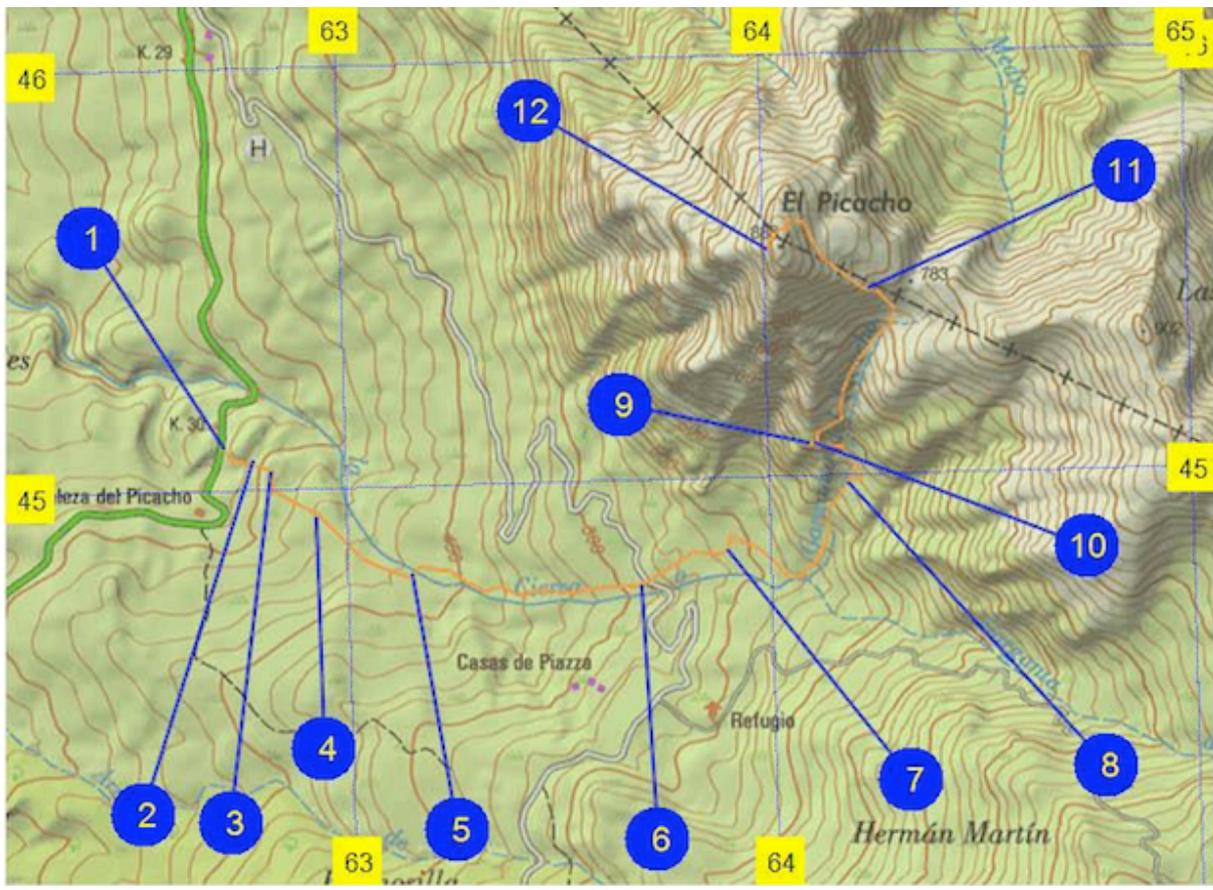


El Picacho



ID: 2051 **Distance:** 6/8 km **Height gain:** 510 m. (800m above sea level) **Contributors** Lyndon & Jennifer Jolley with additions from Tony Pearse. **Duration** 4/6 hours (to the summit and back)

Features: Eagles, Vultures and many more birds, Fantastic Views, Villages, coast hills, Wildlife, Woodland

Description:

The Alcornocales Natural Park covers a massive area north of Tarifa and the Strait of Gibraltar to Ubrique on the southern boundary of the Grazalema Natural Park. It is the largest remaining cork oak forest in Spain and contains the remnants of the ancient sub-tropical forest that once covered most of southern Europe. Species of rhododendron and laurels still survive in the deep gorges and the area is home to abundant wildlife that supports a thriving community of large raptors; griffon vultures, golden eagles and buzzards.

