was attracted by the rivers of Santiago, it is not so surprising that Camilo José Cela, a connoisseur of the rivers from Iria Flavia mentions, in his book 'El Juego de los Tres Madroños' ('The game of the three tassels'), the "Ulla with its salmon, and the Sar with its path of archiepiscopal and civil legends."

There are frequent references in his works to the rivers Sar and Ulla and their proximity to Iria Flavia, his home town. In 'Café de artistas y otros papeles volanderos' he writes: "Green River Sar of the Archbishop, Deep Ulla that still smells like the golden flower of the gorse."

In 'Mesa Revuelta' he speaks of Iria Flavia saying, "the murmuring Sar and strong Ulla meet where and land ceases to be, and the distant Atlantic's fury is tamed." In 'Cajón Desastre' he refers to the wealth of fish in the two rivers, "Trout jump in the Sar and salmon in the Ulla, in praise of Saint James."

## Ximonde Fishing Preserve

*Retracing our steps we now we take the road to the Ximonde preserve, where the Xunta de Galicia's hatcheries are located. Parking space is very limited and there is no leisure area. In addition, the bridge to cross to the other side has not yet been built, so we ask for a little patience.*

Of all the places that attract fishermen on this side of the Ulla, the Ximonde preserve is possibly the most beautiful. In addition, this preserve is one of the three in which you can try to capture the King of the river, our friend the salmon.

Ximonde fishing preserve is the farthest from the sea, and resting salmon are easily found, possibly due to a natural homing instinct, or to the existence of the dam by the old mill of the Pazo de Ximonde, which is today a hatchery belonging to the Xunta de Galicia.

In any case, we presented with one of the most productive fishing preserves in Galicia, and even dare we say, in the whole of the north of Spain.

Blessing of rods in Ximonde in the 1950s



Juanito de Ramiro with a gaff and salmon (Courtesy of the Museo da Pesca de Casa Suárez)





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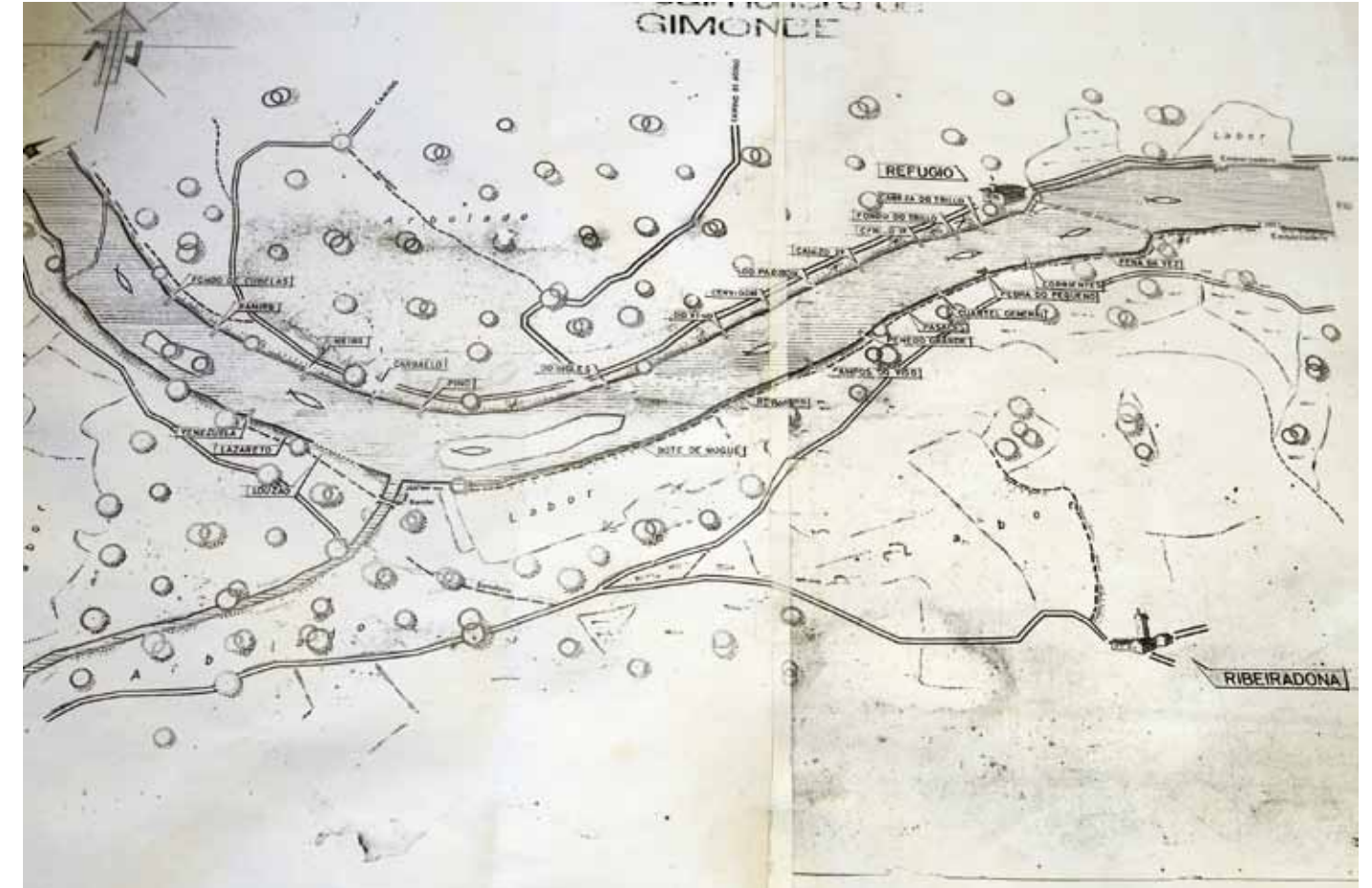
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In the second half of the twentieth century, a suspension bridge was built so that fishermen could cross to the other

side, to the parishes of Ribeira and Paradelas. However the bridge was later closed following decades due to the poor state of repair. The floods of the winter of 2000 eventually destroyed the bridge, and finally in 2010 the Ministry of Development approved the construction of a new one almost 90 meters long. The new bridge should be completed in 2012, becoming a new attraction for this salmon preserve.

It is also a sanctuary for reo fishermen, especially at the lowest part of the preserve, where the name Pozo de Venezuela refers to the ease of the catch (likened to the ease of earning money in South America). In contrast, the name Posto Inglés refers to the story of an Englishman who drove his car right onto the riverbanks to fish for salmon, but nobody else has ever had success at this spot. This was not an exceptional event, as Portuguese and English fishermen came every year to the banks of the Ulla, as you will see in a later section.

Today this space is open to multiple entertainment possibilities, such as walks along the fishermen's trails, mountain biking, or trotting horses.



*Map of the Ximonde Preserve in the 1950s*



## Pontevea: resistance to the invader

*Retracing our steps to get back to the main means of communication, the AC-241 highway, we now turn left towards Pontevea. We can take a detour a kilometre before this left turn in the direction of Burgas de Xermade, or continue to the Pontevea bridge, arriving there on foot walking for ten minutes by the riverbank*

## The bridge of the town of Burga

The six-arched Pontevea Bridge, built between the fourteenth and fifteenth century and rebuilt in the eighteenth century, crosses the river Ulla to connect the parish of San Cristovo de Reis with the Estradense of Santa María Couso; land that was formerly a Roman road crossing would probably have their bridge, Pons Vellegia (Pontevea)

Apparently one of the medieval arches of the bridge was destroyed in 1809 to hinder the passage of Napoleon's troops and was rebuilt years later, in 1822. It seems that the battle was a constant reconstruction of the arch of the bridge for timber the French always met with resistance the local side. Perhaps the smartest seen Ponte events Ledesma.

At the end of the twentieth century, a new bridge was constructed beside the old, the intention being to divert

vehicles away from the old bridge, leaving that for pedestrians. Until recently however, cars still circulated by the old stone bridge causing constant congestion problems.

A few hundred meters upstream from Pontevea, in Xermade, we can find on the banks of the Ulla river a hot spring with a pool which is believed to have been built in the eighteenth century. This spring is still used to cure skin problems, and some people also attribute to the water special properties that can help with rheumatism, liver and kidney complaints, and some eye problems.

The waters are sulphurous and emerge from the ground at a temperature of fifteen degrees. At the shore are the remains of a bath house designed in 1932 with the intention of attracting tourists interested in the healing properties of the spring. Whether you decide to come on foot along the river bank, or drive back via the diversion of Xermade, a visit seems almost obligatory due to the uniqueness of the small pool and the medicinal properties of the waters.

This seemingly small spring hides a rather unique history that we will continue below.

## From Spring to Spa

The famous Fonte da Burga, located in Xermade is silent witness to the small spa town of Pontevea. Guests enjoyed these sulphurous waters comfortably accommodated in a home environment. Its reputation among outsiders began during the eighteen century thanks to an abbot of the monastery of San Martiño de Ribadavia, who was



The Pontevea bridge





People bathing in Burga de Xermeade in 1912 (Background Blanco-Cicerón. Museo do Pobo Galego)

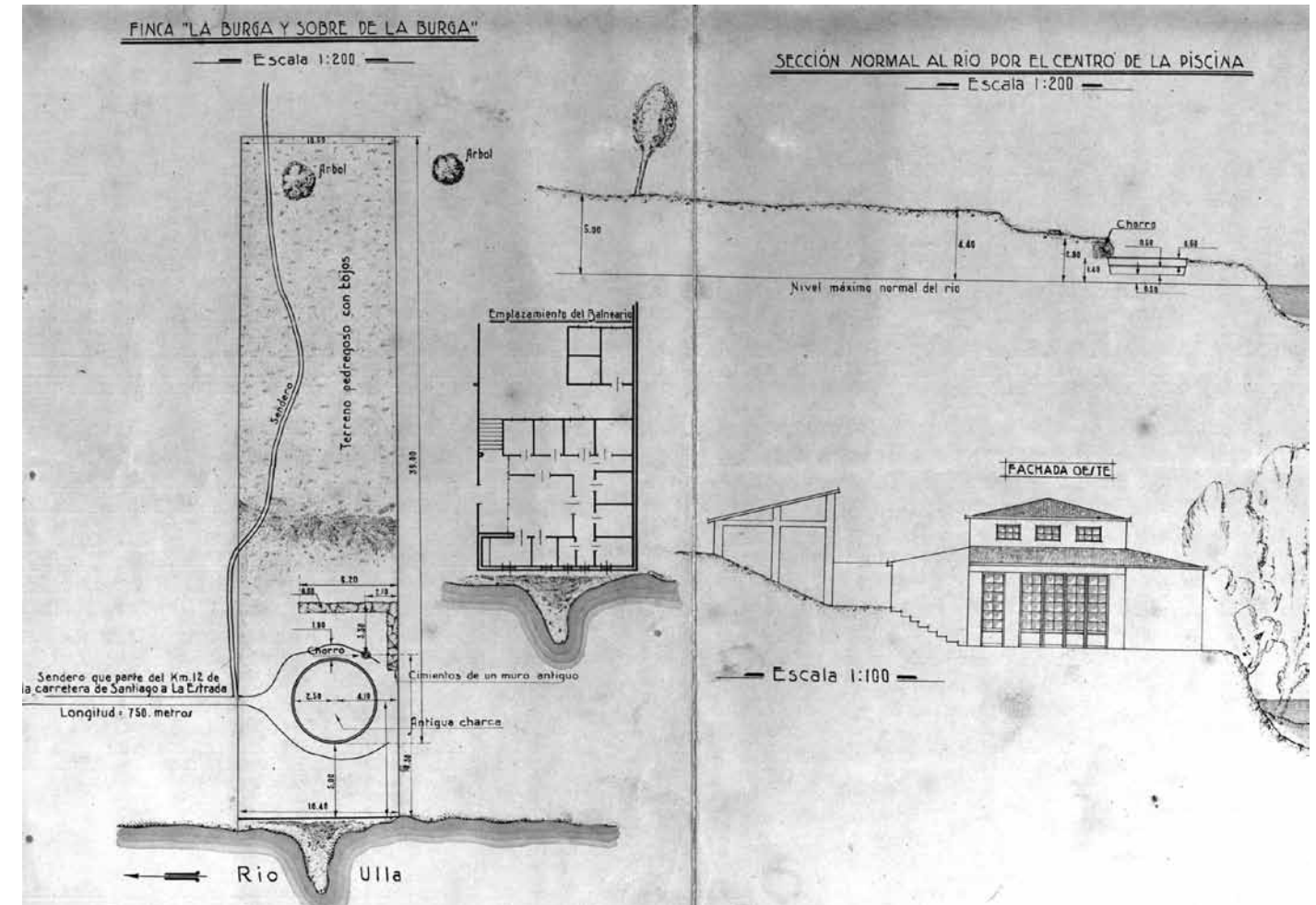


Burga de Xermeade, present day

suffering from a leg ulcer. The problem was so severe as to be life-threatening, so he decided to go to Santiago where in all likelihood the leg would be amputated. In the midst of this dilemma and in the course of his journey, he encountered an old tavern and inn in Pontevea where he stopped to rest his continuously painful leg.

