

BEARIZ

Discover the magic



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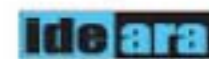
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THE ALVITE ROUTE



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PRESENTATION

This route will take us round a valley where the Ponte Pedriña stream flows. This stream will flow into the Avia, a plentiful river that stands out for its fishing, history and natural wealth. The Avia waters the Ribeiro -a region in Ourense famous for its wines- and farther away to the south it finally flows into the Miño, the biggest river in Galicia and the one that shapes its orography. Although at this point it is still small, the river provides the soil along its banks the necessary moisture to grow vast woods of unique ecological diversity, which can be appreciated in the variety of its flora and fauna.

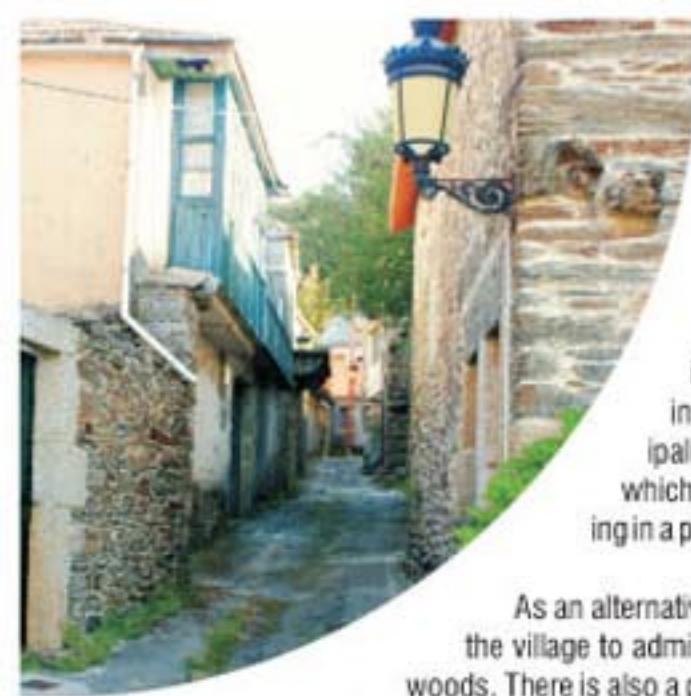
Among the hiking trails in the municipality of Beariz, this one stands out because the almost constant shade of the trees makes the walk much more enjoyable. Only in the highest stretch, in the Chancela (between kilometer 2 and 4), the forest becomes less thick. Nevertheless, this will allow us to better enjoy the view of almost the whole municipality, its villages and surrounding mountains. In the deepest part of the valley, especially towards the end of the route, we will feast our eyes on the soil's fruitfulness in birches, oaks and pine trees. Mushrooms, insects, birds or even mammals may also be encountered on our journey.

These 12.8 kilometers could be covered on foot, by bicycle or by SUV. Should you go for this latter option, you would need to make a detour almost at the end of the route (in the stretch from the recreational area of Barcia) and take the main road instead.



THE ALVITE ROUTE

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The small village of Alvite, between Lebozán and Muradás, is located at an altitude of 700 meters in the valley that stretches from the Ermida, in the north, to Beariz and Magros. The lushness of the surrounding oak woods and the restoration works it has experienced in recent years make it a must-see for those visiting the municipality of Beariz. "La Zapateria de Tío Ramiro" is a country inn which not only offers quality food but also provides the best lodging in a peaceful setting surrounded by nature.

As an alternative to the 12 km. long route, we suggest a nice walk around the village to admire the architecture, the "eiras" with "hórreos" and the oak woods. There is also a path down to the recreational area of Barcia which offers the chance to admire the oaks and the vegetation common to the river's edge. It is one of the most fertile and moist areas of the municipality, and was the site of many flourishing craftwork and commercial activities; this is evidenced by the name of several houses, which remind us of the activity they were originally intended for.

