



ALTERNATIVE ROUTE GR 249.4

STAGE 2: ANTEQUERA • VALLE DE ABDALAJÍS

THE STAGE IN SUMMARY

Antequera is strategically well-placed in the province for a number of reasons. The Sierra aides its function as a frontier fortress, the fertile plains stretch to the horizon at around 500 metres above sea level and the Nacimiento de la Villa supplies it with clean drinking water. From here, the Stage sets off to the south, first crossing the clay hills with rainfed crops and then climbs one of the most rugged landscapes of the entire Great Path, La Escaleruela, heading towards the mountain pass of the same name.

This section is aptly named after the winding cobbled path, with occasional steps to overcome the steep incline and sometimes has more than one branch. Despite these first impressions, the landscape above is much less rugged than expected. Its wide valleys and cultivated hillsides lie between the very contrasting relief of the Chimenea mountains to the west and El Torcal ridge to the east.

Practically downhill from here on, the route's course changes from mostly south to west as the path skirts the hills of El Águila and Gordo. These act as a turning point halfway along the route, and from where the landscape opens out. At the same time, human activity becomes more apparent with a string of country houses and some larger settlements. The route follows a fairly straight line, with a wide arc to avoid the numerous tributaries in the upper course of the Arroyo del Espino. The path also crosses a municipal boundary here, for the second time.

The Great Path passes close to three hamlets that depend on Antequera, Los Nogales, La Higuera and La Joya. It is this latter settlement that is the largest and most compact in terms of urban development. This spread of villages in the area is due to the meeting of two very important roads, one from Malaga to Bobadilla (running north to south) and another from Antequera, which the Stage follows almost entirely. The crossroads and its nearby springs are the setting of La Joya.

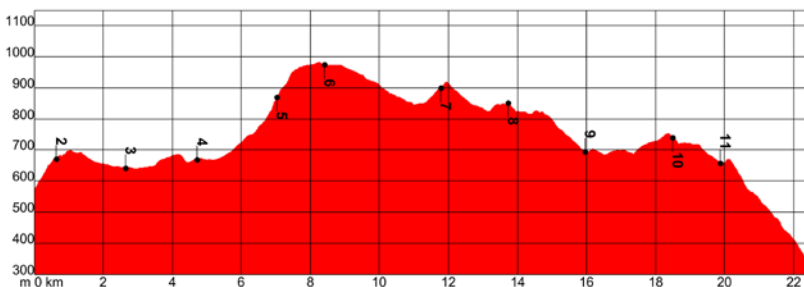
The last part of the route goes through fields of cereals and Olive trees, over a long hill that forms the watershed. It soon comes to the eastern side of Valle de Abdalajís, ending up near the iron bridge over the Las Piedras stream. ►

The Great Path passing through La Escaleruela, with Antequera and its plains beyond





Antequera (SO) 570 m				Valle de Abdalajís (E) (330 m)			
22.4 km		7 h 20 min.		675 m		915 m	
On foot						Linear	
4.8 km		14.7 km		2.9 km			
Environment hazards		1 2 3 4 5		Underfoot Conditions		1 2 3 4 5	
Navigation		1 2 3 4 5		Physical Effort		1 2 3 4 5	



- Road traffic circulating on some of the major tracks
- Crossing the A-343 and MA.4402 roads