When he arrived, the locals recommended that he bathe in the water of Burga. Feeling the effects of the water almost immediately, the abbot decided to extend his stay. When he eventually reached Santiago for the amputation, the doctors discovered that operation was unnecessary – the leg had already healed. The following summer the abbot returned to Pontevea and financed the construction of a circular stone pool. The pool had space for 24 bathers, the goal was for everyone, including the poor, to enjoy the miraculous properties of the water.

In 1932 the governor of the province closed Burgas allegedly for public health reasons, although it was perhaps really done in the interest of the land owner for the construction of a new health spa, the “Balneario de Aguas Sulfuro-Sódicas de Las Bargas”. The neighbours were opposed to this project because it would limit their access to the spring. In fact, the famous Galician architect José Caridad Mateo had to visit the site under the protection of the Guardia Civil. The spa was granted a license in 1936, but the only trace of this unfinished dream are the building plans made by one of the best architects of the era of the Second Spanish Republic.



Architectural plans for the spa, the “Balneario de Aguas Sulfuro-Sódicas de Las Bargas” by José Caridad Mateo.



## The boundary of O Xirimbao or Couso

*At the centre of Pontevea take the main road in the direction of Santiago. The first left turn after leaving Pontevea leads to O Xirimbao. Follow the signs to enter an ample space for relaxation and leisure.*

The fishing preserve of O Xirimbao covers a stretch of more than half a mile from the river Ulla in the parish teense of Reis, while the other side of the river is the parish of estradense Couso, so the preserve is known as O Xirimbao or Couso. A newly restored suspension footbridge links the two banks, and both are appropriate for hiking due to

the existence of paths made for fishermen. There is also a recreational area teense? enabled in carballeira next in Estradense is the feast of the climb the first Sunday in August, as these fish are more abundant trout and salmon also can be found in these waters.

Years ago catching salmon was relatively simple, as they stopped at the small dam across the river to recharge before continuing their race against the current. Today, since the construction of scale fishing, the salmon comes to preserve Ximonde in forty-eight hours, witnessed by the fact presence of fish with sand flea, which shows his recent departure of the marine environment. The positions

of Preserve fish and wells are: A Presa (the beginning of the preserve), Purgatorio, O Trabadoiro, A Croeira, O Lazareto, Salto do Can, and Pedra de Fernández.

In them are the positons of ‘Purgatorio Pequeno’, Purgatorio Grande, O Canal, Pedra de Cervera, Pozo de Cervera, O Trabadoiro, A Croeira, O Lazareto, Posto do Can, Curva das Mimosas, Souto de Antón, O Lampreiro, and Pedra de Fernández, that marks the end of the preserve.

On the Estradense side of the river near the suspension bridge is the Casa Forte of Maíndo, dating from the

sixteenth century. It was the residence of the Captain General of the Kingdom of Galicia, Pedro de Cisneros and was later owned by the Counts of Ximonde, who possessed some important Pesqueiras salmon in the river Ulla-Couso had others Maíndo- which are still in the early decades of the twentieth century used to catch lamprey and eel. A short way beyond the Casa Forte you can visit the parish church of Santa María de Couso.



*The O Xirimbao suspension bridge*





## The sportsmen of the salmon

At the same time as the emergence of native sports fishermen in the early nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon travellers attracted by the possibilities for fishing in Galicia began to arrive. In particular, those lacking in purchasing power or without landholdings in the rivers where the salmonids ran often decided to travel to Europe in search of the famous king of the river, the salmon.

The sport's top fishing destinations were the northern rivers, especially in Norway and Sweden, but demand for river havens was seemingly endless. It opened a new road has been opened for travellers 'journal in the pocket' as George Borrow, that despite not participating in the fishing world, had already made this land known to the English. Of greater interest is the book by English writer C. Gasquoin Hartley on the role of women accompanying their husbands on a fishing trip. This paragraph from her book (published in London in 1911), vividly illustrates the glorious past of the three major rivers that appear in this guide:

*"The Ulla, the Tambre, the Xallas and the Eume are all fishing rivers comparable to the best rivers in England, Scotland and Ireland. Salmon can be found in many rivers. There are twaite shad, lamprey, barbel, bream, scales - a kind of cross between a sapwood and a chub, and other less fine fish."*

In this unique sports fishing fever, and in the hands of these sportsmen of the new-style salmon (and sometimes

trout), we note the arrival of imported fishing equipment, especially for the better-off. We still remember those precious instruments: handmade bamboo fly rods, Greenhart rods, reels and tropical timber, and the colourful flies used for salmon fishing, which back then were already objects of worship.

Other renowned Anglo-Saxons such as Ernest Hemingway and Camilo José Cela Trulock (whose father was Galician and mother was of English and Italian origin), continued the process of placing the rivers Ulla, Tambre and Xallas on the sports-fishing world map. However, this process was greatly damaged both by the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period, and these foreign tourist-fishermen now favour other destinations.

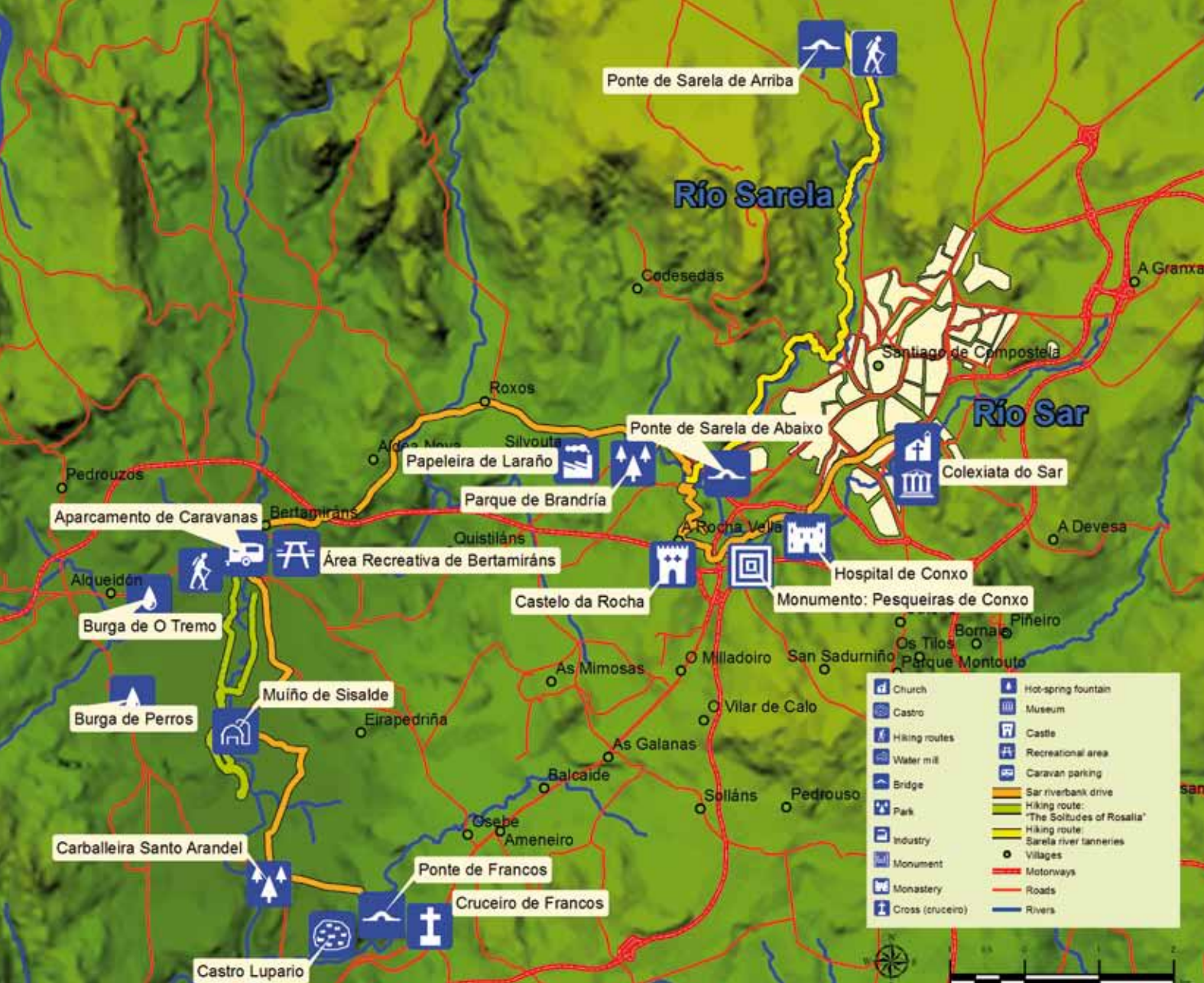
In 1951, partly to reorganise the usage of the river, a group of preserves of the Ulla were created by the Servicio Nacional de Pesca Fluvial y Caza that were complementary to those created by the Dirección General de Turismo. These new preserves were more focused on outsiders for fisheries productivity and conditioning space. The Ximonde shelter, bridge or Xirimbao and other sports fishing infrastructure.

The 1960s and 70s were the culmination of tourism on the part of the Anglo-Saxon contingent, and were times of big fish and people dressed and equipped as dream could not tell. Following this high point, lack of investment in the river, the dam of Portodemouros and new pollutants associated with mining activities put an end to this quality tourism that had meant so much for the land of Ulla.



\*Photos courtesy of the Museo da Pesca, Casa Suárez





## 2. Between the rivers Sar and Sarela is Santiago de Compostela

The saying, “between the rivers Sar and Sarela, is Santiago de Compostela”, will help you remember the two historically important rivers of the Galician capital, where numerous mills once stood. Rosalía de Castro, who published a book of poems entitled “On the banks of the Sar”, also mentions them in ‘Follas Novas’ where the poem ‘Farewell’ (Adiós) can also be found:

*Goodbye! Mountains and meadows, churches and bells*

*Goodbye! Sar and Sarela, covered in intertwined branches*

*Goodbye! Cheerful Vidán, mills and hollows,  
Conxo the cloister of the sad and placid solitudes<sup>4</sup>*

The source of the river Sar, according to the Madoz dictionary, originates in the western part of the Meixonfrío

heights and later joins the waters that run through southern Conxo, near the former convent. In Vidán the river Sar is joined by its tributary the Sarela: also known as Toad river (Río dos Sapos), which itself originates in O Romaño and flows by the former convent of San Lourenzo of Trasouto, today a pazo<sup>5</sup>.

