

# **WALKING AND TREKKING IN THE SIERRA NEVADA**



### About the Author

Richard Hartley started walking in the UK hills in the mid 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s he spent many seasons walking and mountaineering in the Alps. Since then he has led six expeditions to the Patagonian Icecap and joined a Berghaus-sponsored expedition in 2013 to ski volcanoes in Kamchatka.

In 1998 he quit his job as an accountant in search of a better life and found it in the Sierra Nevada where he has lived since 2002, just outside the spa town of Lanjarón in the Alpujarras. He is the owner of a local tour and guiding company, 'Spanish Highs, Sierra Nevada' ([www.spanishhighs.co.uk](http://www.spanishhighs.co.uk)). They run walking, trekking, mountaineering, snowshoeing and ski touring trips into the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, and further afield organise regular expeditions to the Southern Patagonian Icecap.

# **WALKING AND TREKKING IN THE SIERRA NEVADA**

**by Richard Hartley**

**CICERONE**

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL  
[www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk)

© Richard Hartley 2017  
First edition 2017  
ISBN: 978 1 85284 917 7

Printed by KHL Printing, Singapore  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.  
All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.



Route mapping by Lovell Johns [www.lovelljohns.com](http://www.lovelljohns.com)  
Contains OpenStreetMap.org data © OpenStreetMap  
contributors, CC-BY-SA. NASA relief data courtesy of ESRI

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/917/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/917/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL, United Kingdom.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

*Front cover: First winter snows on the north faces of Alcazaba and Mulhacén from the Loma de los Cuartos (Route 28)*



# CONTENTS

---

Overview map . . . . .	8
Mulhacén and Alcazaba overview map . . . . .	9
Map key . . . . .	10
Mountain safety . . . . .	11
Route summary tables . . . . .	12
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	17
Plants and wildlife . . . . .	18
Climate and conditions. . . . .	21
Getting to the Sierra Nevada. . . . .	25
Getting around. . . . .	25
Accommodation and bases. . . . .	28
Respecting the environment . . . . .	35
Safety and rescue . . . . .	36
Water sources. . . . .	43
Weather resources . . . . .	43
Planning and maps. . . . .	44
Using this guide . . . . .	45
<b>WALKS</b> . . . . .	49
<b>Trevélez</b> . . . . .	50
Route 1 Ascent of Alcazaba via Cañada de Siete Lagunas . . . . .	52
Route 2 Ascent of Mulhacén via Cañada de Siete Lagunas . . . . .	59
Route 3 Round of the Río Juntillas and Trevélez valleys . . . . .	64
<b>Capileira</b> . . . . .	70
Route 4 Barranco de Poqueira circular . . . . .	72
Route 5 Ascent of Mulhacén from Hoya del Portillo. . . . .	76
<b>Refugio Poqueira</b> . . . . .	81
Route 6 Ascent of Mulhacén from Refugio Poqueira. . . . .	84
Route 7 The Caldera peaks. . . . .	88
Route 8 Around Mulhacén via the Vasar and Siete Lagunas . . . . .	91
Route 9 The Púlpitos . . . . .	96
<b>Western Alpujarras</b> . . . . .	99
Route 10 Pico del Tajo de los Machos and Cerrillo Redondo . . . . .	103
Route 11 Ascent of Cerro del Caballo from the south. . . . .	107
Route 12 Ascent of Cerro del Caballo via los Tres Mojones . . . . .	112

<b>Dílar valley</b> .....	115
Route 13 Silleta de Padul .....	117
Route 14 Integral de los Alayos .....	121
<b>Cumbres Verdes</b> .....	125
Route 15 Boca de la Pesca .....	128
Route 16 Trevenque via Cuerda del Trevenque .....	130
Route 17 Circuit of Trevenque and Dílar valley .....	133
Route 18 The Cerro Huenes group .....	138
Route 19 Pico del Tesoro and Cerro del Cocón .....	141
Route 20 Trevenque direct .....	145
<b>Ski area – Hoya de la Mora</b> .....	148
Route 21 Veleta, Tajos de la Virgen and Lagunillas .....	149
Route 22 Veredón Superior and Cerro de los Machos .....	154
Route 23 Veredón Inferior, Veta Grande, northern flanks and lakes .....	159
Route 24 Across the mountains to Lanjarón via Refugio Elorrieta .....	163
<b>Vereda de la Estrella/Genil valley</b> .....	172
Route 25 Vereda de la Estrella, Refugio Cucaracha and Cueva Secreta . . .	174
Route 26 Cortijos del Hornillo circular .....	177
Route 27 Ascent of Mulhacén via Cueva Secreta .....	180
Route 28 Round of the northern peaks via Peña Partida .....	187
<b>Jérez del Marquesado and Refugio Postero Alto</b> .....	194
Route 29 Ascent of Picón de Jérez and round of the Alhorí valley .....	195
<b>Puerto de la Ragua</b> .....	199
Route 30 The eastern peaks .....	200
<b>MAIN RIDGE TRAVERSE AND LONGER TREKS</b> .....	205
Route 31 ‘Los Tres Miles’ Integral 3000m peaks .....	207
Route 32 ‘Los Tres Picos’ – Veleta, Mulhacén and Alcazaba .....	220
Route 33 The Sulayr GR240 .....	226
<b>HIGH MOUNTAIN SCRAMBLES</b> .....	235
Route 34 Espolón de Alcazaba .....	236
Route 35 Traverse of Puntal de la Caldera .....	240
Route 36 Espolón de la Caldera .....	244
Route 37 Arista de las Campanitas .....	249
Route 38 North ridge of Tozal del Cartujo .....	253