GR 7 E4

Tarifa – Athens, link up at the start

SL-A 51

Las Arquillas, link up at the start

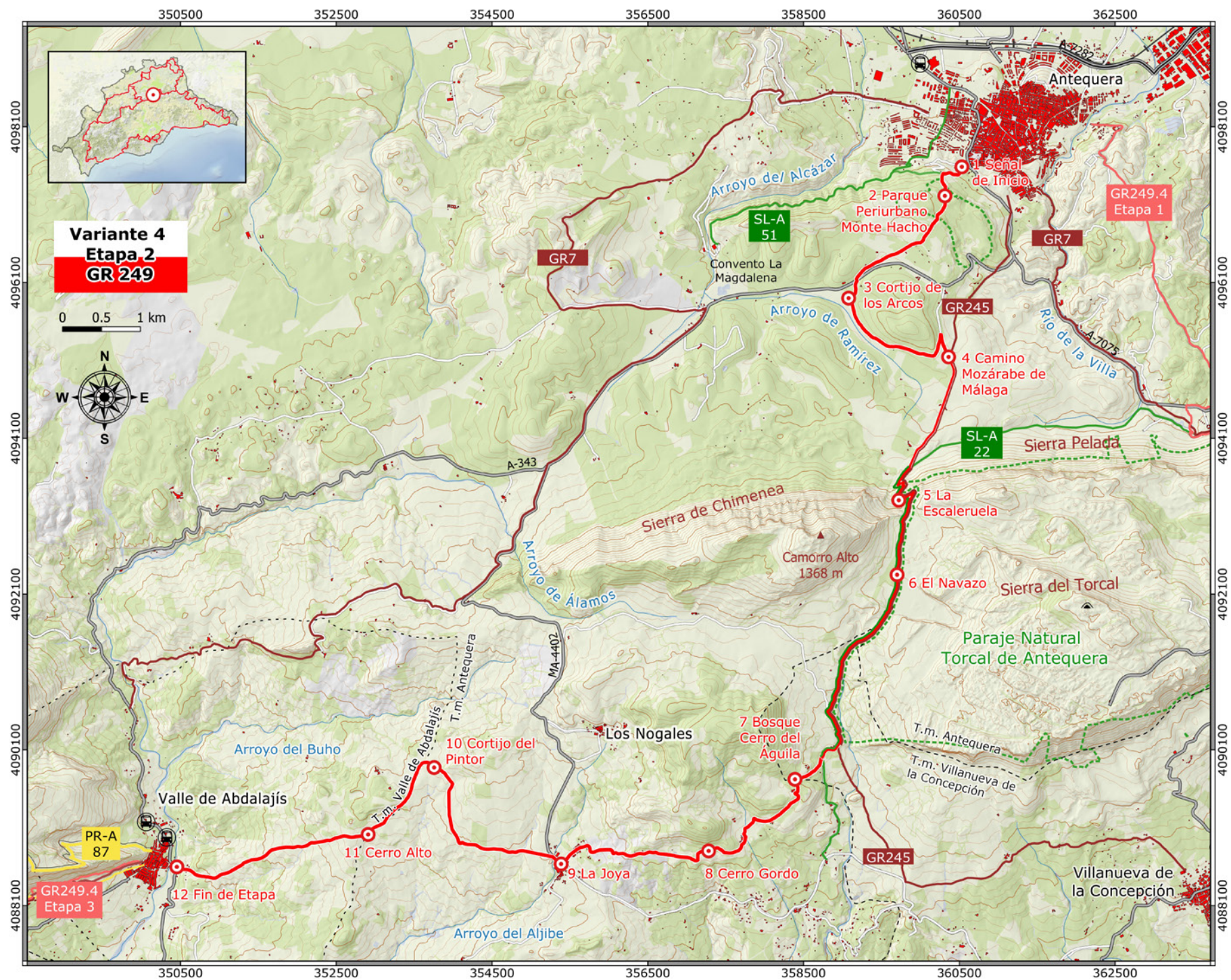
GR 245

Mozarabic Way, partial overlap in the Sierra

SL-A 22

La Escaleruela, partial overlap

P O I N T	X	Y	HEIGHT ABOVE SL	DISTANCE
1.Start point	360530	/ 4097585	/ 570 m	Km 0,0
2.Semi-urban Park of El Hacho	360315	/ 4097215	/ 670 m	Km 0,6
3.Los Arcos estate	359080	/ 4095900	/ 640 m	Km 2,6
4.Malaga's Mozarabic Way	360360	/ 4095145	/ 670 m	Km 4,7
5.La Escaleruela pathway	359720	/ 4093305	/ 870 m	Km 7,0
6.El Navazo	359700	/ 4092350	/ 975 m	Km 8,3
7.El Aguila wooded hill	358390	/ 4089720	/ 900 m	Km 11,7
8.Gordo Hill	357280	/ 4088805	/ 850 m	Km 13,6
9.La Joya	355385	/ 4088635	/ 695 m	Km 15,9
10.El Pintor estate	353755	/ 4089875	/ 740 m	Km 18,4
11.Alto Hill	352910	/ 4089015	/ 660 m	Km 19,8
12.End point	350450	/ 4088600	/ 330 m	Km 22,4



