

# BEARIZ

Discover the magic



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## THE MAGROS ROUTE



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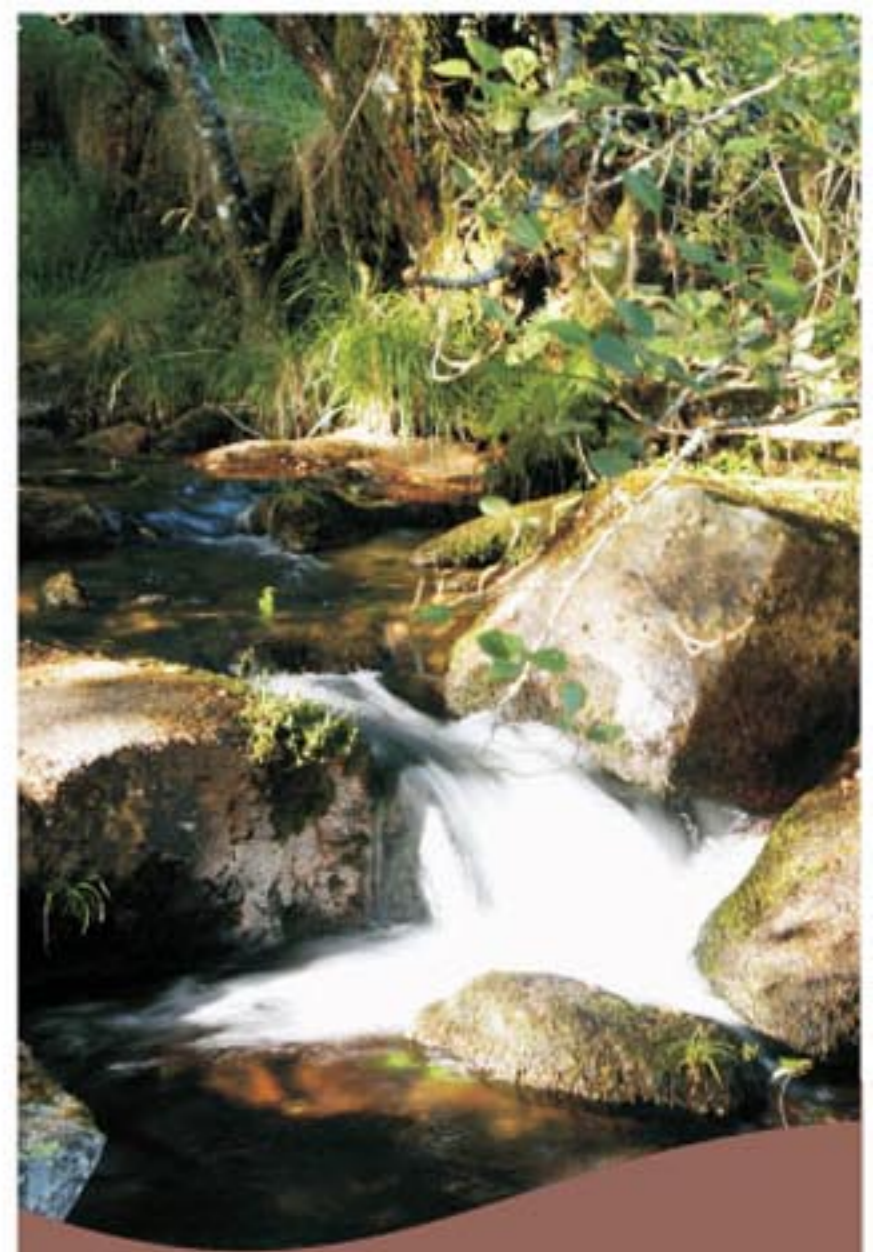
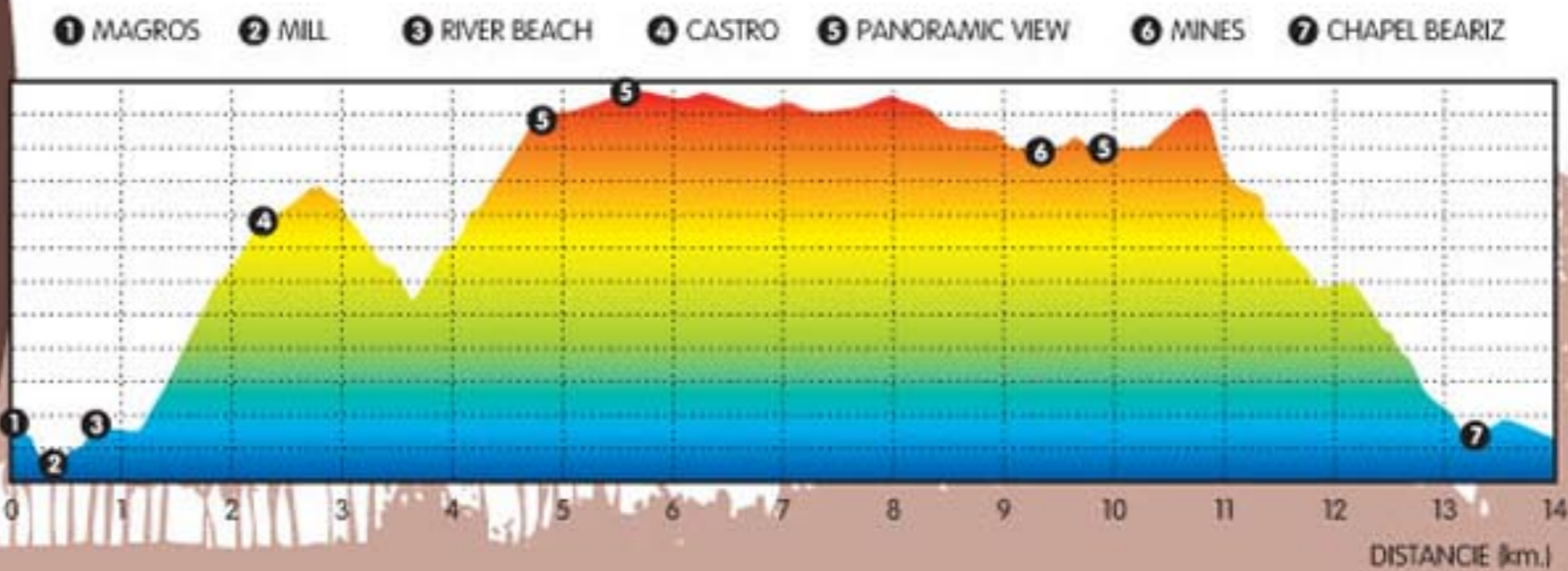
## PRESENTATION