<b>Appendix A</b>	List of the 3000m peaks . . . . .	258
<b>Appendix B</b>	Accommodation. . . . .	259
<b>Appendix C</b>	Useful contacts. . . . .	261
<b>Appendix D</b>	Glossary . . . . .	262
<b>Appendix E</b>	Further reading. . . . .	264

## Acknowledgements

Mention must be made of the writer of the previous editions of this guide, Andy Walmsley, who published the guide in 1996 with a revision in 2006. These books have spent countless hours accompanying me around the hills of the Sierra Nevada. They also provided much-needed inspiration as I sat around a winter fireside. My sincere hope is that this current guidebook can continue his excellent work.

Walking companions Javier Aguirrebengoa, Nick Cranham, Felipe Nieto Conejero, Clive Fenn, Jens Foell, Victoria Bocanegra Montañes, Andrew Phillips and Ian Tupman provided assistance with photos, route-checking and route choice. Ian Tupman also proofread and highlighted errors in the text.

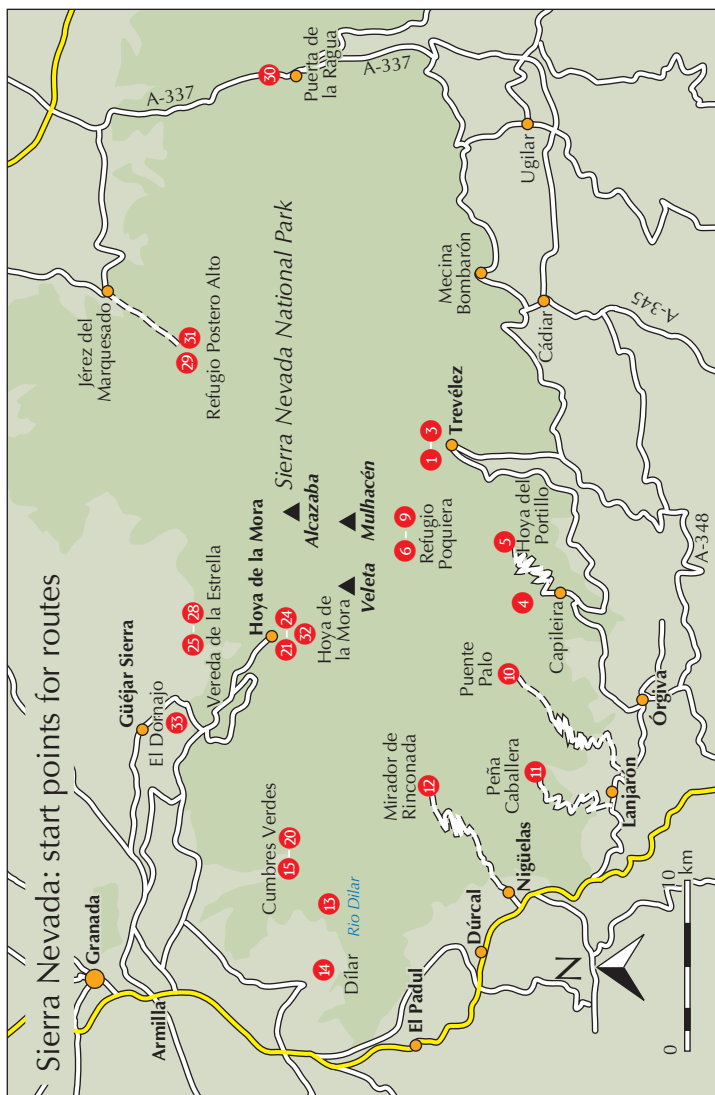
Local expert Pepe Badaje added information and history about the unguarded refuges. Carol Byrne gave me information about fiesta dates in the Alpujarras. The climate section was checked by weather expert Stephanie Ball of MeteoGib.