ROUTE DESCRIPTION

 **The high plains at the foot of the mountains**
→ Up to km 6.3

The second stage of the Alternative Route 249.4 gets going from Antequera's higher southern side, from just near the A-343 road. The views of La Alcazaba and the Collegiate Church are hard to miss. The Atalaya Park is a pretty garden outside the perimeter wall where you start to climb using the most clearly signposted branch of the many tracks over the yellowish earth tracks. After 400 metres from the start, you pass a communications tower on your right and the path linking up to the short SL-A 51 de las Arquillas, going halfway up the hillside.

The wooded area above is the Semi-urban Park and Public Uplands of El Hacho, with 84 hectares of Pine forest. You reach this along a firebreak with Esparto grasses which, once at the top, comes onto a plain of dolomitic sand flats. On the summit of 727-metre peak, is the Nasrid watchtower of El Hacho used to control the network of paths to the north.

Malagan goats and sheep begin the climb up La Escaleruela



From the highest point, a rocky area that has formed a small gully, you begin to descend, while avoiding a track that links again a little further on and going down through Olive groves. A secondary branch, called Los Alambres Way, joins from the left and you continue along this. This runs parallel to the Valle de Abdalajís A-343 road for a kilometre, passing some tourist accommodation on the left and then some farm buildings on the right. Now cross the road at its kilometre 12, heading towards the lane of the country estate of Arco de la Magdalena. The path follows a semicircle along the southern side of the hillside covered in Olive groves. It then turns sharply to the south and east again, before making contact with the main track, the path from Antequera to Málaga.

Shortly after, this track is joined by a smaller one along which the Mozarabic Way from Antequera (km 4.8) joins this Alternative. This is a major crossroads near the Buenavista country estate, where La Pesquera and La Dehesilla (which comes from the flat heathland to the east) ►

293

294



The Karst landscape of El Torcal by Los Navazos country estate

footpaths also meet. With the foothills of the Sierra close by, the track becomes narrower, the fields finish and the Local Path (SL) of La Escaleruela joins you from the left. Stage 1 of the GR 249.4 witnessed its beginnings at the Nacimiento de la Villa spring.

 **La Escaleruela pathway and the limestone peaks**
→ Up to km 13

The pathway from Antequera to Málaga, which the three certified footpaths now follow, starts the adventurous climb up the Escaleruela. A few sections have needed replacing, with varying degrees of success, and care must be taken to take the correct branch. There are paths going off to the right that curve round close to the gully.

This ancient pathway has always been the best alternative between the Antequera plains with the Guadalhorce as it passes through Málaga. It runs between two towering peaks, Las Mesas on the right, which has a via ferrata, and Roque on the left. At the top, you can see the prominent shape of the Piedra de la Comedianta (Comedian's

Rock). The concrete path brushes past it on the right towards the end of the steep zigzagging climb. Below this is another pathway with no modern alterations. This is a fine viewpoint and on clear days, the Sierra de Arcas and Cartaojal stand out on the plain to the north-east, and the Sierra de Humilladero and the village of Mollina, in the middle to the north-west.

At the highest point of the day is El Navazo with a country house (km 8.3). You join a track here which you will continue along, in its various forms until the end. This road also marks the western boundary of the Nature Reserve. The mountainous relief is quite elongated here, also flat and fertile, between the Sierra de Chimenea to the west (where there was a Muslim watchtower) and the more rugged Sierra Pelada and El Torcal to the east. There are three wide open treeless valleys that lend their name to the landscape, the first of which is the mountain pass. The second is triangular, a gentle valley with no surface drainage and at its southern end is the only country house. To the left is also the ►



third plain, Majada Larga, the furthest from the track and which has an old burial site.

