

**WALKING ON
LA GOMERA AND EL HIERRO**

About the Author



Paddy Dillon is a prolific walker and guide-book writer, with almost 100 books to his name and contributions to 40 other titles. He has written for several outdoor magazines and other publications and has appeared on radio and television.

Paddy uses a tablet computer to write as he walks. His descriptions are therefore precise, having been written at the very point at which the reader uses them.

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Other Cicerone guides by the author

Glyndwr's Way
Mountain Walking in Mallorca
The Cleveland Way and the
Yorkshire Wolds Way
The GR5 Trail
The GR20 Corsica
The Great Glen Way
The Irish Coast to Coast Walk
The Mountains of Ireland
The National Trails
The North York Moors
The Pennine Way
The Reivers Way
The South West Coast Path
The Teesdale Way (Martin Collins;
updated by Paddy Dillon)
Trekking in Greenland
Trekking in Mallorca
Trekking in the Alps
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Walking on Guernsey
Walking on Jersey
Walking on Gran Canaria
Walking on La Palma
Walking on Lanzarote and
Fuerteventura
Walking on Madeira
Walking on Malta
Walking on Tenerife
Walking the Wales Coast Path

WALKING ON LA GOMERA AND EL HIERRO

45 DAY WALKS AND TREKS FOR ALL ABILITIES

by Paddy Dillon

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lovelljohns.com

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Front cover: The Barranco del Valle on La Gomera (Walks 13 and 21)

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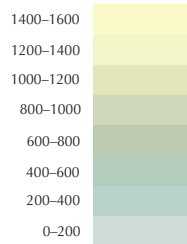
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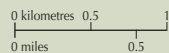
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Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  start/finish point
-  alternative start point
-  alternative finish point
-  alternative start/finish point
-  route direction
-  woodland
-  urban areas
-  peak
-  building
-  other feature
-  airport

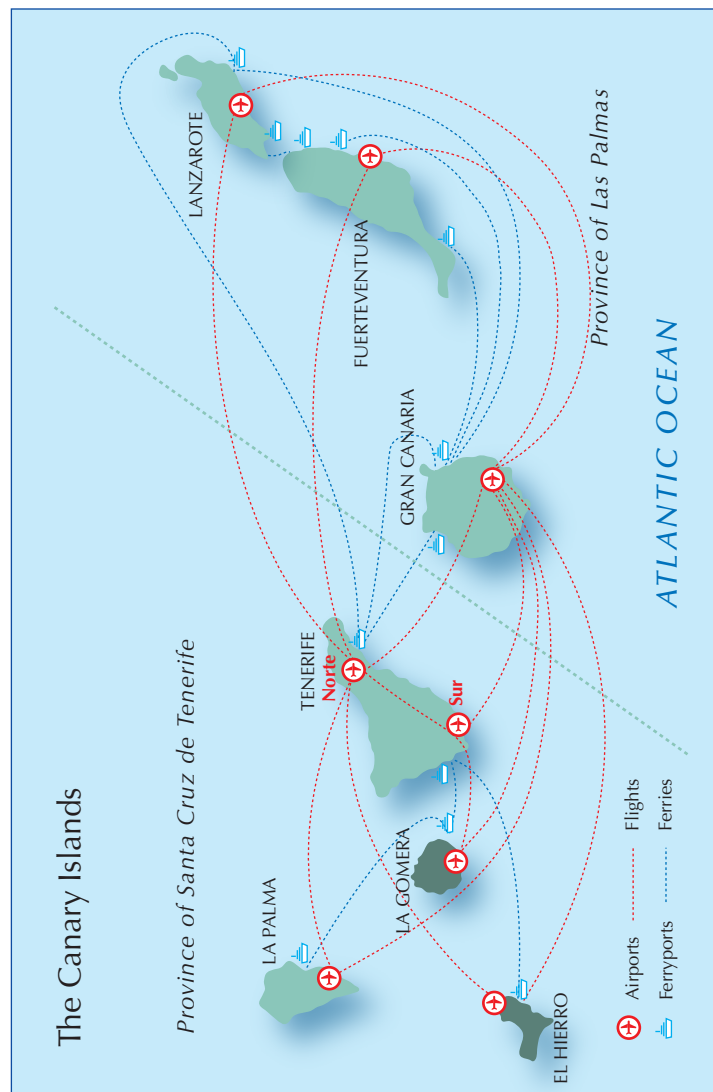
Relief
in metres

SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/841/GPX.