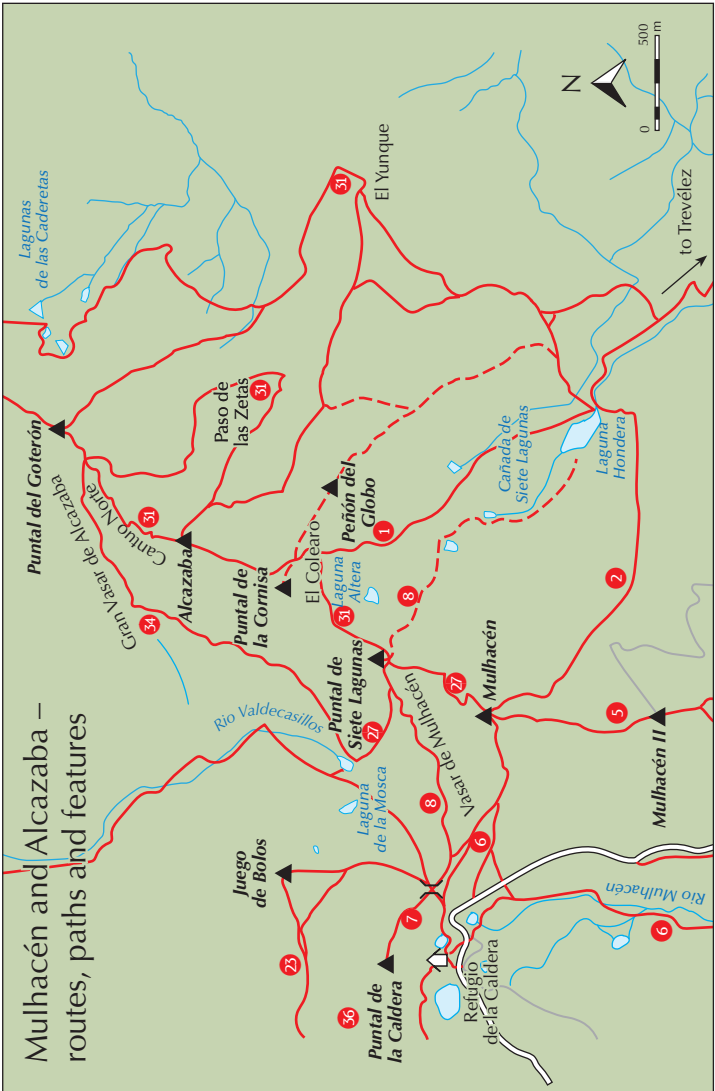
The 'Plants and wildlife' section was provided by my wife, Kiersten Rowland, and illustrated with her wonderful photos. She and my daughter, Emma Hartley, also ran the office for long periods whilst I had my head immersed in files and maps. This was invaluable as they removed the few remaining excuses I had to get down to some hard graft.

Thanks to the Hotel España and 'Sabores de las Alpujarras' in Lanjarón for allowing me to use their excellent facilities to spread out the maps, use my laptop, and for keeping me supplied with a seemingly constant stream of coffee or cold beer!

And of course, thanks to Jonathan Williams at Cicerone Press for his guidance, patience and understanding over the years.

Dedicated to my father for introducing me as a 10 year old to the wonders of the hills in the first place.





Mulhacén and Alcazaba –  
routes, paths and features

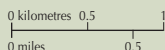
## Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	scramble
	start point/alternative start
	finish point
	start/finish point
	woodland
	urban areas
	regional border
	international border
	station/railway
	peak
	town/village
	manned/unmanned refuge
	parking
	building
	church
	col/pass
	water feature/spring
	viewpoint
	restaurant
	cave

### Relief in metres

3800–4000	
3600–3800	
3400–3600	
3200–3400	
3000–3200	
2800–3000	
2600–2800	
2400–2600	
2200–2400	
2000–2200	
1800–2000	
1600–1800	
1400–1600	
1200–1400	
1000–1200	
800–1000	
600–800	
400–600	
200–400	
0–200	

SCALE: 1:50,000



All maps are at 1:50,000 except for Routes 31 and 32 which are 1:100,000, and Route 33 which is 1:250,000.

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

### GPX files

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded for free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/917/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/917/GPX)

## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### **International Distress Signal** *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### **Helicopter Rescue**

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### **Emergency telephone numbers**

In case of accident or emergency call 112. Ask for an English speaking operative if you require assistance with the language.

### **Weather reports**

If telephoning from the UK the dialling code is:

Spain: 0034

Teletiempo Sierra Nevada 807 17 03 84

Agencia Estatal de Meteorología 807 17 03 65

**Note** Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

# ROUTE SUMMARY TABLES

No.	Title	Start	Grade	Distance	Ascent	Time	Page
1	Ascent of Alcazaba via Cañada de Siete Lagunas	Trevélez	Tough	22km	1770m	11hr/2 days	52
2	Ascent of Mulhacén via Cañada de Siete Lagunas	Trevélez	Tough	21km	1870m	11hr/2 days	59
3	Round of the Río Juntillas and Trevélez valleys	Trevélez	Tough or challenging	38km or 35km	2180m or 1670m	2–3 days	64
4	Barranco de Poqueira circular	Capileira	Challenging	20km	930m	8hr	72
5	Ascent of Mulhacén from Hoya del Portillo	Hoya del Portillo	Tough	23.5km	1330m	8hr 30min	76
6	Ascent of Mulhacén from Refugio Poqueira	Refugio Poqueira	Challenging	9.5km	990m	5hr 30min	84
7	The Caldera peaks	Refugio Poqueira	Challenging	10km	680m	6hr	88
8	Around Mulhacén via the Vasar and Siete Lagunas	Refugio Poqueira	Challenging	12km	900m	6hr	91
9	The Púlpitos	Refugio Poqueira	Moderate	10km	670m	4hr 30min	96
10	Pico del Tajo de los Machos and Cerrillo Redondo	Puente Palo	Tough	17.5km	1410m	8hr 30min	103