After leaving Conxo and San Lourenzo, where the Sarela and Sar meet, you can see the remains of the legendary archbishop’s fortress of A Rocha Forte, excavated in recent years and of which only its foundations remain. It was destroyed by the Irmandiños<sup>6</sup> in 1467. Around 1472 the Archbishop Alonso de Fonseca built a castle in the Pico Sacro (now also disappeared) with stone from A Rocha Forte and from the tower of Ximonde near Ponte Sarandón (which is the possible origin of today’s pazo).





"The river Sar, beloved of Xelmírez, Rosalía and Cela"

## A path of archiepiscopal and civil legends.

For Camilo José Cela<sup>7</sup> the river Sar is a path of archiepiscopal and civil legends. Santiago's urban expansion neglected a legendary river, the Sar. For this reason, we suggest taking a journey downstream, where the surrounding patrimonial assets related to this river are almost more important than the stream itself. The inclusion of this trail in our guide is a way of redressing the balance; a way of restoring the memory of the Sar and highlighting its beauty, whilst showing the cultural heritage around Galician rivers.

Here we go...

### The Collegiate Church of Santa María Real do Sar

*Situated in the Compostelan neighbourhood of O Sar, on Campo do Sar street (42°52'23.88"N8°32'7.69"O)*

During Archbishop Diego Xelmírez's time, Santiago was at the forefront of Europe. Proof of this was the pursuit of metropolitan status for the Church of Santiago in 1120, in order to achieve a position of privilege similar to those of Jerusalem and Rome.

Archbishop Diego Xelmírez was the founder of the St. Augustine monastery (convento de San Agustín) and he also consecrated the Santa María do Sar church, fulfilling the will of his friend Munio Alfonso, who died on June 26th 1136, and who had bought a large estate on the

banks of the River Sar and ordered the construction of the buildings. Xelmírez allowed the Church of Santiago canons who wanted to retire and lead a normal life there, to do so without losing the privileges attached to their titles.

Centuries later, the monastery became the Collegiate Church of Santa María Real do Sar. Part of its Romanesque cloister still remains. Another attraction when visiting the church are its tilted columns, supported from the outside by strong buttresses built between the 17th and 18th centuries. On some occasions when the Sar river floods, the Collegiate Church is affected. There is also a small museum next to the church.

In this area there are plans to build a nature walk to join the Carlomagno (in As Fontiñas) and Eugenio Granell (A Pontepedriña) parks. The project will also include a connexion to the City of Culture (Ciudad de la Cultura) park, known as Bosque de Galicia, which is currently under construction. This latter park will recreate the traditional Galician forests.

It is possible to visit the church, the cloister, the sacristy and the collection of liturgical objects and documents in the small museum. Open daily (except Sunday evenings) from 10.00 to 13.00 and from 16.00 to 19.00 in winter and until 20.00 in summer. Tickets cost 1€.





Conxo fish-hatcheries monolith.

## From the fishes of Conxo to the Fortress of A Rocha Forte

*The district of Conxo (N 42°51'44.95", W 8°33'22.33") gave name to a former municipality annexed to Santiago. We recommend using a a GPS to find the fortress which is located at the following coordinates: N 42°51'39.03", W 8°34'23.79", in the village of A Rocha Forte.*

Among the activities of the seemingly omnipotent Xelmírez, it is worth mentioning the founding of the Church of Santa María de Conxo and the surrounding houses. "The History of Compostela" mentions that in 1129 he established a nunnery there. The book mentions that the archbishop:

*"... Stimulated by divine love and wishing to build in the area, he planted, where there were no sign of trees before, an orchard of apple and cherry trees and all types of trees that are grown in these lands to produce fruit. In the same stream [Sar] flowing through the confines of the church, as we often hear, he ordered built fish hatcheries so that, when it was not possible to find an alternative supply of fish, the nuns who lived in that place have use of them."*

A monolith erected in 1952 in the Rúa do Torrente reminds us of the pioneering initiative of Xelmírez, but does not mention that the hatcheries had been built for the nuns, instead it explains that:

*"...In these parts of the river Sar he ordered in the year 1129 a fish hatchery built so the river waters provided an important wealth to the poorer classes..."*

Although a nursery or fish hatchery is commonly referred to in the translations, it is the cause of some controversy, because if correct, the hatchery mentioned on the monolith would be one of the oldest in Western Europe. The Latin text in the 'Compostelana' says 'vivaria piscium' (HC, I, 21). According to the 'Medii Aevi Lexicon latinitatis' by Brepols (a medieval Latin-French dictionary) the noun 'vivarium' has two meanings: 1. verger. 2. vivier. 'Verger' is vegetable garden, but 'vivier' is literally hatchery/nursery. So if we believe that a fish hatchery is actually mentioned here, it would have been something different the current idea of the term; i.e. not a fish farm, but perhaps just a small nursery. The convent of Benedictine nuns was later on inhabited by Mercedarian monks and today houses the renowned Conxo psychiatric hospital.

The site where the castle of A Rocha Forte was built is quite surprising as it is at the bottom of a valley and on the banks of a river like the Sar. The location is explained by the need to control the entry of goods and taxes to the city from Noia and Padrón; the latter part of the Portuguese way. From the military point of view it was the first point of defence against city invasions from the Ría de Arousa. Let's remember that the Apostle James disciples left their stone boat tied up on an Roman altar in Padrón. Therefore, this mythical journey highlights the possibility of sailing upstream, first via the Ulla and then by the Sar.

This castle is also known as "Os Churruchaos". It is a symbol of the church's power and was built in 1240 by Juan Arias as the residence of the archbishop and the cathedral chapter. In 1320 it witnessed the first uprising of the "bourgeoisie" by Alfonso Suárez de Deza, which ended

Picture of an assault on a castle in the middle ages



A Rocha Forte castle





with his execution along with ten other distinguished Compostelan men in the castle courtyard. It was almost destroyed in the Irmandiños wars<sup>8</sup> and some of its parts used in the construction of other buildings.

For this reason, we should visit this castle to see the remains of medieval castle with a keep in the centre. Only part of the side walls remain upright, but there is an excavation and restoration project to find out more about this unique monument, and to give visitors an understanding of the site.

### From a paper mill to a hotel

*Leave A Rocha Forte and follow the main road to Santiago, then take the first right turn. Once on the main road to Noia (AC-543), you will see at the first roundabout a white warehouse with the name Papelera de Brandía (Brandía Paper Mill), turn left following the sign for the Quinta da Auga hotel (N 42°52'11.75", W 8°34'57.08").*

After crossing Conxo and the lands that dominated the ancient archiepiscopal fortress of A Rocha Forte, the Sar river takes us to where once stood the Laraño paper mill, next to the quiet and unknown park of Brandía. A 17th century building that, apparently, was the largest factory

in Galician pre-industrial times.

Nicolás de Santamarina started building it around 1792, on the right bank of the river Sar. Next to it, in the early 19th century, another factory of plain paper was established. The complex founded by Santamarina housed the paper industry until 1834, producing up to six thousand paper reams annually.

However, by 1847 it was no longer listed as such in the Madoz dictionary. It is known that after that, it hosted a fulling mill<sup>9</sup>, a sawmill, a brewery and finally an ice factory that operated until the 1940s, when it was abandoned. Its facilities and annex land became property of the Brandía Paper Mill company, which built a modern paper mill near the old building. In 2003 the building was bought to be transformed into a hotel.

Today it is the luxurious Quinta da Auga Hotel. In addition to accommodation and restaurant areas it has a modern spa. Nearby, the modern paper industry is still situated, thereby continuing an activity that began in these lands more than two centuries ago. This is a good example of cultural heritage recovery in the environment of the river, as part of the revitalization of rural areas.



Brandía park

Laraño's paper mill





Recreational area of Regueiro dos Pasos

## Bertamiráns recreational area

*Follow the road to Noia (AC- 543). You will find the recreational area (N 42°51'40.65", W 8°38'51.34") just before entering Bertamiráns. Continue on the road and take the first left turn after the roundabout to Ortoño-Casalonga (AC300). In the Val de Seara housing development turn left at the roundabout towards the mill of Sisalde; the mill is located in a small recreational area just before reaching Sisalde.*

After being joined by the Sarela, the river Sar crosses Ames on its way to Padrón; there it meets the river Ulla (as its main tributary). In Ames, in the parish of Ortoño, in Bertamiráns, there is a recreational area on the banks of the Os Pasos stream (a tributary of the river Sar). This area includes an old mill and a restored lavadero<sup>10</sup>. At the end of the recreational area the stream joins the river Sar.

This recreational area is the ideal location for those adventurous people who travel by caravan and want to experience the trails suggested by the book 'Downstream, a journey to dream of'. This caravan park offers all the amenities of a small village such as Bertamiráns.

If you want to relax in the parish of Os Ánxeles, (in the municipality of Brión one kilometre from Bertamiráns), is a spa at the Hotel Balneario de Compostela, formerly known as Balneario do Tremo. The spa, with its sulphurous, bi-carbonated, silicate and fluoride waters, is recommended for skin problems, respiratory and rheumatic diseases, and even for fighting stress. Alternatively in the Perrós stream, between Soigrex and Estrar there is a spring of iron-rich mineral waters known as Augas Ferras.

Once we have left Bertamiráns we go towards the countryside so imagined and loved by the poet Rosalía de Castro:

*Paseniño, paseniño,  
vou pola tarde calada,  
de Bastavales camiño...  
"Cantares Galegos" (1881)*

Before arriving in Bastavales we stop to see another example of the industrial heritage of traditional Galician society: the mill of Sisalde. Part of a small recreational area, this mill has two millstones for grinding corn and a



channel that collects water directly from the river. Here the stream runs quietly giving a false sense of calm which in winter is disturbed by the floods that inundate much of the valley.

The river Sar continues to guide our steps. This river, originating in Compostela, and its many tributaries join the river Ulla near Padrón. It is possible to fish, trout, lamprey eel, Iberian Nase, European plaice, although fishermen complain of water pollution and demand that discharges are eliminated from untreated waters.

This problem is very old. Some of the leather factories near Santiago were built in the 18th and 19th centuries

on the banks of the rivers Sar, but most on the Sarela, initiating a process of degradation of their waters which combined with other sources of pollution makes it impossible to speak of the orchard of Sar. Even so, the ecological importance of the surroundings designates it as Site of Community Importance (SCI) including it in the Natura Network 2000; as well as the fluvial system of the Ulla-Deza, which we mentioned at the beginning of this guide.

We should also visit in Padrón the castle of Queen Lupa, the first stop of the Apostle St. James's disciples during their search for a burial place for their master.