This route takes you up to El Picacho, the distinctive conical-shaped peak that can be seen from all over the western side of the Alcornocales Natural Park. The walk though fairly short, climbs rapidly, gaining over 500m from start to summit; the views throughout are well worth the effort. Halfway up the southern face of the mountain there is a colony of griffon vultures, so keep an eye out for these great birds soaring in the midday thermals.

The walk is in several parts: start by skirting a small lake and proceed via rhododendron-filled valleys and cork oak and pine forests, then climb up a steep shoulder to emerge on the summit ridge of El Picacho. The final 150m cone is short and very steep but not too difficult and the summit (about the size of a tennis-court) is well worth the effort, with 360-degree panoramic views of the whole area and a stunning view of Alcala and the coast (on a clear day).

Access info:

The walk is situated in the Natural Reserve and walkers require permission before starting the walk; this can be obtained at any information centre in the park or at the park office in Alcala de los Gazules, where the office is located on the roundabout out of town, Jerez exit sign, head for Benalup and it's on the right. Sometimes they have a helicopter parked there.

Additional info:

Walking-boots are advised and it is not recommended to drink the water from the streams, so a minimum of two litres per person should be taken. The top is very exposed and can be windy, so (except in the height of summer) take some warm clothing. In summer, leave early, you do not want to be out between 3 and 5 pm, take more water than you need.

Mapping supplied by:

1

Park the car in the El Picacho recreational area car park, on the road between Alcala de los Gazules and Ubrique. The first car park is a BBQ area, you need the second, just past the white building on the left. Start through gate on opposite side of the road from car park and recreational area and follow path to first waymarker-post (a very grand affair built of rustic stone, with a wrought iron arrow pointing the way).



2

Turn right at first waymarker and left up steps at second waymarker numbered '2' to Waymarker 3 and a small lake, this is dried up in the summer, lots of frogs in the winter. There are many information boards around the lake about the wildlife.



3

From Waymarker 3 take path with lake on left. Make sure you check to see the path on which you arrived at lake, it is easy to miss on the way down and taking the wrong path leads you away from the car. Continue around lake, turning left and heading uphill, to arrive at an ancient oven and some new buildings (used to be a visitor centre)



4

Pass between new buildings and the old oven and take the obvious path immediately opposite, away from buildings. Continue through cork oak woodland to small stream.



5

Cross the stream by a wooden bridge and turn sharp right at waymarker after bridge. The information board is about the charcoal industry that used to thrive here. Continue gently uphill, to meet through forest road at gap in crash barriers.



6

Cross road and take path immediately opposite, passing waymarker and heading away from road to emerge at small clearing. This may be a good time to look for vultures, as you get a good view of El Picacho ahead.



7

Take the footpath on far left-hand side of clearing on waymarked path towards the summit. At small stream turn left at waymarker and continue upward, keeping to the right of rhododendron-filled gully.



8

At stand of pine trees, bear right at waymarker and through harvested cork oaks.



9

Emerge through tree line at a spectacular viewpoint.



10

Backtrack a few metres to waymarker post and take small footpath leading very steeply uphill past distinctive trapezoidal-shaped rock. Care should be taken, as path is narrow and rocky in places. After a section climbing over exposed pine roots, bear left at waymarker post in centre of small clearing. Continue to climb to reach summit ridge.



11

Pass large boulder at start of summit ridge and take easy path just to right of summit ridge. Continue along this path for about 250m until you pass between two large boulders and the ground starts to fall away before you. The summit is now on your left, about 150m higher.



12

The easiest route to the summit is to walk slightly past the summit in the line of the approach path and then turn sharp left, heading for a distinctive overhanging boulder. The path goes below this overhang. It is then a short and easy climb to the summit. Enjoy the views and reward yourself with a cold drink (if you have one) before returning by the outward route.