No.	Title	Start	Grade	Distance	Ascent	Time	Page
11	Ascent of Cerro del Caballo from the south	Trailhead above Lanjarón or Lanjarón	Challenging or tough	19km or 34km	1060m or 2320m	6hr 30min or 13hr 15min/2 days	107
12	Ascent of Cerro del Caballo via Tres Mojones	Mirador de Rinconada	Challenging	11.5km	900m	5hr 15min	112
13	Silleta de Padul	Ermida de las Nieves	Moderate	13km	570m	5hr 30min	117
14	Integral de los Alayos	Merendero los Alayos	Tough	20km	980m	7hr 30min	121
15	Boca de la Pesca	Collado Sevilla	Leisurely	8km	330m	2hr 30min	128
16	Trevenque via Cuerda del Trevenque	Collado Sevilla	Moderate	10km	670m	4hr	130
17	Circuit of Trevenque and Dílar valley	Collado Sevilla	Moderate	12km or 9.5km	900m or 490m	5hr 30min or 4hr 30min	133
18	The Cerro Huenes group	Puente de los Siete Ojos	Moderate	11km	580m	5hr	138
19	Pico del Tesoro and Cerro del Cocón	Casa Forestal Cortijuela	Moderate	8km	350m	3hr 30min	141
20	Trevenque direct	Casa Forestal Cortijuela	Moderate	5km	330m	3hr	145
21	Veleta, Tajos de la Virgen and Lagunillas	Hoya de la Mora	Challenging	17km	850m	7hr	149

No.	Title	Start	Grade	Distance	Ascent	Time	Page
22	Veredón Superior and Cerro de los Machos	Hoya de la Mora	Challenging	12.5km	870m	6hr 15min	154
23	Veredón Inferior, Veta Grande, northern flanks and lakes	Hoya de la Mora	Tough	21km	1440m	11hr/2 days	159
24	Across the mountains to Lanjarón	Hoya de la Mora	Tough	29km	860m	11hr/2 days	163
25	Vereda de la Estrella, Refugio Cucaracha and Cueva Secreta	Vereda de la Estrella	Challenging	21km	1250m	8hr	174
26	Cortijos del Hornillo circular	Vereda de la Estrella	Moderate	13.5km	750m	6hr	177
27	Ascent of Mulhacén via Cueva Secreta	Vereda de la Estrella	Very tough	16km	2790m	9hr	180
28	Round of the northern peaks via Peña Partida	Vereda de la Estrella or Loma de los Cuartos	Tough or challenging	37km or 22km	2490m or 1110m	15hr/2-3 days or 10hr 30min/2 days	187
29	Picón de Jérez and round of the Alhori valley	Refugio Postero Alto	Tough	16km	1330m	8hr	195
30	The eastern peaks	Puerto de la Ragua	Challenging	26km	1510m	2 days	200

No.	Title	Start	Grade	Distance	Ascent	Time	Page
Main ridge traverse and longer treks							
31	'Los Tres Miles' Integral 3000m peaks	Refugio Postero Alto or Puerto de la Ragua	Very tough	65km or 89 km	3470m or 5370m	3–5 days or 5–7 days	207
32	'Los Tres Picos' – Veleta, Mulhacén and Alcazaba	Hoya de la Mora	Tough	48km	2910m	3 days	220
33	The Sulayr GR240	El Dornajo	Tough	302km	10,070m	15–20 days	226

High mountain scrambles				
No.	Title	Approach	Grade	Page
34	Espolón de Alcazaba	Alto de Chorrillo, Collado del Ciervo, Laguna de la Mosca, Gran Vasar de Alcazaba	3S	236
35	Traverse of Puntal de la Caldera	Alto de Chorrillo or Posiciones del Veleta and Col de Carihuela	2	240
36	Espolón de la Caldera	Posiciones del Veleta, Col de Carihuela, Laguna Larga or Alto de Chorrillo, Collado del Ciervo	3	244
37	Arista de las Campanitas	Posiciones del Veleta, Corral del Veleta, Cerro de los Machos	2/3	249
38	North ridge Tozal del Cartujo	Hoya de la Mora, Collado de las Yeguas, Laguna Misterioso	3	253

*Towards Veleta and Cerro de los Machos from the south ridge of Mulhacén (Route 5)*



## INTRODUCTION

---

*Winter sun setting over the Mediterranean Sea (Route 5)*



Tucked away in the south of Spain, in the centre of Andalucía, lies another world. A world of soaring, snow-clad peaks and deep valleys far removed from the crowded beaches of the Costa del Sol. Relatively few foreign visitors to the region venture into the Sierra Nevada – especially in winter, when snow normally lies over the mountains from December until May. It is a very special place.