Despite its privileged location in an easily accessible area facing south and its outstanding fruitfulness, Alvite was surprisingly left deserted in the 80s and it was not until the 90s when the first country inn opened: "La Zapateria de Tío Ramiro", which owes its name to the original shoe business of Ramiro Otero ("zapateria" means shoe shop in Spanish). Following this lead, other houses have been restored and at present we see most of the village permanently or temporarily inhabited. Some of the houses were refurbished by those who have originally owned them and had migrated; others were bought by people who fell in love with this precious little jewel of the Galician country.

We leave Alvite following the route's signs and going up the paved track. The shade of the leafy oak wood on our way up will make the ascent much more pleasant. The oak has always been a central piece of the domestic economy: it is an essential resource that provides firewood, building materials (e.g. joists and flooring), staves and ends for the barrels, an even food for the cattle. In the past, the oak was widespread almost everywhere in Galicia, but over the years it was substituted by more profitable species in the most accessible places. The steep areas though, very damp and difficult to reach, have preserved the Galician woodland as it was hundreds of years ago.

For the Galician people the oak is the sacred tree par excellence for its purifying character and useful shade. It does not let the sun's rays in and is believed to cure those who go through its cracks, to vanish contagious illnesses, and to have numerous healing properties. Big specimens of the oak are still to be found in places of symbolic value, like celebration sites and crossroads.

We now cross the road and continue walking up the unpaved trail until we get to a Celtic pig farm on our left. This species used to be plentiful in Galicia, but has progressively been substituted by the common pig. The replacement is better suited to small sties and eating leftovers, like the "farelas" and any kind of vegetable waste. The "farelas" are the lumps of flour would not get reduced to power, being therefore useless to make bread. For a long time the pig has been the main input of meat in the Galician diet and it has become closely linked to our cuisine: as an example of some of our best-known dishes there is the "lacón con grelos" (boiled shoulder of pork with turnip tops), the "cocido" (a stew with chickpeas and tripe), the "orejas" (pork ears), the "chicharrones" (pork rinds), the "raxo" (pork tenderloin), the "cacheira" (the pork's head), and the "filloas de sangue" (crepes made with the pork's blood).

Quite to the contrary, the Celtic pig roams freely in the oakwoods in search of acorns, which they get mainly in the fall. This species is perfectly suited to breed in the wild because it is hardy and agile, and also prone to accumulating fat. As a result of its diet and energetic activity in the oakwoods the Celtic pig's meat is of the best quality, and one can even say that the hams and sausages we obtain from it are tastier and juicier than those from the conventional pig. This kind of livestock also contributes to the conservation of the thickets and oak woods, since they are given profitability and left without weeds.

On the outside, the Celtic pig has a distinctive appearance: big ears bending over the eyes, wide and long head, often big dark marks in its skin and, in general, a fairly large body that makes it a much more agile and taller pig than the conventional one. At each stage of the animals' life there is a careful selection of the food they feed on, although they graze most of the time, especially during the last months of the year when the mountains generate enough food to survive. All these factors will result then in a high-quality product.

In March every year the town council of Beariz celebrates the Celtic pig feast, where we get the chance to taste this excellent meat.

On the right side of the path there is a "mámoa", hardly visible under a layer of earth. It is covered by a small mound that hides a thousand-year-old burial.

FROM ALVITE TO CHANCELA

STAGE 1



We leave the farms behind and arrive to Chancela, which is the highest point in our tour. This place is far from the villages and not very fruitful, although it has been used for large plantations of rye and other cereals. These were known as "estibas": farmlands reclaimed from the mountain's scrubland and whose fruitfulness is sustained by rotating their use with years when the land is left fallow. At certain times of the year it was necessary to come every day and work the fields of corn, rye or, more recently, wheat and potatoes. Many of the locals from Muradás and As Ventelas used to have in this high, sunny and moist area a good deal of their sustenance.