*The Mill of Sisalde*





The Bridge of Francos

## Among pilgrims and “mouros”

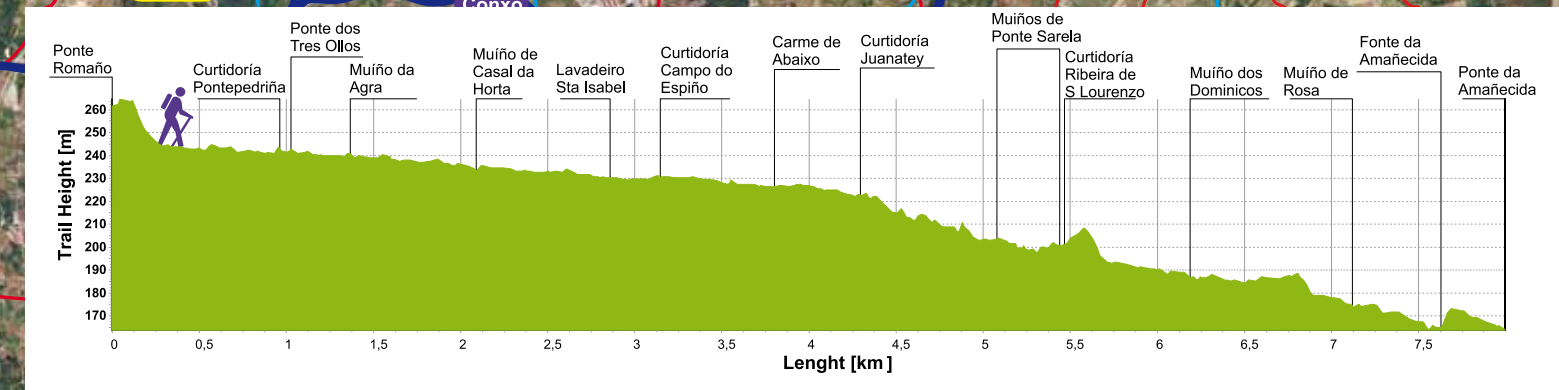
*After leaving the Mill of Sisalde continue for a bit on the main road until the AC-300, then turn right. Continue straight until a left turn to Chave da Ponte. On the way down, on the left side you will see the famous Ponte de Francos (The Bridge of Francos) next to the Portuguese Way. This is the best place to park the car before hiking to the Castro Lupario.*

In Rúa de Francos, in the parish of St Xoán de Calo (Teo) there is a medieval bridge on the old road to Santiago (possibly intended for pilgrims) known as Ponte dos Mouros or Ponte de Francos. It has a unique 4.5 metre granite arch and was used to cross the Tinto river, a river Sar tributary. Not far from the bridge stands the cruceiro (cross) de Rúa de Francos dated from the 14th century, which apparently helped to signal the old Xacobeian route - the Portuguese Way from Iria Flavia to Santiago. One of the oldest and prettiest cruceiros that will see in Galicia on our return journey.

Nearby, on the border between Teo, Brión, and Rois, is the the Castro of Francos or Castro Lupario, where Antonio López Ferreiro<sup>11</sup> places the capital of amaeos, the people who inhabited the region of A Amaia, and where the city of Santiago would later be founded. Also nearby there was a Roman road that connected to the main one in San Fins de Sales (Vedra), just before arriving in the Pico Sacro.

Some historians believe that in this Castro there was a Roman villa, and even a garrison of the VI Legion, covering the old Gallaecia, as Roman bricks were found. A head carved in stone was also found during excavations, and is now kept in Santiago's Pilgrimage Museum. In the Middle Ages and part of the Modern era a construction known by the name of Torre do Sixto was located in its centre.





Compostela produced high-quality shoe soles which

In the last leg of our trail we will come across yet another tannery known as San Lourenzo. This last tannery before the medieval bridge marks the end of our trail.





*San Lourenzo Tannery*



*Castro Lupario*



### TRAIL DESCRIPTION

Length: 7,3 Km  
Highest point: 31 m  
Lowest point: 19 m  
Difficulty: Easy  
Drop: 1,8%  
Duration: 2 hours

### LEGEND

Hiking trail

Roads

Bridge

Mill

Motorway

Rivers

Riverbank forest

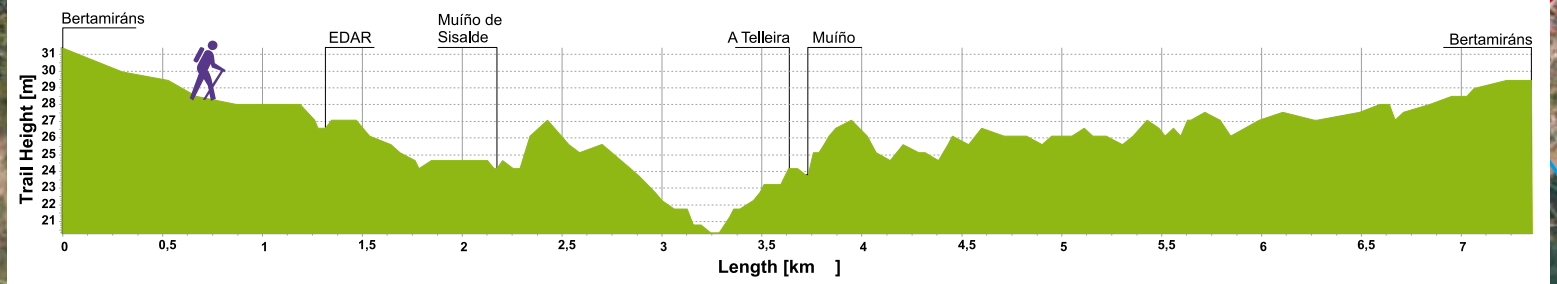
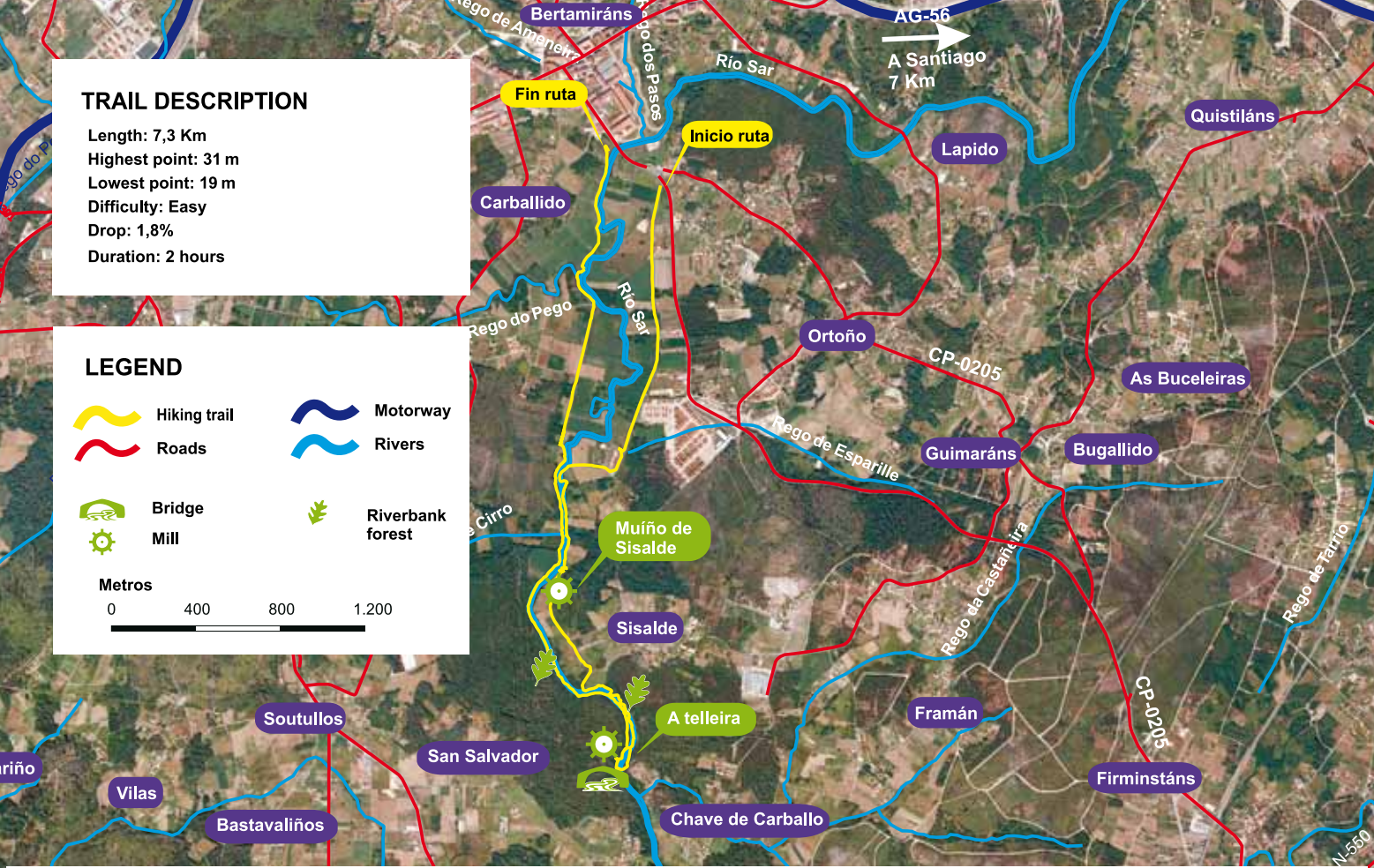
Metros

0

400

800

1.200



## Sar Trail: The Solitudes of Rosalía

The trail starts in Bertamiráns (Ames), at the entrance of the village, on the old Santiago to Noia road. From here, head south to the confluence of the Os Pasos stream with the river Sar. Cross the bridge and head left 250 meters to a large panel that marks the beginning of the trail.

This trail leads us first to the parish of Ortón (Ames) through the farmland of the Amaía valley. Once past the power station the road bends around to the right to follow the riverbank. The best time to do this trail is the early morning or late afternoon when the sun is low, piercing through the leaves of the willows and alders creating endless contrasts of light and shadow on the many shades of green seen in the vegetation.

Follow a narrow path to reach the mill of Sisalde, which has two wheels for grinding corn and a canal that draws water directly from the river. Here the river normally runs lazily, giving a false sense of calm that is often broken in the rainy winters, with floods that inundate much of the valley. The wooden bridges suffer the consequences of

flooding and it is often impossible to use them, forcing us to take a small detour to return to main path.

The section that is best preserved, from the environmental point of view, is the one to the south, after the mill of Sisalde. This area has the status of SCI (Site of Community Importance) within the Ulla-Deza fluvial system. On the riverbanks we see the characteristic vegetation of riparian forests with willows, alders, and birches, in the more humid and flooded lands, and additionally a small carballeira (oak forest) and chestnut trees.

Shortly after Sisalde (700 meters), continue through the lands of Bastavales (Brión) mentioned by Rosalía in her famous poem. In a place known as A Telleira cross the river using the bridge and return by the left bank. This walk will show us a new perspective of the river Sar (from the other bank) and little by little we reach the end of the route in Bertamiráns, just a few meters from where we started it.





*When the Chernobyl catastrophe took place, the river Tambre descended as pretty as a god from a mountain and I woke up (O día de Chernobyl, o Tambre baixaba fermoso como un deus da montaña e eu acordei de min)<sup>12</sup>*

### 3. The river Tambre: Slow & solemn among the trees

The Tambre is another great river, and can be seen as a water course far removed from human interference. Unlike the Ulla, which enjoys the communication trails near the riverbanks, the Tambre's undeveloped banks make it more difficult to enjoy its slow and calm atmosphere among the trees as we journey downstream.

However, the Tambre has one great advantage in the summer season. The river is calmer, creating pools of water suitable for swimming. Therefore, in addition to all the possibilities shown already in the Tambre section, a visit to one of its river beaches such as Chaián, Tapia or Ponte Maceira should be considered almost essential for those seeking to discover a different side to the rivers.