Around this point, you enter the municipality of Villanueva de la Concepción, which you continue through for about 2 kilometres. A gentle descent down a wide open gully with reddish soil leads to a junction with the main track that climbs up to the Fuenfría country house. Continuing downhill along a concreted curve, you pass the Robledillo country house on your right, while the area's only wooded area is up ahead, on the hill of El Águila. The GR 245, Málaga's Mozárabic Way splits off to the left along a track with a fountain. At kilometre 11.3, you come to another junction, where the SL-A 22 La Escaleruela takes the left branch, not far from its conclusion in the hamlet of La Higuera.

Nevertheless, this Alternative Route goes uphill and the first Holm oaks appear at the top of a deep gully. To one side is the El Águila hill and looking back from here, the southern and highest escarpments of Antequera's El Torcal appear to the east. The dramatic cliff faces of El Saltadero and of El Espejo stand out most. There is a series of clumps of woodland with pastureland in

between with several junctions. Always keep to the left, while you pass a house on the right that indicates the highest point of this section at 922 metres above sea level. This is also the end of the municipality of Villanueva de la Concepción (km 12), where you make a sharp turn. Between two more hills covered in woodland, and crossing an ancient olive grove, you reach a bowl-like depression called Las Chozas, with farmhouses and large country estates.

The hamlets & country estates → To the end of the stage

Carrying on between the country estate's livestock sheds and the main spring, you climb a little to another rise with exceptional panoramic views. On clear days, you can see the two highest peaks in the province, El Torrecilla to the west and La Maroma to the east, along with a number of Málaga's coastal mountain ranges. During this last kilometre of the route, this one has gradually turned west, from its previous southerly course.

From these hills bordering the fields, you can see the farmhouse of La Higuera below, with a huge number of properties scattered around. You soon reach the tarmac (km 13.8) and a four-star hotel, the Fuente del Sol. ►



Forested agricultural land in the hamlet of Las Chozas



A long incline leads to La Joya (meaning the Jewel), which is called La Hoya (the Basin) on old maps and is perhaps a name more in keeping with this village's location of some 400 inhabitants.

Cross the hamlet by passing through the main square (km 15.8) and cross over El Aljibe stream on the MA-4402 road. Then take the main Málaga to Antequera track on the left, just where you see a threshing circle. After a fairly straight and level stretch, the clay hills funnel the rainwater from higher elevations to produce the stream of El Espino. You then climb up to the rise that forms the watershed, where the ruins of El Pintor country house are located. The views to the north bring the striking rocky ridge of Cortijo del Castillo (Castle Country Estate) and its watchtower into sight. For about 400 metres the track also forms the boundary between the areas of Antequera and Valle de Abdalajís, whose territory amounts to 22 km² and is almost completely surrounded by the former. Coming up on your right is the Alto hill, while after a long curve of a

kilometre and a half is the turn-off towards the country estate of Fuente Abad (km 19.9), only just visible on the left.

At the next junction, ignore the track going downhill, to pass a solar farm on your left, then go under a high-voltage power line and begin the final descent. You can already see the Abdalajís Valley from close-up when you reach the tarmac access road to the houses in the area. The best views of the village and its surroundings are from the string of natural lookout of the points that follow. Make sure to always take the main path along the ridge that divides the river basins. The Sierra of the Valle de Abdalajís stands out behind, an exceptional geomorphological and scenic asset. The Capilla mountain is its highest point and is separated from El Charcón by a saddle or dip. Meanwhile the steep slopes, rockfaces and gullies of La Muela and El Picacho provide the amphitheatre for this pretty white village. This is where this long stage ends, on La Viñuela street, near the Puente de Hierro (Iron Bridge). ■

La Joya and its surrounding fields, with the mountain range of El Valle de Abdalajís beyond