INTRODUCTION



Several routes start or finish near the church in Valverde (Walks 28–31)



A view of the rugged coastline after climbing high above Santa Catalina (Walk 25)

The seven sub-tropical Canary Islands bask in sunny splendour off the Atlantic coast of north-west Africa. Millions of sun-starved north Europeans flock there for beach holidays, but increasingly visitors are discovering the amazing variety of landscapes throughout the archipelago. Conditions range from semi-deserts to perpetually moist *laurisilva* 'cloud forests', from rugged cliff coasts to high mountains, from fertile cultivation terraces to awesome rocky *barrancos* carved deep into multi-coloured layers of volcanic bedrock. Some areas are given the highest possible protection as national parks, but there are many more types of protected

landscapes, rural parks, natural monuments and nature reserves.

More and more walkers are finding their feet, exploring the Canary Islands using centuries-old mule tracks, rugged cliff paths and forest trails. Paths pick their way between cultivation terraces, squeeze between houses and make their way to rugged coves and hidden beaches. Some paths run from village to village, following old mule tracks once used to transport goods, while other paths are based on pilgrim trails to and from remote churches and *ermitas*. Many have been cleared, repaired, signposted and way-marked in recent years, ready to be explored and enjoyed.

This guidebook explores the way-marked trail networks on the islands of La Gomera and El Hierro. Despite their small size, they boast routes of all types – from easy strolls to hands-on scrambling, from simple day-walks to long-distance trails. As these routes are fully signposted and waymarked, walkers can follow them with confidence and enjoy the islands to the full. Over 700km (435 miles) of trails are described in this guidebook.

LOCATION

The Canary Islands are more or less enclosed in a rectangular area from 13°30'W to 18°00'W and 27°30'N to 29°30'N. As a group, they stretch west to east over 450km (280 miles). Although administered by Spain, the mother country is 1100km (685 miles) away. The narrowest strait between the Canary Islands and Africa is a mere 110km (70 miles). The total land area is almost 7500km (2900 square miles), but the sea they occupy is ten times that size.

GEOLOGY

Most of the world's volcanic landscapes are formed where huge continental or oceanic 'plates' collide with each other. When continental plates collide, the Earth's crust crumples upwards to form mountains, and when plates are torn apart, basaltic rock from deep within the Earth's mantle erupts to form mountains. The

Canary Islands, however, are different, and have a complicated geological history.

The African landmass is the visible part of a continental plate that extends into the Atlantic Ocean, but the Canary Islands lie within the oceanic crust of the eastern Atlantic Ocean, close to the passive junction with the African continental plate. It is thought that the islands now lie directly above a hot-spot, or mantle plume, some 2500km (1550 miles) deep within the Earth. The mantle plume is fixed, but the oceanic and African plates are drifting very slowly eastwards. Every so often a split in the oceanic crust opens above the mantle plume, allowing molten rock to vent onto the ocean floor. As more and more material erupts, it piles higher and higher until it rises from the sea. Each of the Canary Islands was formed this way.

Lanzarote and Fuerteventura were the first Canary Islands to form, and were subsequently pulled eastwards. The next time a rift opened over the mantle plume the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife were formed, and these were in turn pulled eastwards. A further oceanic rift led to the formation of La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro. Looking forward in geological time more islands will appear as other rifts are torn open in the future.

The forces at work deep within the Earth can scarcely be imagined. Every single piece of rock throughout



El Teide on Tenerife is often seen above the clouds from La Gomera and El Hierro

the Canary Islands once existed in a molten state. Consider the energy needed to melt one small stone, and multiply that to imagine the energy required to melt everything in the island chain, as well as the immense amount of rock beneath the sea that supports them all!

Over time huge amounts of volcanic material were piled high, but erosion has led to great instability. During recent geological time vast chunks of the islands have collapsed into the sea, creating features such as El Golfo on El Hierro, the Caldeira de Taburiente on La Palma, and the Orotava valley on Tenerife. With each catastrophic collapse, tsunamis devastated places around the Atlantic Ocean. Geologists predict that similar collapses could occur in the future on the Cumbre Nueva on

La Palma or the north face of El Teide on Tenerife.

WILDLIFE

Plants and flowers

While the northern hemisphere was in the grip of an Ice Age, the Canary Islands were sluiced by rainstorms, with powerful rivers carving deep, steep-sided barrancos into unstable layers of ash and lava. As the landmasses emerged from the Ice Age the Canary Islands dried out and the vegetation had to adapt to survive. Some species are well adapted to semi-desert conditions, while on the highest parts of the islands, laurisilva cloud forests are able to trap moisture from the mists and keep themselves well watered. Laurisilva



Clockwise from top left: Prickly pear fruit; Canarian lavender; Canarian tagasaste tree

forests once spread all the way round Mediterranean and tropical regions, and one of the best remnants now crowns La Gomera, where it is protected in a national park.