The Sierra Nevada is not only one of Europe's most southerly mountain ranges, it also contains the highest peaks in Western Europe outside of the Alps. It is a relatively small range of mountains (90km long by 35km wide)

situated in the Granada province of Andalucía, Spain – but what it lacks in size it makes up for in altitude, with over 25 peaks above 3000m. These include the highest point in Western Europe outside the Alps: Mulhacén, at 3482m. From these mountains, on clear days it is possible to view the coast of North Africa some 200km away across the Mediterranean Sea. No glaciers remain here but their effect is marked, with deep cirques and valleys on the northern flanks. By contrast, the southern aspect is relatively gentle.

The range gained national park status in 1999 and covers an area

of 85,883 hectares, making it the largest national park in Spain. It was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1986, in recognition of its exceptionally diverse plant, bird and animal species.

The Sierra Nevada is bordered in the west by the plains of the Vega de Granada, while in the east the mountains drop down to merge with the arid desert badlands of Tabernas in Almería. To the north west the hills of the Sierra de Huétor merge into the dry plains around Guadix and Baza to the east; and to the south the Sierra Nevada drops down into the hills of the Alpujarras, a mix of whitewashed villages and lush green valleys fed by the waters of the Sierra Nevada.

The area is very accessible, being only a two-hour drive from the sun-drenched beaches of the Costa del Sol. Despite this it sees relatively few visitors to its slopes, apart from at weekends and during *fiestas* (public holidays) in summer, when the locals enjoy the high mountains. That is, of course, part of the attraction. So close to Africa and the costas and yet so wild and inhospitable. The contrast couldn't be more marked.

There is tremendous scope here for those who prefer their mountains wild and dramatic, as this guide-book will attempt to demonstrate. Yes, it has its trade routes – especially around the easily accessible peaks of Mulhacén (highest) and Veleta (easiest access). Once the decision has been made to venture away from these,

and especially during the week, the area has much to commend it for the seeker of solitude – and especially for multi-day wild camping.

The guide describes routes of varying degrees of difficulty, from easy half-day jaunts and day trips through to tough multi-day treks. Although most are high-level routes in the Sierra Nevada, there are some superb lower-level alternatives that should not be overlooked. These include eight walks in the delightful Cumbres Verdes and Dílar valley hills just south east of Granada. There are also five high mountain scrambles for the more adventurous.

### PLANTS AND WILDLIFE

The Sierra Nevada has some of the most exceptional and unique varieties of plant and animal life in the western Mediterranean area. Living conditions are difficult for these species because of the extremes of temperatures and weather.

#### Plants

Some 116 of the region's 2100 catalogued plants are threatened, and 80 of these are endemic to the Sierra Nevada massif.

Sierra chamomile (*Artemisia granatensis*) is endemic and is on the critical list due to years of being over-collected for its reported healing properties. Another endangered species is the Sierra Nevada poppy (*Papaver lapeyrousianum*), which can



*The estrella de las nieves, or 'star of the snows' (Plantago nivalis) (Photo: Kiersten Rowland); the endangered Sierra Nevada poppy (Papaver lapeyrousianum)*

only be found in certain areas close to the summit of Mulhacén.

Some of the most fragile and unique ecosystems in the mountain range are the *borreguiles* (high meadows) – home to many of the endemic species, where 35% of the plant species are not found anywhere else in the world. During the spring you'll find a beautiful carpet of alpine flowers and the only carnivorous plant that grows in the Sierra Nevada: the Sierra Nevada Tirana (*Pinguicula nevadensis*), which grows in the wettest areas above 2500m. Depending on snow melt, it blooms in July and catches insects with its sticky leaves.

Probably the most emblematic plant of the Sierra Nevada is the estrella de las nieves ('star of the snows'; *Plantago nivalis*), which has a legend of being the flower of eternal love.

The wide range in altitude here results in two major forest zones: a conifer zone, typical of the higher

elevations (1200m–2500m), and a mixed broadleaf zone occurring at mid and lower levels. The park is home to such tree species as Salzmann pine (*Pinus nigra*), Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), and Maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*).

### Birds

In 2017 it was estimated that over 60 species of bird live in the Sierra Nevada. Birds of prey commonly seen include the golden eagle, Bonelli's eagle, short-toed and booted eagles. Many smaller species such as kestrels, peregrine falcons and goshawks are also frequently spotted.