#### The river Tambre, from Sobrado to Ponte Sigüeiro.

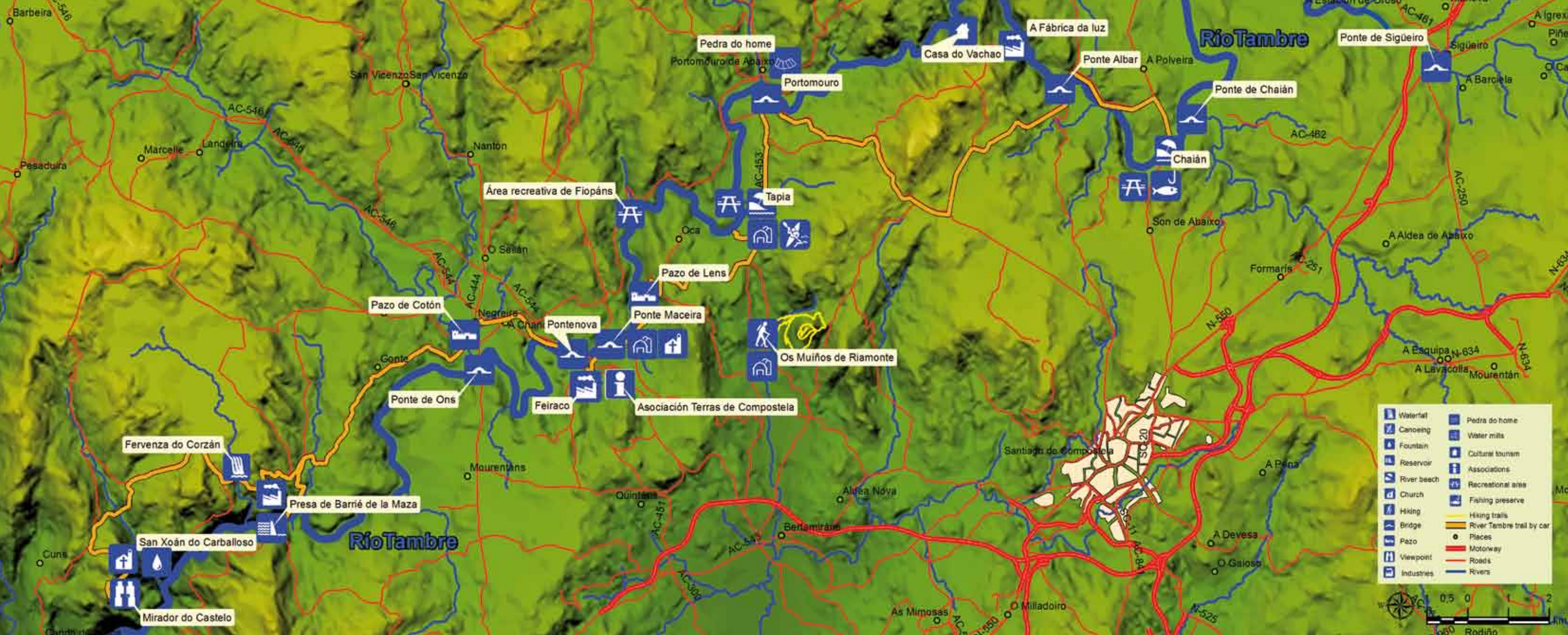
Our first stop will only be in our imagination due to the difficulty to travel from Chaián to Sigüeiro. But first, let

us mention the source of the river Tambre in the Sobrado convent pool, into which the fountains of As Pías and O Bocelo run. The Tambre's course from there to its mouth in the Atlantic ocean takes more than one hundred miles. The river reaches Compostela with a substantial water level. It then crosses Ponte Sigüeiro and joins the parishes of A Barciela to Oroso, the latter giving its name to the neighbouring municipality and where in spring the trout festival is held.

The bridge is part of the English Way used by British pilgrims travelling from A Coruña to Compostela. Construction started in the 13th century originally in the Romanesque style and it was later finished in the 14th century in Gothic style, with a single arch. Centuries ago there was a chapel dedicated to San Blas and Santa Catalina nearby on the riverbanks.

Some say that the bridge was built by order of the feudal lord Fernán Pérez de Andrade “the good”, as it had a stone showing the Andrade's Coat of Arms. Father Sarmiento<sup>13</sup>







noticed the stone in one of his trips through Galicia and it is now preserved in the Archaeological Museum of the Castle of Santo Antón (A Coruña).

The Sigüeiro bridge was the scene of key battles in the liberal uprising of 1846, led by Miguel Solís<sup>14</sup>. On the 8th April that year a battle took place in the vicinity between the liberal troops and those loyal to the king.

## Chaián, leisure area and fishing preserve

*From Santiago take the road to A Coruña (N-550), and at the Meixonfrío roundabout do a full circle to take the service road and a few meters later head right. Go through Meixonfrío and the Tambre industrial estate and without leaving the road to Trazo, continue through the village of Son of Abaixo and finally arrive in Ponte Chaían (N 42°56'52.58", W 8°31'32.61").*

### Where the escaló (*Squalius carolitertii*) transforms from beggar to king

The Chaián river beach is the closest one to the capital of Galicia. It is ten kilometres from Santiago, and when the rail road from Santiago to A Coruña was inaugurated in 1943, many families used the train and got off at Verdía (also in the municipality of Santiago) to get to the beach (about a 1.5km from the Chaían).

On the Chaián bridge the two riverbanks, one from Compostela and one from the parish of Chaían (Trazo) are equipped as recreational areas with picnic, parking

and sports zones. Near the bridge there are small river islands and on the Compostela bank there is also a shelter for fishermen. In the river close to this shelter there is a monument to a renowned fisherman by the name of Ángel González Moure (Kías). This recreational area is also a fishing preserve and in July the Festa do Escalo takes place here. This festival includes a fishing contest in which dozens of fishermen are involved, taking advantage of the fishing preserve between the mouth of the Ponte Vilariño stream and Ponte Alvar.

In this recreation and leisure area you can relax or follow

the hiking trail from the water-treatment plant of Chaían (turn right on the road to Santiago after 1 km) to Ponte Alvar. There is an almost unique opportunity to appreciate the riparian forest as we pass through the Gatofero bridge and imagine from the name Barqueiros (boatman), how people used to cross the river near Ponte Vilar to end in Ponte Alvar, our next destination.

A curiosity: the humble boga (*Pseudocondostroma duriense*) in the Tambre waters is called Escalo, even though this word is commonly used to name the fish *Squalius carolitertii*. These fishes are differentiated by

the food they eat; the common boga grazes for algae and prefers calm waters, and in the Chaían preserve it coexists with trout.

One of the most amazing views in this environment is the great number of *Ephemera danica*<sup>15</sup> (mayfly), one of the largest aquatic insects in Galicia. During the months of May and June a spectacular variety of fish and birds (particularly swallows and wagtails) can be seen.



Chaián recreational area





Monument of a Fisherman in Chaián

## Ponte Alvar and the legend of the castle

*The following places are hard to reach and may appeal less to the casual traveller. For this reason we only give the coordinates for those interested in exploring. Ponte Alvar (N 42° 57'40.34", W 8°33'32.76"), The Light Factory (N 42°58'15.84", W 8°34'22.10"), and the O Vachao<sup>16</sup> house (N 42°58'27.89", W 8°35'17.79").*

Ponte Alvar, on the road from Santiago to Trazo, has five arches and was modified and extended in the 20th century. The bridge joins the parishes of St. Xoán de Fecha (Santiago) and St. Cristovo of Xavestre (Trazo). Through this fluvial site of granite stones goes the Santiago way from Bergantiños. This area is also a fishing preserve. Eugenio Carré Aldao mentions, in the 'General Geography of the Kingdom of Galicia', the existence of a castle in the mountains of A Pica, near the bridge:

*"Dominating the bridge and the riverbanks there stood a*

*strong castle in the mountains called A Pica. Its master was Don Pedro Alvarado, a man who struck fear into his vassals by means of his great cruelty. Luciano Cid Hermida, in his book "Legends and Traditions of Galicia" (A Coruña, 1891), echoes the local tale in which the feudal lord snatched one of his servants' beautiful daughters, who, after being dishonoured, died seized with pain two months later. The father came to demand justice from King Alfonso VIII and the king was quick to exercise it, besieging the castle, which was taken after an intense battle. Lord Pedro could not be found among the dead or wounded, nor among the prisoners that had been taken. However he was later seen, striding erect and proud by a peak of a local mountain. He was persecuted and hunted, and later captured and executed by hanging from an oak tree, his coat of arms having been destroyed by the executioner. The fort was demolished"*

Ponte Alvar



The Tambre river in Chaián



Fishing with bait  
(Picture by Eloi  
Saavedra)



## Recreational fishing techniques

### The intricate art of fishing

- **Fishing with bait.** This is the most basic type of fishing, in which natural bait present in the river waters, (grasshoppers) or on the riverbank (worms) play an important part. However, it is a type of fishing that can be technically complex, as shown in salmon fishing when using big fishing rods of up to 12 meters.
- **Fishing with spoon lures.** The spoon lure, an appropriately weighted kind of artificial bait, is cast, and due to its rotation and brightness drives the fish to attack. In Galicia there are several artisans who make these fishing accessories.
- **Fishing with artificial fish.** A refined version of the prior technique but using rod and reel casting. An imitation fish made of balsa wood or plastic is used. This technique has reached high levels of sophistication in Galicia, due the late Sr. Taboada who built the most technically perfect lures in existence.
- **‘Risky Fishing’ (pesca con riesgo).** This technique is genuinely Galician, and as such is part of our native fishing culture. This technique is used to catch a

‘Risky Fishing’ (Picture by Miguel Piñeiro)



variety of trout locally named reo. It involves disturbing the fish, who are very territorially minded creatures, using special lures around dusk. The lures are slid into the the water invading their space, provoking the fish to attack. It is a fishing technique where tact and hearing are more important than sight. Artisans such as Miguel Piñeiro build the finest examples of the lures used.

- **Fly-fishing.** This is a most advanced and exquisite technique. The fly is cast using a fly rod, reel, and specialized weighted line. In the case of salmon flies, lures needed for this type of fishing are truly works of art made by artisans such as Paco Porto or Xaquín Muíños (known as The Lord of the Flies – O Señor das Moscas).

Lures designed by Sr. Taboada (Picture by Miguel Piñeiro)



‘Risky fishing’ (Picture by Miguel Piñeiro)

Fly designed by Paco Porto (Picture by Paco Porto)







Portomouro

## Other hidden places

Nearby, but with limited accessibility via the village of San Xoán de Fecha, we can find a building now known as Light Factory (Fábrica da Luz). It was formerly a mini-hydroelectric power plant (Power Plant of San Xoán de Fecha) and dates from the 1950s, although it was modernized at the end of the 20th century. One of the most unique elements of the modern power plant is the respect given in its design to migratory fish.

The Casa Grande do Vachao is located on the west side of the mountain. Another example of the restoration of a small 18th century rural town, it is located in a 14,000 square metre forest with exceptional views of the first “Tambre canyons”. It is worth visiting whilst hiking down the Tambre banks, where there was another small hydroelectric station known as O Remuíño.

## Portomouro

*Head north from Trazo for 1.5 Km until reaching Gurís and take a left turn onto the CA-7804. After Ponte Alvar take the second (unmarked) turn on the right, then continue until reaching the AC-404 that leads directly to Portomouro (N 42°57’34.33”, W 8°38’51.19”) and the famous anthropomorphic tombs known as Pedra do Home (N 42°58’2.84”, W 8°38’30.13”). To go to Bemibre,*

*cross the bridge heading north until reaching the centre of the village (N 42° 58’2.84”, W 8°38’30.13”).*

## From the Portomouro bridge to Bemibre

Located on the road that links Santiago with Santa Comba and the Costa da Morte, the existing bridge over the Tambre river dates from the 19th century; it was renovated and expanded in the 20th century. It stands very close to where a medieval bridge (dating from earlier than 1380 but destroyed in 1592) was located.

Near Portomouro there are a group of anthropomorphic tombs excavated in a hill known by the name of Pedra do Home. It is visible from the parish church of San Cristovo since it is at a higher altitude. Even though they are located far away from the river, they still seem to dominate the lands of the Tambre.

Back on the main road if we continue to Bemibre, located next to the Dubra river, surrounded by various trees (mainly willows), we find a recreational area with a swimming pool that opens during the summer months. There is also a resting, picnic and children’s playing area and an old mill. A summer camp called Pescadubra is held at which fishing is taught in the O Souto, the stream running through the recreational area.