Canary pines flourish on high, dry mountainsides, sometimes in places where nothing else grows. Almost every pine you see will have a scorched trunk, but they regenerate surprisingly well after forest fires. Beware of the long pine needles on the ground, as they are slippery underfoot. Canary palms also flourish in dry places, and in the past every part of the tree had a use; today they provide delicious *miel de palma*, or palm honey. Every so often dragon trees occur, the last surviving descendants of the ancient

prehistoric forests. They have been decimated in the wild but prove popular in gardens.

Tagasaste trees are often found in dense plantations, always in places where livestock are grazed. They grow with little water, yet have a high nutritional content and are regularly cut for animal fodder. In recent years they have been exported to Australia. Junipers (*sabinas*) are common; fruit and nut trees have been established, including apples, oranges, lemons, bananas, almonds, figs and vines. The introduced prickly pears are abundant, not so much for their fruit, but for raising cochineal beetles, whose blood provides a vivid red dye.

Bushy scrub is rich and varied, including sticky-leaved cistus and a

host of species that walkers should learn to identify. These include bushy, rubbery *tabaibal* and the tall *cardón*, or candelabra spurge. Both have milky latex sap, as does tangled *cornical*, with its distinctive horned seed pods, which creeps over the ground and drystone walls. *Aulaga* looks like a tangled mass of spines and is often found colonising old cultivation terraces in arid areas. Aromatic, pale green *incienso* is a bushy plant that, with *salado*, grows densely on the arid lower slopes of the islands. The fragrant Canarian lavender usually grows in arid, rocky, stony areas among other scrub species. Few of the plants have common English names, but all of them feature so often that they should be learned.

Flowers grow all year round, but visitors in spring and early summer will be amazed at the colour and

wealth of flowering plants. Many are Canarian endemics, and even trying to compile a shortlist would be pointless. Anyone with a particular interest in flowers and other plants should carry a specific field guide, in English. Try *Native Flora of the Canary Islands* by Miguel Ángel Cabrera Pérez, Editorial Everest or *Wild Flowers of the Canary Islands* by David Bramwell and Zoë Bramwell, Editorial Rueda.

Animals

As befits remote islands created in relatively recent geological time, the main animal groups to colonise the land were winged creatures, insects and birds. The largest indigenous land mammals were bats. Large and small lizards also arrived, possibly clinging to driftwood. The laurisilva cloud forest is home to the laurel pigeon, while the rock pigeon prefers cliffs.

The giant lizards of El Hierro were rescued from the brink of extinction and are now being conserved



WALK 1

San Sebastián and Jaragán

Start/finish	Plaza de la Constitución, San Sebastián
Distance	18.5km (11½ miles)
Total ascent/descent	700m (2295ft)
Time	5hr
Terrain	Roads, tracks and rugged paths on the ascent. A steep descent and a long road walk to finish.
Refreshments	Plenty of choice in San Sebastián. Bars at Lomo Frágoso and El Langrero.
Transport	Buses converge on San Sebastián from all parts of La Gomera

After climbing from the centre of San Sebastián to its highest suburbs, tracks give way to rugged mountain paths across the face of Jaragán. A ridge walk is followed by a steep and rugged descent through scrub into a valley. A simple road walk returns to San Sebastián.

Route uses Rutas
30, 32 and GR132

Start in the centre of **San Sebastián** on a corner of the Plaza de la Constitución beside the Bar Restaurante La Hila. Walk up the narrow Camino de La Hila and turn right. The stone-paved street climbs, ending with steps to the **Mirador de La Hila**. Enjoy the views and continue up the road, keeping right at a junction signposted for La Lomada. At the next road bend, climb steps up Camino de Puntallana. Watch for a right turn up more steps and climb to a road at a higher level. Turn left and keep left at a junction to follow Calle de la Orilla de Llano. The road climbs and leaves the top end of town as part of the long-distance GR132, bearing stout markers at 1km intervals.

Reach a roundabout and follow a narrow road uphill. Turn right as signposted for Jaragán, following a path through tabaibal, verode and aulaga vegetation.