Griffon vultures are common and seemingly dominate the skies from late spring to autumn. The vulture is nature's natural dustbin-cleaner and does a superb job of clearing the land of unwanted carcasses. The successful reintroduction of the lammergeier (bearded vulture) in a nearby





*The colourful bee-eater is found in the lower slopes of the Alpujarras from spring to autumn (Photo: Kiersten Rowland)*

mountain range means there's a chance you'll see one of these beautiful rare vultures visiting the Sierra Nevada.

The friendly alpine accentor is found above 2000m and seems to like the Mulhacén summit area in particular in summer. It is mainly resident but winters more widely at lower latitudes.

Skylark, red-billed chough, wheatear and rock thrush are some of the few non-raptors that can be seen, and the ring ouzel visits in winter.

### **Animals, reptiles and insects**

Mammals to be spotted in the Sierra Nevada area include the Spanish ibex (of which there is a thriving population, although it is now facing threats

from illegal hunting and the fatal disease of sarcoptic mange), fox, wildcat, martens, snow vole and wild boar.

Large solitary feline prints have been seen in the snow at 3000m; Lynx are known to frequent the Sierra Arana just north east of Granada, and while it is not inconceivable that they travel south, locals suggest the prints are more likely to be those of a wildcat.

Snakes including the ladder snake, horseshoe whip snake and Lataste's viper can be encountered (see 'General hazards'). Lizards will often be seen sunning themselves on the trails. The ocellated lizard was once traditional cuisine, but is now protected.

There are 270 unique species of insect, with over 100 endemic to these mountains. Most have adapted their life cycles to the extreme conditions; many have become darker, thicker and wingless, such as the endangered saddle bush-cricket.

The Sierra Nevada blue and the Apollo (considered an important



*A fine example of a macho Spanish ibex (Cabra Montés) (Photo: Nick Cranham)*





*Stunning views from Puerto Molina (Route 5)*

endemic species), two of the 120 of butterfly species recorded in the region, are also endangered.

### CLIMATE AND CONDITIONS

Misjudgment of the weather tends to be due to the changing of the seasons and the related mountain risks that brings. Traditionally, autumn and spring are the most unpredictable times, as it may be t-shirt and shorts weather on the Costa Tropical, yet people could well be fighting blizzard conditions at 3000m. A fine day on the coast can lead unprepared and ill-equipped people into the mountains.

Strangely enough, winter is more predictable. Most mountain-goers recognise the severe weather potential, and that at a bare minimum it will be very cold and windy. The Sierra Nevada does provide some reliable

snow cover in the mountains from December to May.

Summer generally offers fine weather for high-level walking and trekking, when it is possible to travel light save for clothing required for the odd afternoon thunderstorm or cooling breezes.

One of the major benefits of the Sierra Nevada is the stability of its climate. Big high-pressure systems sit over the area for months at a time in summer, and sometimes for long periods during the winter months too. The downhill ski resort is said to be the sunniest ski resort in the world. Winter is the most unsettled and wettest period, though, and when bad weather does come in you can expect it to be generally heavy, violent and short-lived.

There are huge differences in temperature between the various seasons. At 3000m in January and February the air temperature (without

For Routes 1 and 2, if arriving by car, on entering Trevélez take the sign towards Barrio Alto and Barrio Medio. You'll find car parks on the edge of Barrio Alto. For Route 3 and the Río Trevélez it's best to park at the lower village.

There are three daily bus services from Granada: check the timetable at [www.alsa.es/en/](http://www.alsa.es/en/)

## ROUTE 1

### *Ascent of Alcazaba via Cañada de Siete Lagunas*

---

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Car park at Barrio Medio, Trevélez (1540m)
<b>Distance</b>	22km
<b>Total ascent</b>	1770m
<b>Grade</b>	Tough
<b>Time</b>	11hr/2 days
<b>Summits</b>	Alcazaba
<b>Water sources</b>	Usually plentiful at Siete Lagunas and above, although a filter is advisable in high summer. Below Siete Lagunas there are many cattle herds, so it's better to carry more water rather than risk taking from lower sources.
<b>Seasonal notes</b>	In winter the caves at Siete Lagunas may well be filled with snow, requiring excavation. The waterfall at Chorreras Negras can be sheet ice in midwinter; in these conditions great care should be taken when ascending the flanking path. In July and August an early start is recommended from Trevélez to avoid the heat at lower altitudes.

Many visitors each year make the trip from one of the highest villages in Spain to the beautiful valley and lakes at Cañada de Siete Lagunas. Surrounded by the crags and cliffs of Mulhacén and Alcazaba, it is a spectacular place and in itself one of the classic walks of the Sierra Nevada. Many people camp here and then either return via the same route or continue to ascend Mulhacén or Alcazaba. As such this walk can either be done in one very long day or split into two shorter ones.