In this first stretch we will walk past several "mámoas" in Alvite and, on our way down, those in A Chancela and the Bola. None of these burial mounds ("mámoas") has been unearthed and to the naked eye only a small mound is visible. Nonetheless, they hide a burial with vertical stone slabs and a big horizontal one on top. The "mámoas" were mainly used to bury the dead and date back to the sixth millennium before Christ at the most. They are usually located in high and flat areas, close to where the stones came from, and are believed to have also been used to mark the limits of a territory.

We are already descending. On the sides of the path we will find three "mámoas" partially covered by weeds that can only be traced by the regular mounds along the descent. We now make a detour to the right, which takes us back to the shade of the oaks, until we get to a paved road. After crossing a meadow with horses we reach the village of Lebozán, which has a spring and a bar.

It is worth visiting the small chapel and some of the few "eiras" left in Lebozán. The "eira" is a flat aired space surrounded by "hórreos" owned by different locals. In the "eira" the cereals are sun-dried and beaten before putting them in the "hórreo". The "hórreos" in this area have the peculiarity that they are made of stone and wood, whereas those in other parts of Galicia are exclusively made of stone.

Soon after leaving Lebozán we get to a river where we shall rest and cool down for a little while. From now on we will walk through successive groves of oaks, pine trees and birches.

The end of our descent along the path means we have reached the bottom of the valley, that we now cross in its northern part, where the birch is the dominant species. This tree can be easily recognized for it has small rhomboid serrate leaves. Its trunk is straight and whitish with small branches that shape elongated yet regular oval crowns. We may often find several trunks coming out of one single base, but they are never too big.

The birch is perfectly suited to river banks or other damp soils, although it is hard to find in such a big amount and with the lush foliage we see here. Its wood is quite soft and easy to work with. It has been mainly used in carpentry and cabinet making, to make clogs and farming tools. The leaf of the birch is diuretic, and the sap may be used in the treatment of urinary tract infections and to dissolve kidney stones.

Right after the birches we see the oaks. This species has distinct leaves, with lobed undulated margins, and a grey-colored trunks. In general, these grow straight, but in the oldest specimens -those that may live up to a thousand years- they turn knotted and irregular. The branches of the oak offer firewood for the winter and with some luck, if they are straight enough, one may even get joists from them. Due to its great resistance to water and rot, the oak is perfect for building materials as well as for making barrels and wine casks.



CHANCELA AND LEOZÁN

STAGE 2



Barcia is the perfect recreational area to rest for a while before setting off for the final part of our journey, which will include a couple of short but steep slopes. We now cross the small wooden bridge to get to a clearing with a spring, stone tables and benches, and barbecues. Here we will find specimens of the most typical trees of the river bank, which will be easily distinguished from each other by their leaves.

The willow's leaves have non-dentate margins and elongate as they grow, becoming three times longer than wider. They are wide at their base and taper to a rounded or slightly pointed tip. Its bark is the main ingredient of a well-known medicine, one of the most important in history: the aspirin.

The alder has distinct round serrated leaves, neither pointy nor heart-shaped at the base as in the hazel's leaf. Its wood has also been commonly used to make clogs and cart axes, and its leaves are good to soothe tired feet.

Here we will also find different kinds of fern and perhaps even some specimens of pale flax, the remainder evidence of the times when it was widely grown in this area. The pale flax has three-veined lanceolate rush-like leaves. The flowers are dark blue, about 3 cm. big and have five petals. They sprout four days after being sown and flower in May and June.

The route continues through the recreational area up to the track, which we follow only until the first curve on our right, where we will go left. This shady path leads to another track and to the main road. Once we go past the second house on the left side of the road we leave the road behind and continue through an oak wood. Our walk through this damp and lush area constantly goes in the shade of the oaks and finally ends in Alvite. On the way we may see many other species of plants and trees, or even mushrooms and fruit in certain seasons.



BARCIA AND MURADÁS

STAGE 3