Pedra do Home: anthropomorphic tombs





## River fishing instruction: Pescadubra

Pescadubra is an annual event that takes place in the Dubra area. In order to explain how it works, we will describe the 2010 event. At the beginning of June the Bembibre recreational area hosted the 8th sporting event, organized by the association O Ranqueiro, in which 120 disabled people from different parts of Galicia learned how to fish on the first day of the event.

For this event, thousand of trout were released into the ponds located in the O Souto. The stream is a tributary of the river Dubra, which in turn is a tributary of the river Tambre. On the first day, 400 trout were captured thanks to the help of instructors and relatives. Pescadubra was

sponsored by the Avante Association, consisting of traders from the village and the town hall. At the end of the day there was a barbecue in the recreational area.

The second day was devoted to teach fishing to kids (aged 2 to 15) from Val do Dubra who after lunch attended a children's show. The activities were designed to first familiarise the participants with the materials and illustrate the use of each of the various elements. Later, artificial bait was introduced, and the children were shown how to place it on the hook and begin fishing - a very easy task in this case due to the hundreds of trout released into the river earlier.



*Picture by Sol Elvira*



## Tapia: fishing & river beach

*From Portomouro, just before the bridge, take the road 453 towards Tapia. After 5 km follow a sign to turn right (N 42°55'46.19", W 8°39'33.24"). Alternatively, coming from Santiago take the road to Noia (C-543) and in Villestro, at the roundabout turn right towards Negreira. After Ventosa and Augapesada, a left turn indicates Praia Fluvial de Tapia, from there just follow the signs..*

The facilities in Tapia are open during the summer from the 15<sup>th</sup> June to the 15<sup>th</sup> September. During that period several activities aimed at children are organised, such as games,

a special library and there is also a playground. There are lifeguards, rest-rooms, showers, a children's pool, a bar, a playroom and on the riverbank there is also a restored mill complete with four grinding stones.

Trout fishing is also possible as Tapia belongs to the Ponte Maceira fishing preserve. Other activities that take place in this area are canoeing: with events such as White Water Canoeing Praia de Tapia (mentioned later); volleyball and swimming; and the Tapia Swimming contest.

The Tambre is also a place for active tourism with specialized companies like the ones already mentioned in

the Ulla chapter. However, those who wish to experience more of the kayaking world have an exceptional opportunity in Tapia. The Canoe Club Ribeira do Tambre (Club de Piragüismo Riberas do Tambre) has complete facilities in the river beach: gym, storage, locker rooms and offices. It offers year-round training, Tuesday through Friday in the afternoons and Saturday and Sunday mornings. In summer there are introductory courses for kids aged between 8 and 14.

For the more dynamic there are also other possibilities. During April and September, on training days the club has boats and the necessary accessories (paddle, vest, helmet

etc.) free to use for people interested in trying canoeing. However, the visitor should not miss in the last weekend of August or first of September, the white water canoeing in the river Tambre an event which is now in its 26<sup>th</sup> year.



The canoeing club Ribeiros do Tambre





**TRAIL DESCRIPTION**

Length: 8,5 Km  
 Highest point: 340 m  
 Lowest point: 89 m  
 Difficulty: Medium  
 Drop: 10%  
 Duration: 2 hours, 30 minutes

**LEGEND**

Hiking trail	Rivers
Roads	Mill
Viewpoint	Traditional village
Riverbank forest	

Meters

0 400 800



# The river engineers: the Riomonte Mills

*Our next trail takes us to the municipality of Ames. The best option is to follow the AC-543 from Santiago or the new AG-56 towards Noia. In Bertamiráns take the AC-0203 which goes by Augapesada and then the AC-453 until reaching the village of Vilar, near the recreational area in Tapia.*

We will start in Vilar, which still preserves many examples of vernacular architecture. From here the clearly marked path takes us through farming lands to the banks of the Riamonte stream.

This small stream originates in Chan do Monte, near Cortegada and eventually flows into the Os Pasos stream which in turn joins the Sar in Bertamiráns. This

small stream divides into smaller torrents, puddles and waterfalls due to its high incline. This made it suitable for the development of a number of mills which worked both in winter and summer, thanks to the construction of a small dam. The first one we come across on the right bank is the recently restored Ortoño mill. From here on there are ten other mills such as: O Vello mill, O Novo mill, O Muiño da Xustiza or o Muiño da Pedra.

After the last mill we can either go back to Vilar by a descending path or go to the top of the San Marcos mountain, where once stood a chapel by the same name. The view from here is spectacular: to the south the Val da Amaía, and to the north and west, the banks of the river Tambre.





Ponte Maceira

## Ponte Maceira

*Leave Tapia and take the first turning on the right onto the AC-201. After 5km we arrive at our destination. (N 42°54'18.15", W 8°41'38.63").*

## Ponte Maceira

Ponte Maceira is located just past the Pazo de Lens. It crosses the river Tambre between the parishes of Agrón (Ames) and Portor (Negreira) and is part of the old royal road between Santiago and Finisterre. It dates from the 14th and 15th centuries - some people even claim it dates from the 13th century, and that it was built by order of the Church of Santiago.

On 13<sup>th</sup> June 13, 1471, a battle took place here between the troops of Archbishop Alonso de Fonseca II Compostela and the Count of Altamira, Lope de Moscoso, in one of the frequent clashes between the ecclesiastical power and the nobility.

The reason behind the battle was the reconstruction by Lope de Moscoso of the castle Torres de Altamira (Brión),

which had been destroyed years ago by the Irmandiños wars. The Archbishop objected to its rebuilding, but in spite of his superior number of troops he was defeated.

The bridge was rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century maintaining its medieval structure of five arches and two spillways and later partially repaired on several occasions. On both sides of the river there are several very interesting old buildings, some linked to the old Pilgrims Way, which was the only one that existed until the 19th century when the Ponte Nova (new bridge) was built a few meters downstream. On the Negreira side there is a dam and several mills opened to the public, and near these the Chapel of St. Brais and a building from 1955, imitating a Pazo. This wonderful architectural environment makes it a very pleasant leisure area.

## Feiraco

*From the Ponte Nova (new bridge) the Feiraco dairy facilities can be seen a few feet away. (N 42°53'49.71", W 8°42'6.11").*





*Various images of Ponte Maceira*



There are many reasons to visit the Feiraco dairy, the foremost being that it shows a successful model of the dairy industry in the area. Its facilities are located next to the river Tambre as it passes through Ponte Maceira, within the municipality of Ames.

The Feiraco Cooperative was established due to the convergence of several factors: the underdeveloped nature of an area based on a subsistence economy, the existing cooperative environment of the region with small interlinked industries in almost all the parishes, the work of the Agricultural Development Office (1955), the social movements lead by priests (especially among the young people), and the Negreira Caritas<sup>17</sup> office set up in the Barcala area.

It was thanks to these factors, and to the involvement of a local property registrar named Jesús García Calvo, that it was possible to establish the cooperative in 1968. García Calvo became the Cooperative's first President and was also its chairman until 2008.

Feiraco revolutionised the region, and little by little the area transformed, not only through the production of animal feed, but also the industrialisation of milk and other dairy products that were marketed with a quality certification throughout the country

It currently has a staff of 200 workers, 3,500 members and a turnover of almost 100 million Euros It is an innovative cooperative with quality products, covering the entire process from production to marketing and even a total guarantee of traceability, because the products come from its members' farms.

Feiraco is a reputable brand, with public recognition and it became very well-known throughout Spain and even in Europe due to its sponsorship of the Deportivo La Coruña football team (their logo can be seen on the players' shirts.) In addition to the Feiraco factory one can also visit the headquarters of the Terras de Compostela Association. The Association's main objective is to integrate and represent the various relevant territorial, institutional, social and economic, public and personal interests in promoting the development of the territory comprising the following municipalities: Boqueixón, Vedra, Teo, Santiago de Compostela, Brión, Ames, A Baña, Negreira, Val do Dubra and Santa Comba. Those interested in submitting proposals or collaborating in this field are welcome to visit the office.



*Xurxo Lobato's pictures of the factory and the cows.  
Pictures by Feiraco*



Guided visits to the Feiraco factory can be organised via [www.feiraco.es](http://www.feiraco.es)

Terras de Compostela Association:  
[www.terrasdecompostela.org](http://www.terrasdecompostela.org)



## Troitosende and Fiopáns

Two parishes in the A Baña municipality are by the river Tambre: Troitosende and Fiopáns. The church of Santa María de Troitosende has Romanesque remains. However, most of the church is of baroque and neoclassical styles.

San Pedro de Fiopáns: a baroque church from the 18th century, with several coats of arms showing the close links of this parish with the nobility of the time. Enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the landscape in the newly created recreational area of the river

## The Barcala in its last stretch

*Go back to the roundabout and take the third exit onto the road to Negreira (AC-544). Enter the village and at the first roundabout take the first exit, then the next left turn and you will soon see the Pazo do Cotón (N 42°54'18.15", W 8°41'38.63")*

## The Barcala mists in the Veiga do Cotón

The sheltered and fertile valley of O Cotón usually starts the day shrouded in mist formed by the confluence of the Barcala and Albariña rivers. The Pazo do Cotón is located

in this area, named the Barcala valley, which is in the proximity of the A Baña and Negreira municipalities.

The Pazo do Cotón is one of the major historical attractions of Negreira; it is linked to the Luaces and Mariño de Lobeira families. Like many other Galician pazos it has its origins in a medieval fortress that after losing its original function was rebuilt and adapted according to the changing times. The most significant alteration took place in the 17th century. The turrets of the ancient walls remained, framing the different parts of the building; the exterior underwent major transformations. Its stone gallery crosses the main street of Negreira with a triple arcade with turrets, balustrades and balconies. There are also some remains of the Chapel of San Mauro or Santo Amaro, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A market takes place every Sunday on the banks of the Barcala river, and on the first weekend of November there is also a special Medieval Market. O Cotón, the site where the market takes place, appears in a manuscript of 1717:

*"In the field of N<sup>a</sup> Sra. del Carmen chapel, parish of Santa Eulalia de Logrosa (...)" the neighbours hold a market: "as there is no more suitable place than the Cotón field, where the chapel of the Glorious San Amaro is situated*



The Pazo do Cotón in Negreira





*The Barcala river before flowing into the Tambre river (Alicerce archive)*

*next to the river and the Negreira bridge, and it is the only suitable place for Don Gregorio Suárez Loveira Mariño, owner of the house and its jurisdictions, as well as the House of Cotón”.*

## The Barcala Preserve

Before arriving at the Pazo do Cotón, fishing enthusiasts can enjoy the preserve operated by the fishing company Azor. The preserve goes from Ponte Rial (Barcala) and Ponte Trián (Alvariño) in the north to the Vilachán bridge in the south.

One of its main attractions are the big trout from the Barrié de la Maza reservoir, that come to the preserve to spawn. This is, therefore, one of the explanations for the large number of small trout to be found there.

It is worth noting the extreme cleanliness and crystal clear waters full of small trout. This contrasts with the

poor quality of the Tambre waters, affected by urban and agricultural discharges in its extensive estuary.

## The Albariña river lovers

The Albariña river joins the Barcala near the Pazo do Cotón. Another pazo takes the name of this river, the Pazo de Albariña; best known as the Pazo de Chancela or Capitán. A very beautiful love story is associated with this place.

The legend of the tragic love between Munia and Bernardo is similar to the Anglo-Saxon legend of Tristan and Isolde. Munia was punished the a wet nurse after dropping, on a stormy day, the house owner’s eldest son. The maid was condemned to death, but her faithful squire husband decided to take her place. However, when the executioner’s axe dropped, Munia also put her head on the block so the two of them would die together. Two embracing pines are grew on their graves.