Alcazaba (3371m) is one of the finest mountains in the national park. Its very name, which translates as ‘the fortress’, invokes a sense of invincibility and impregnability. It is surrounded by cliffs, and yet to the south and east there are chinks in its armor that give pleasant ways to its lofty summit. There are three walking routes to the summit from Siete Lagunas, all of roughly the same length and time. The route via El Colaero is the most spectacular and is described here as the ‘main’ option; the other two alternatives are also given.

From the car park take the tarmac road 100m east to a market square, from where the route to the start of the track leaving town is well signposted. Walk up the street east past the Coviran store, turn left up the hill just before Hotel La Fragua, and then dogleg right. A large sign on the left indicates the start of the route as you leave the village.

After leaving the town proper the track rises slowly, passing through agricultural land before turning left up steepening slopes to join an irrigation channel (*acequia*) – the **Acequia Gorda**. Shortly after crossing the acequia, the path traverses up and across more open slopes towards the prow of **Prado Largo**.

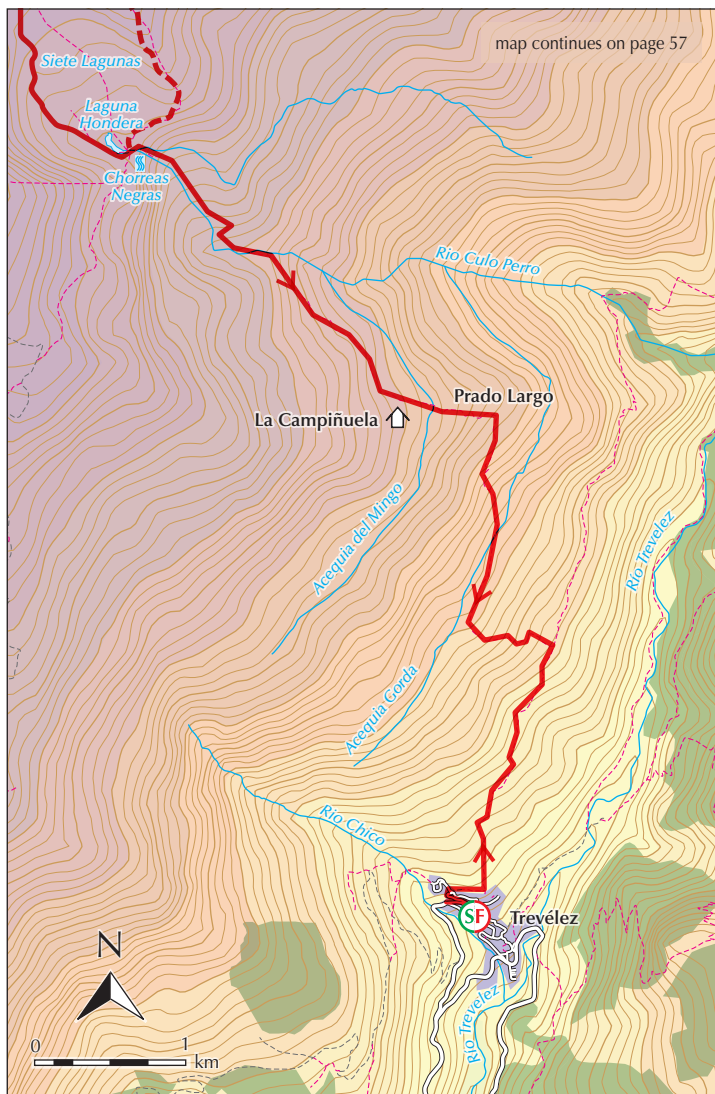
After emerging from a young pine forest and crossing the **Acequia del Mingo**, the recently restored building at **La Campiñuela** (2410m) is reached (2hr, 5km). This is a useful landmark: make a mental note of the return path into the pine forest. (In descent it’s easy to wander off on the wrong path, especially in mist.) [In blizzards or bad weather the refuge makes a suitable emergency shelter.](#)

The well-marked path continues into the valley of the curiously named Río Culo de Perro and crosses the river before ascending to the foot of the waterfall coming from the lip of Siete Lagunas, the **Chorreras Negras**. The path then zig-zags its way up the steep northern side of the Chorreras, often muddy at the very top, before emerging over the lip and into the valley of **Siete Lagunas** (4hr 15min, 7.5km)

## SIETE LAGUNAS

At this point, straight ahead lies the vast bulk of the east face of Mulhacén – the highest peak on mainland Spain – and to the right is Alcazaba. It is a magnificent sight. The lake directly ahead is Laguna Hondera, whose grassy banks make a delightful place to while away the hours.

For those intending to camp, there are plenty of possible sites. (Just a few metres south east of the lake are some natural caves that are often used.)



One of the delights of camping here is the morning sunrise over Laguna Hondera, with the line of the Sierra Nevada mountains stretching away to the east towards the distant hills of Almería.

Foxes can be a nuisance here in the summer (see ‘General hazards’ in the introduction); they are attracted to the food brought by overnight visitors. An alternative option would be to move up the gently sloping valley floor until you find a suitable bivouac site at one of the higher lakes.