The walk starts by climbing past houses to leave San Sebastián

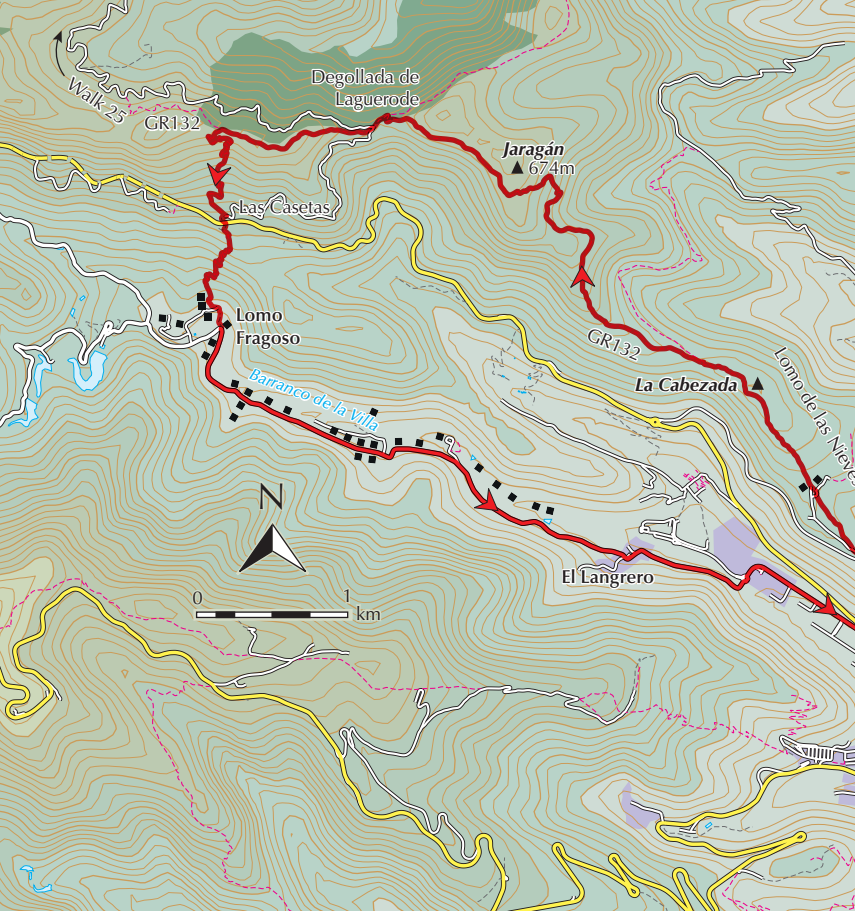


Cross a water pipe and head gently up to a narrow road. Turn right then quickly left to walk up beside a goat enclosure to reach the road again at a signpost. Walk up an easy, stony path past old terraces on **Lomo de las Nieves**. The path levels out with views across the valley to Los Roques, with Jaragán ahead.

Follow the path onwards and go down a rocky ramp above palms. Cross a gap and climb, exploiting a soft red layer. Climb onto a ridge and pass lots of cardón and tabaibal scrub. Rocks have been shifted to make the path, but watch carefully as it rises across a slope of prickly pears. A pointed peak rises ahead, so keep right and pick up a path contouring along a soft, creamy layer of rock. Later, zigzag up towards palms then head downhill. The path contours round a hollow in the mountainside around 500m (1640ft). A reddish, stony zigzag path cuts through old terraces, becoming vague as it crosses the shoulder of **Jaragán** around 625m (2050ft).



The path across the face of Jaragán is very narrow and at times runs beneath an overhang



The dirt road can be followed right for Hermigua, continuing along the GR132. It is easy, but very long and convoluted.

Swing right along another soft, creamy layer on the rocky slope, slicing across the face of Jaragán, sometimes cut so deeply that the rock overhangs. Dogs may be heard barking up the cliff, at a little goat farm. Keep following the terrace path onwards, wary of rock-fall. When the far end of the ridge is reached, scooped-out steps lead downhill and a sign announces the Parque de Natural Majona. Zigzag down to a bend on a dirt road at 599m (1965ft), and make a decision. ◀



The dirt road could also be followed left, winding easily down to the main road, but Rutas 31 and 32 run straight up a rocky path instead. It starts awkwardly but becomes easier, climbing a broad ridge between forest and scrub. Climb only until a path drifts left, Ruta 31, which links with a narrow, stone-paved path zig-zagging down a steep slope of dense scrub. Cross the main road near **Las Casetas** and go through a barrier to continue the descent.

Follow a short stretch of dirt road, but turn left down a narrow zigzag path on another steep and scrubby slope. When a house is reached, turn left down a red-tiled path, cross a streambed, go down steps and pass some banana plants. Turn left to cross a bridge over a river then turn right to reach a road beside the Bar El Atajo at **Lomo Fragoso**.

Walk down the road, all the way through the **Barranco de la Villa** to San Sebastián. It sounds simple, but it is 6.5km (4 miles) to the town centre. Pass San Antonio and pass the Bar Restaurante La Cabaña at **El Langrero**. The road turns left to cross a bridge over the barranco then turns right past an ambulance station. Follow the road into San Sebastián, keeping left as sign-posted 'centro ciudad' under a road bridge. Walk straight into the town centre.