*Pazo de Albariña (Alicerce archive)*



*Pazo de Albariña (Alicerce archive)*





View from the Ons bridge

Coat of Arms of Negreira

## The bridge of Ons

*Turn left at the O Cotón roundabout and head towards Brión. 800 meters after the roundabout we find the path to Ons (N 42°54'4.19", W 8°44'4.56").*

The Barcala river flows into the river Tambre in the vicinity of the Ons bridge. The remains of the bridge are now under the Barrié de la Maza reservoir. It formerly crossed the Tambre river near Pontevedra (old bridge) place, in the parish of San Martiño in Liñaio (Negreira). Jacobean tradition and conventional history offer us two differing points of view concerning the bridge.

The first tradition claims that after the journey of the body of St. James from Palestine to Iria Flavia, his disciples Theodore and Athanasius asked Queen Lupa to provide a burial place. She sent them to Duio (Finisterre), where the priest of the Ara Solis, Regulus, lived. They were captured by the priest, but were able to effect a miraculous escape. However, it was not long before Roman soldiers were

sent in their pursuit. The legend says that as soon as the disciples crossed the Ons bridge it collapsed, an event that is represented on the Negreira Coat of Arms.

The story says that a bridge (called Pías) existed at Ons in 1220 although by the 17th century it was in ruins. It is believed that one of the Jacobean routes passed close to the bridge and the now-destroyed chapels of San Pablo and Santa Cristina. Pías was not rebuilt due to the beliefs that God sundered the bridge in twain for a specific reason.

The transport of goods and people across the river was still in the hands of Ricardo and Miguel's boats (dornas<sup>18</sup>) in the 1920's. The use of a small boat (2.5 x 1 meter) cost 0.10 pesetas, and a large one (4x3 meters) to transport the cattle for Santa Eufemia and the markets of March and All Saints cost 0.25 pesetas.



## Power stations and the Barrié de la Maza reservoir

*Go straight from O Cotón square and take the first turning left to Ponte Nafonso. After 7km there is a sign that shows the left turning to the reservoir (N 42°51'53.80", W 8°47'49.24")*

## Electric profitability from the river

The river Tambre was suitable for salmon fishing until the early 1970s. However, due to hydroelectric activity they disappeared from its waters. In the last stretch of the river there are two large and one small power plants. The oldest one, known as Tambre I, is situated in Roo (Noia), which is next to the parish of Cornanda (Brión). Tambre I was built

between 1924 and 1927; the buildings were designed by the renowned Galician architect Antonio Palacios.

In 1946 construction work on the Barrié de la Maza dam started with the aim of increasing electricity production. Situated between the municipalities of Negreira, Brión and Ames, it would ensure a continuous water supply for the power station from 1949. Construction of the so-called

Tambre II, upstream, began in 1969 and it was operational in 1974. This power station is believed to be the cause of the disappearance of salmon and lamprey and now hardly any remain in the river, however there are still reo, trout and eel. The mini power station Tambre III was built between 1998 and 2000. It is located in the municipality of Brión at the base of the Barrié de la Maza reservoir and turbine and which is used to feed the central Tambre I.







*Needle Pesqueiras in the Tambre (Alicerce archive)*



## Infrastructure

This stretch of the river today, for the fisherman, is just a shadow of what it was before the opening of the Tambre hydroelectric complex. The importance of migratory fish in this stretch of river is documented in the Convent of Toxosoutos, where books (dating as far back as 800 years) can be found that record the previously abundant number of Pesqueiras<sup>19</sup> and their presence in the river today.

In the extensions of 1951 which included the reservoir, the company overseeing the deterioration of the salmon, reo and lamprey fisheries, purchased the pesqueiras from their owners. The most difficult to access were demolished or blown up. In this publication we can see some images of Pesqueiras that existed in the area.

As we already mentioned the building of the power stations dramatically reduced the numbers of lamprey and salmon, however there was a healthy reo population until 2003. In that year a new project was carried out, thanks to the European Union, to build new “ecological flow” turbines. Unfortunately this project condemned the Tambre to be a muddy river endangering the reo population almost irreversibly.

Another negative effect on the environment and life surrounding the Tambre are the mists created by this type of water infrastructure. For this reason we advise patience and caution in this stretch of the river Tambre.



*Elongated Pesqueira in the Tambre (Alicerce archive)*





## San Xoán do Carballoso, the water that cures warts

*Continue along the road towards Ponte Nafonso. When reaching the highest point on the left hand side, we come across an old sign indicating San Xoán do Carballoso. (N 42°51'59.96", W 8°84'09.64").*

San Xoán do Carballoso is a very important pilgrimage destination in the parish of San Pedro de Xallas. The festival of San Xoán (St. John) falls on the 24th June coinciding with the saint's feast day. On the 23rd, the night of San Xoán, like everywhere else in Galicia, bonfires (cacharelas) are lit near the church and barbecues of sardines and meat (churrascadas) are enjoyed.

The location was chosen as it was the perfect place to observe the rugged beauty of the canyons of the river Tambre.

We believe that a pre-Roman sanctuary was built in the area and the Church Christianised it with the constructing of a chapel and the miraculous spring. The fame of San Xoán do Carballoso goes beyond the region as the waters from the spring are believed to cure certain skin diseases. Another important feature can be found inside the chapel:

there are two containers to place objects for auction on the day of the pilgrimage.

In order to cure the skin diseases, it is said that a particular ritual needs to be followed. THE damaged areas are cleansed with a tissue and once finished the tissue should be placed on a tree to leave the disease behind. Residents still remember one woman from Coruña that came with her son to perform the ritual, but when they returned home the boy had a rash all over his body. When

the mother took the clothes out of the washing machine, she realized that her son had not left the tissue on the tree, but instead had brought it home with him. The woman then took a taxi to go back and rectify the issue.

The views from the top of the hill of San Xoán do Carballoso are spectacular. The river Tambre canyons can be seen from the top. Nearby, along the road to Nafonso we find the mirador del castillo (viewpoint of the castle) where the winding mouth of the river Tambre can be seen.

*Old view from San Xoán do Carballoso*



*The fountain of San Xoán do Carballoso.*





## River fish gastronomy

Those travelling downstream through the rivers in this guide should think at lunchtime about the hidden treasures in the kitchens of this area. Hemingway liked to prepare trout with Parma ham. In Casa Suárez they still remember how the owner's mother prepared "salmón Ximonde", using the secret recipes from Pazo de Ximonde. In Pontevea the lamprey is considered a "prehistoric fish" that is very difficult to eat for the first time.

At present, most river fish are threatened by pollution or by inadequate interventions in rivers. River fish, when available in restaurants, are considered to be far superior to farmed ones.

We would like to return to the golden age of the rivers, and for this reason, we will remember the cooking book by Manuel María Puga y Parga "Picadillo": "The practical kitchen". This expert cook was Mayor of A Coruña and a politician in the Spanish Parliament. We chose this character because the first edition of this book (1905) includes recipes that differentiate sea and river fish. It shows the enormous wealth of fish in the late 20th century.

This abundance of fish is remembered by Mr. Louzao who first started fishing back in 1948, and who quite rightly says: "Before, we had one fishing rod and caught many fish, now we have many rods and cannot catch anything."

Here are some recipes from the "Picadillo":

### Genoa-style salmon (*Salmón al estilo de Génova*)

*Boil a piece of salmon in red wine and meat broth in equal parts. Salt it and add mushrooms and chopped parsley. Once cooked, remove the salmon and set it aside.*

*Add butter and flour to the sauce, and cook again. When the sauce has halved add the salmon and allow it to rest for five minutes before serving.*

### Trout with bacon

*Place a layer of thin slices of bacon on a grill. Add on top a layer of cleaned and salted trout and then another of thin bacon. Place it in the grill at a good heat until the bacon is crisp.*

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Picadillo index





Lamprey festival in Pontecesures (picture by Puri Sanglao)



### **Eel tartar style**

*The Tartars prepared eel according to the following recipe:*

*Fry some onion, parsley, carrots, thyme and bay leaves together. Add some flour and Rhine wine and sieve all half an hour after cooking. Cook the eel in salted water and place it in a tray in a spiral form. Place the sauce in the middle. Glaze the eel with a whisked egg and place the dish in the oven.*

Nowadays to enjoy fresh water fish, one must take advantage of the different festivals organized around these popular delicacies.

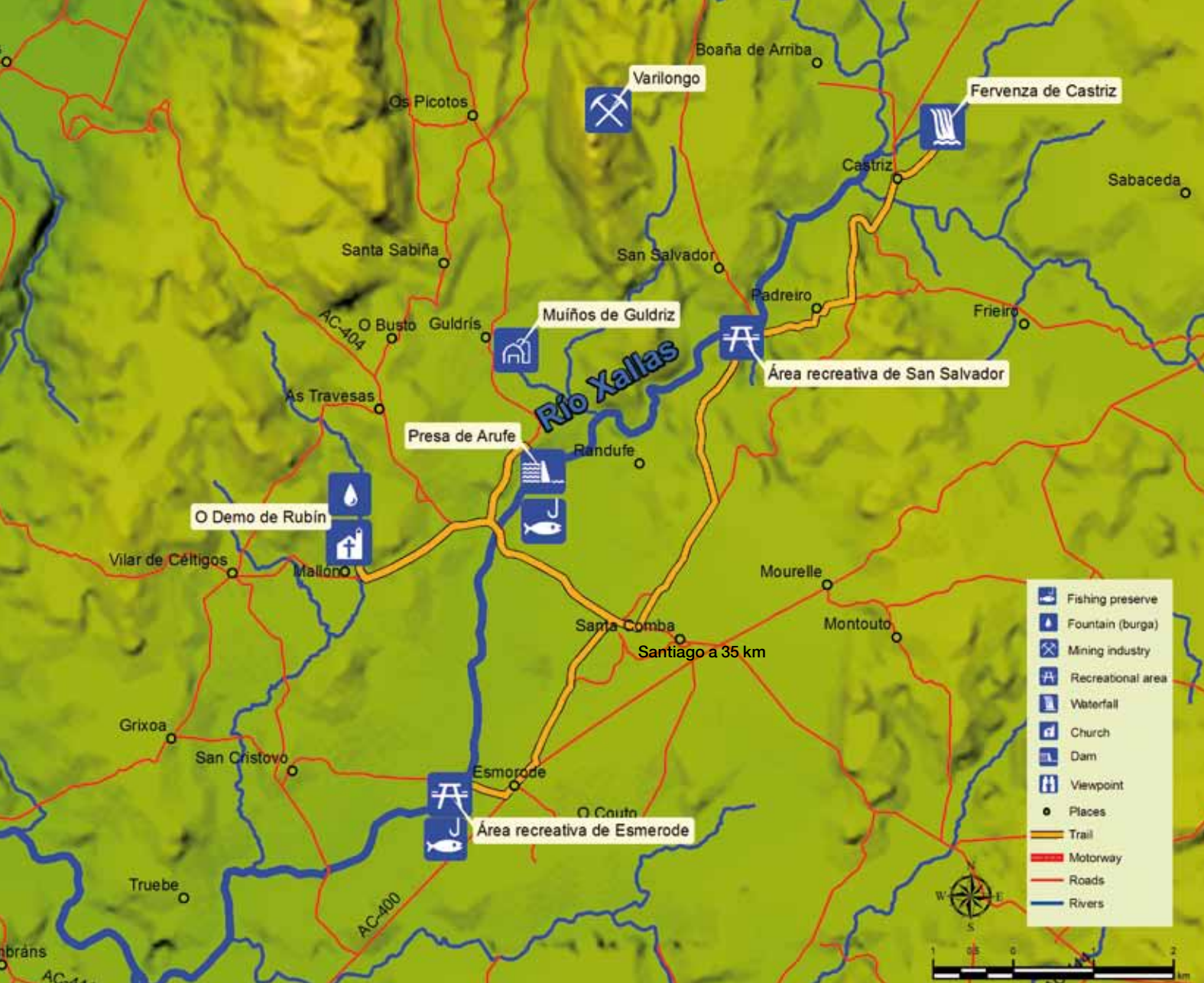


Salmon in a Estrada (picture by Puri Sanglao)



Stuffed lamprey from Casa Calviño (picture by Soledad Felloza)





## 4. Xallas: Place of the waterfalls

We start this chapter by remembering an accurate appraisal made in 1911 by English writer Catherine Gasquoine Hartley, already mentioned in the chapter “The sportsmen of the salmon”:

*“The Ulla, the Tambre, the Xallas and the Eume are all fishing rivers comparable to the best rivers in England, Scotland and Ireland. Salmon can be found in many rivers. There are twaite shad, lamprey, barbel, bream, escalos and other less fine fish.”*

In addition to the importance of the river Xallas to the fishing elite of Europe, its other main virtue is that it is the symbol of the region known by the same name (consisting of the municipalities of Santa Comba and Mazaricos). Numerous local shops and businesses are known with pride by the name of Xallas.