It’s a short but fine stroll up the valley to visit the other lakes. In the spring the valley is a mass of tumbling streams and rivers – a real delight. The upper lake is (not very originally) named Laguna Altera; it lies in a dramatic rocky hollow at the head of the valley beneath the peak of Puntal de Siete Lagunas (3244m).

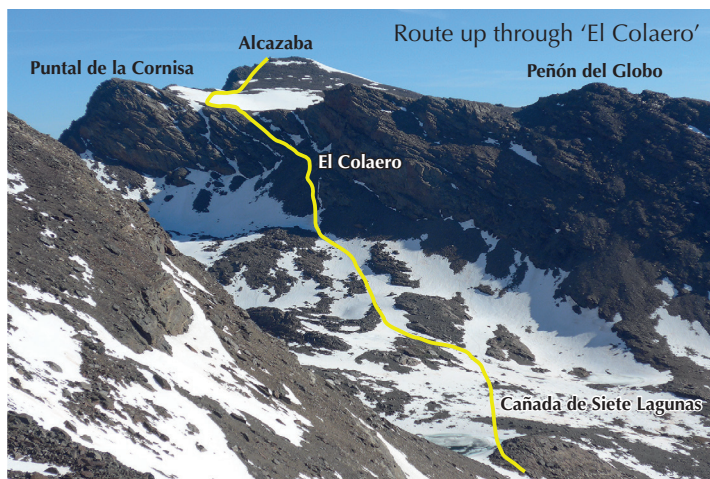
From **Laguna Hondera** (lake), walk up the gently graded valley floor, passing alongside tumbling streams and tranquil lakes and aiming for the upper centre of the valley. There are some faint tracks but the way is obvious up to the upper basin, where the highest lake, **Laguna Altera**, lies encircled by cliffs and ridges.

Just before reaching the lake, take a track that heads north west up the steepening and rocky slopes, aiming for an obvious col between **Puntal de la Cornisa** (3307m) and Peñón del Globo (3279m). The gully leading up to this point is known as ‘**El Colearo**’; cairns mark the way, and although it is steep and loose the ascent is without difficulty. (At one point a hand may be required to assist upward progress, but this could hardly be called scrambling.)

**El Colaero** looks impossible from the lakes to the south east. Surely there can’t be a walking route through those steep upper crags? The reality is that it is just a steep walk – but it is certainly a fascinating place, surrounded by rock walls and scenery reminiscent of the Skye Cuillin.

You may start to feel the altitude, but sooner than expected you arrive at the col, which is marked by a large cairn. [Make a note of this place for the return journey – especially in misty conditions.](#)

Ahead lies the fairly level plateau area leading to the summit, and the good path continues round the rim of the valley just below the ridge crest before the final climb up to the large summit cairn on **Alcazaba** at 3371m (6hr 15min, 11km).



The **summit** is a fine viewpoint – possibly the best in the Sierra Nevada – with expansive views in all directions, although the plunging precipices of Mulhacén's north west face will no doubt draw the eye.

### Alternative ascent via Peñón del Globo ridge

A track leaves Laguna Hondera at its south eastern side and goes north east towards the pinnacle of Piedra del Yunque east of Alcazaba. Follow this path for 10min until an easy ascent onto the broad south east ridge of Peñón del Globo can be made. There are signs of a path and the going is relatively easy until the ridge abuts steeper slopes running up to the summit (5hr 30min).

Now ascend on rocky and stony ground, avoiding some large boulders, until the ridge becomes more defined and eventually arrives at the summit of the **Peñón del Globo** at 3279m. From the summit continue along the ridge to the cairn at the col beyond, and the path coming up from the left from El Colaero. From here follow the main route description to the summit of **Alcazaba** (6hr 15min, 11km).

### Alternative ascent via Meseta de las Borregas

This route should only be considered in fine, clear conditions as it passes through quite featureless terrain.

Take the alternative path described above to just below the steepening of the broad ridge of Peñón del Globo. Look for a small and obvious col to the



## ROUTE 1 – ASCENT OF ALCAZABA VIA CAÑADA DE SIETE LAGUNAS



*Looking south along the summit plateau to Punta de la Cornisa, with the vast bulk of Mulhacén rising behind*





right (north) between the Loma de la Alcazaba and the ridge dropping down from Peñón del Globo: traverse across to this col on a good path. The col marks the entrance to the **Meseta de las Borregas** – the upper south east valley of Alcazaba (5hr).

After making a minor, almost imperceptible descent, cross the valley floor and ascend the slope opposite that joins the south east ridge, which is followed to the summit of **Alcazaba** (6hr 15min, 11km).

From the summit, the simplest descent – especially in mist – is to return the same way (via El Colaero) to **Siete Lagunas** (8hr). In clear weather you might choose to vary your route by reversing one of the alternatives described above. From Siete Lagunas, retrace your steps down the main route to return to **Trevélez**.