At present the river Xallas offers both tourists and citizens somewhat contrasting areas. The spectacular area of Esmorode and Rubin contrasts with the abandonment of the Castriz waterfall and the Arufe Light Factory. Against this anomalous situation a little patience and understanding is demanded from our partners and travel

companions on a journey downstream, which in this case, is a true journey of dreams, thinking more about the future than the present. Another problem is that in the nearby council the Xallas is still very undeveloped.

The river was formerly known by the names of Ézaro or Lézaro because its most known part is the Ézaro waterfall that flows directly into the ocean. In the past, when the watercourse was unspoilt by man, several intellectuals considered this one of the most spectacular phenomena of our land:

*“One of the most beautiful shows that can be witnessed in Galicia”*

**Manuel Murguía, ‘Galician history’ (Historia de Galicia) (1885)**

*“The mouth of the Xallas river at the base of Mount Pindo is one of the greatest landscapes of Galicia.”*

**Ramón Otero Pedrayo<sup>20</sup> ‘Galician Guide’ (Guía de Galicia) (1926)**

We start our trail in the Castriz waterfall (Santa Comba).





## The Castriz waterfall

*Leave Santiago by the Vista Alegre neighbourhood and head towards Santa Comba (AC-404). At the first roundabout take the second exit, rúa Alfonso Molina, and then take the first right turn onto the AC2904. Use the following GPS coordinates to reach the waterfall as there are no signs (N 43°5'12.46", W 8°46'37.93"). Go towards Santa Comba (AC-2904) and turn on Padreiro to reach the recreational area of San Salvador (N 43°4'9.17", W 8°47'57.73")*

The Xallas river originates in the Castelo hill at the boundary between the municipalities of Coristanco and Tordoia, and runs through the municipalities of Coristanco, Santa Comba, A Baña and Zas. It is also the boundary between Mazaricos, Carnota and Dumbría and finally flows into the Atlantic at the spectacular Ézaro waterfall, located in the mythical Pindo Mountain.

Before getting there, we should note that one of its tributaries, the river Mira, has an interesting waterfall in Castriz (Santa Comba), with an eight meter drop. To reach it follow the road from Santa Comba to Coristanco and

in Castriz take the road by the stone cross (cruceiro). Keeping left, after a kilometre you will arrive in the vicinity of the waterfall, although it is difficult to access due to the dense vegetation. and because the banks of the creek are not cleaned. The remains of an abandoned mill and equipment from a recreational area can also be seen. The magnificent cascade however, where the water runs encased in granite bowls, should of course be our first priority.

This was one of the places the mountain bike route that crossed the As Terras do Xallas passed through and which several hundred people participated on the 1st of May 2011. This route also went through other attractions in Santa Comba like the Barilongo mine, a strategic enclave in World War II due to its production of wolfram for Hitler's Germany.

It is always nice to finish in a recreational area, however we are not finished yet. It is still worth mentioning the recreational area of San Salvador in Albín, for those seeking the tranquillity of a small leisure area near the river.





## The Arufe dam

*Go back and follow the AC-2094 until it connects with the AC-404. After 2.5 km turn right to Xesteira, and a kilometre later arrive at our destination. (N 43°3'15.23", W 8°49'47.37"). The mills are in Guldriz, in the small recreational area (N 43°4'10.37", W 8°50'17.77").*

This small dam was built in Rieiro, on the river Xallas, to ensure water supply to the also small power plant that supplied Santa Comba in the mid-twentieth century. It is known as Arufe dam or A Xesteira; the latter name is related to the area in which it is located, an area full of xestas (bushes).

Inside the building that housed the plant's facilities, a

small part of the machinery with which the force of water was turned into electricity for the municipality, can still be seen.

The fishing preserve starts at the dam and goes to the bridge next to the A Pereira slaughterhouse and from Ponte Nova da Pereira until it merges with the Xallas river. Its waters are crystal clear and there are many trout. It is possible to walk a long stretch along the river.

In the vicinity of this dam we see another traditional way of using the water resources. The Guldriz mills stand out. In a small area we see six small mills seemingly connected together, maximising the use of river.



## The Devil of Rubín and the miraculous fountain

*Return again to the AC-404. At the first left turn head towards Rubín on the AC-7701 (N 43°2'46.65", W 8°51'34.03").*

Rubin's Chapel, located at the top of the recreational area, belongs to the parish of San Pedro de Cícere and the town of Santa Comba. It is dedicated to Our Lady of Health (Nosa Señora da Saúde), whose pilgrimage is celebrated on the 8th of September. Inside the chapel there is an statue of her and others of San Miguel Arcanxo and Our Lady of Easter. The San Miguel statue is represented standing over the devil, so the locals refer to it as the devil of Rubin.

Near the shrine, which is dominated by a small statue of the Archangel Michael, there is a miraculous spring, as shown in the weekly newspaper "Lands of Santiago" (Tierras de Santiago) by the journalist Marcos Manteiga:

*"Sick children are taken to bathe in the the waters which are attributed with healing properties. After bathing in the fountain, their wet clothes are abandoned around it. Many children are immersed in near-freezing waters,*

*and others take the water to their homes. Some miraculous cures have taken place."*

Years ago, children were taken to the fountain to overcome fears: they were placed in the cavity on the top of the bowl (now enclosed by a fence), and due to the fear experienced in this situation, later on they were not easily scared.







## Esmorode river beach

*Reverse on the 404-AC and turn left onto the 7002-AC to connect with the AC-400. Following this road you will find a right detour signposted to Esmorode river beach (N 43°1'4.72", W 8° 50'39.02").*

The Xallas riverbank in Esmorode was built in 1994 as a public river park to exploit its great potential as a recreational area. It is used as A river beach and during fishing season as a fishing preserve, with facilities such as picnic area, fountain and areas suitable to do barbecues. There are also many trees that offer shade on a hot day.

One of the distinguishing features of this river is the

presence of abundant aquatic vegetation (especially brizo, *Oenanthe crocata*), and there is also a wide variety of wildlife that supports populations of trout and bream (boga). This stretch of river is co-administered by the Fisheries Society of Santa Comba and the Department for Rural Affairs.

The preserve was newly established in 2005 and has not yet been exploited to its full potential. Its upper limit is the A Xesteira dam, and the lower limit is the Truebe and Pereira bridges in the Abuín River.





# A Guidebook to contemplate

Rural development and river conservation has a promising future. Water is a vital and key element to any sustainable development, both for the wealth it generates and the attraction for the general public.

The ten councils that constitute Terras de Compostela believe that there is a need to establish a roadmap to reflect these concerns, and this believe is embodied in the draft ‘The Galician of the thousand rivers’ (La Galicia de los mil rios). Here are some of the strategies found in this document:

- Extensive sustainable productive uses for the recovery of branes and wetlands
- Forest restoration and programmed replanting of native species (flora and fauna), especially in high-value forests and natural carballeiras (oak tree areas) along the river banks.
- Encourage hiking using marked trails and recondition the basin’s natural corridors of the Tambre and Ulla rivers.
- Create a river observatory network to prevent pollution of major rivers.

- Offer small plots for organic farming to the city residents.
- Use of hydro-power without altering the river landscape.
- Create economically and environmentally sustainable fish farms or breeding farms; specialize each river with local fauna: salmon, lamprey, trout etc.
- To value the semi-abandoned villages in the riverbanks with artisan workshops to establish people on the riverbanks; including the mills.
- Advance and expand the supply of river beaches and encourage water sports by creating canoeing, kayaking, rafting schools etc.
- Recovery of agricultural lands for forage production in the vicinity of river basins.

All these ideas should be channelled through the creation of a technology centre focused on the study of river landscapes. Apart from helping to generate valid knowledge for the enhancement of rivers, it is also the starting point for the contents of outreach programs and environmental and cultural awareness.



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hot spring

<sup>2</sup> Stone Cross of variable dimensions, placed at crossroads and in atriums. Very common in Galicia and Portugal.

<sup>3</sup> Castros are fortified settlements, usually pre-Roman, (although some are from the late Bronze or Iron Age), the oldest structures associated with the Celtic culture.

<sup>4</sup> “Adios! Montes y prados, iglesias y campanas – “Adios! Sar y Sarela, cubiertos de enramada - “Adios! Vidán alegre, molinos y hondonadas – Conxo el del claustro triste y las soledades plácidas (Rosalía de Castro was a Galician romanticist writer and poet - 1837-1885)

<sup>5</sup> The Pazo is a traditional type of Galician housing. Similar to a manor houses; pazos are usually located in the countryside, and are former residences of important people in the community (kings and nobles).

<sup>6</sup> The Irmandiño Wars were two revolts that took place in 15th-century Galicia against attempts by the regional nobility to maintain their rights over the peasantry and the bourgeoisie. The revolts were also part of the larger phenomenon of popular revolts in late medieval Europe caused by the general economic and demographic crises in Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries.

<sup>7</sup> Camilo José Cela (1916-2002) was a Spanish novelist and short story writer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature In 1989.

<sup>8</sup> The Irmandiño Wars were two revolts that took place in 15th-century Galicia against attempts by the regional nobility to maintain their rights over the peasantry and the bourgeoisie.

<sup>9</sup> Place where cloth (particularly wool) is cleansed to eliminate oils, dirt, and other impurities, and to make it thicker.

<sup>10</sup> Old outdoor public clothes-washing facility

<sup>11</sup> Antonio López Ferreiro (1837-1910), followed an ecclesiastical career and in 1871 was appointed canon of Compostela council, which allowed him access the document archive of the cathedral. Following his research he wrote historical novels that were hugely popular in the Romanticism movement.

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Rivas (Galician writer, poet and journalist), 1996, “El Pueblo de la Noche”.

<sup>13</sup> Father Sarmiento (1695-1772) was a Spanish scholar, writer and Benedictine monk, illustrious representative of the Enlightenment in Spain.

<sup>14</sup> Spanish soldier and noblemen.

<sup>15</sup> The common name “green drake” is used in some parts of the British Isles for this species.

<sup>16</sup> Known commercially as Bachao.

<sup>17</sup> The Caritas Confederation is the official charity of the Catholic Church in Spain, established by the Episcopal Conference.

<sup>18</sup> Small fishing boat typical of the Rías Bajas, with sail and hull lashing clinker.

<sup>19</sup> Sort of dike or dam built diagonally in the course of a river, from where one can fish or divert the water to fish.

<sup>20</sup> A Galician writer and intellectual (1888-1976)

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# Where to eat and where to stay

Our walk downstream, our journey of dreams requires places to eat, to get power, and of course, to sleep. Therefore, we recommend some places where you will find the most complete and up-to-date information for these areas.

We hope that you enjoy your visit.

## General web page:

<http://www.turgalicia.es/>

## Specific information about each town council:

<http://www.concellodeabana.es/>  
<http://www.concellodeames.org/>  
<http://www.boqueixon.com/>  
<http://www.concellodebrion.org/>  
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