The hiking trail of Magros is 14 kilometers long, and it will provide the opportunity to discover the main attractions in the village of Magros and to walk round the sides of the Marcofán mountain, which marks the eastmost boundary of the municipality of Beariz. Along this route we will find many open spaces with scenic views and the village of Magros, with its nice architecture and its rough little river.

The technical difficulty of the route is low and its few detours make it easy to get one's bearings. Only in the first slope in the road may the sun bother us and make it a bit harder to go up.

The whole route is suitable for walking, riding a mountain bike, quad biking or driving a SUV. Nonetheless, at the beginning -in the area of the mill of Magros- the road gets too narrow for a SUV. We thus recommend the owners of these vehicles to make a detour around the village and take the road in the opposite direction to Beariz. After some 500 meters and having gone past the river and the fluvial beach, you will be back on the track, which from now on will be 100% trafficable.

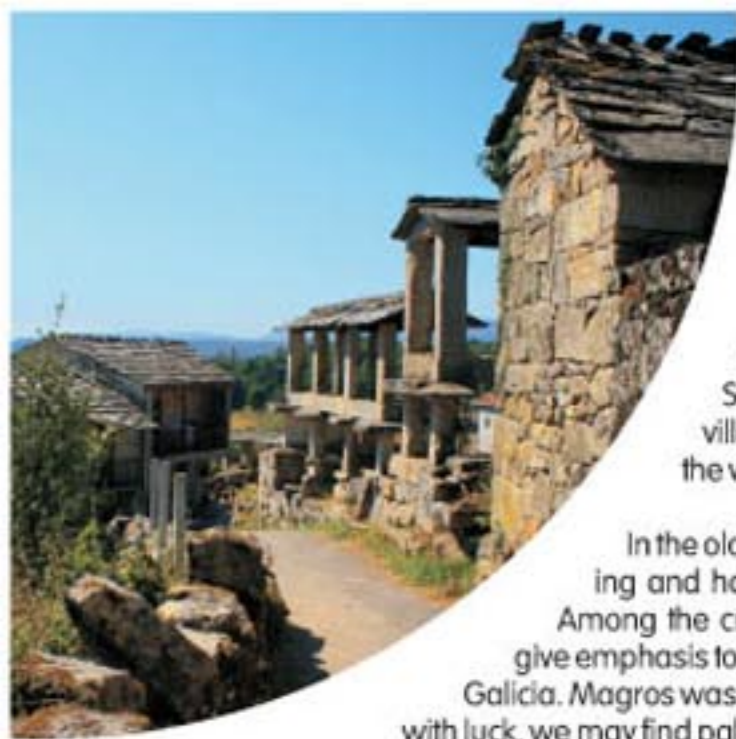
The Marcofán is the municipality's most significant and better-known landmark, for it is visible from everywhere and was linked in the past to the mining and masonry activities in the region.



## THE MAGROS ROUTE

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The newest houses in the village have been built next to the road to Beariz, searching for wider and more accessible areas. Just like Beariz, Magros is protected from the strong and humid southwestern winds by the mountains of the Serra do Suido. Moreover, the Marcofán protects the village from the cold northern winds and, as a result, the weather conditions here are quite mild.

In the old days, Magros was much more involved in the mining and handicraft sectors than the rest of the municipality.

Among the craftsmen who mushroomed in the area we must give emphasis to the stonemasons, who carried out their job all over Galicia. Magros was also the village with the last linen looms in use and, with luck, we may find pale flaxes along the route. They are easily recognized for they have dark hardy stems and small blue flowers streaked with darker color. These have five irregular and rounded petals, and a blue protruding carpel that becomes darker at its stigma.

Going down the road we cross the oldest part of the village. Some houses have undergone restorations, like the Casa da Laxa, a country inn by the river. We will see several "eiras" (or fields), some of them with "hórreos" that have also been restored. The affluence in this area gives us an idea of its quite high population rates and of its soil's fertility.

As we go down the new environment welcomes us with the pleasant harmony of the fresh breeze, the sound of the river and the shade of surrounding trees. Besides, at the lower end of the path, right by the bridge, we will find a quiet area to cool down in the shade of the oaks, chestnuts, birches and willows. We may even sit on one of the rocks interrupting the river's course and relax for a while only a few meters from the country inn of Laxa.

In this spot there is a restored mill, now in perfect conditions in the inside as in the outside. The mill of Beariz actually belongs to Maquia: it used to be owned by the Church and rented out. Those in charge of it would mill people's grain in turns and then get in exchange part of the resulting flour. Some of the mill in this area are private properties, others used to be administered as explained.

The damselfly ("cabaliño do demo" in Galician), the dipper and the trout are only some of the species we may be lucky to see in this area.

Along the different stretches of this route several types of damselflies may be found, but we would like to stress the importance of the well-known Beautiful Demoiselle (called "gaiteiro aliazul" in Galician). The "gaiteiros" and the "cabaliños" are similar to dragonflies, but are distinguished from them by their much smaller size (around 4 cm. long) and by having their wings folded back in line with the body when at rest.

The "gaiteiro aliazul" has distinct dark metallic blue wings streaked with black, and may not be too hard to see for it does not fear our presence. The "gaiteiros" are better to be found between April and the end of the summer, and we have talked about them in detail because they are said to be good indicators of the quality and purity of the rivers' waters.

In Galicia we call the biggest specimens and the dragonflies "libelliñas", and keep "gaiteiros" for the smaller ones. The Golden-ringed Dragonfly is the most common one in this area, but it is much bigger, faster and more restless than the "gaiteiro aliazul". The abundance of butterflies and amphibians is another indicator of the good quality of the water and air around here.

After crossing the river we continue along an old and almost always damp path up to the road. Here we can go on with the route, to the right, or make a detour to the left to enjoy a refreshing bath at the fluvial beach and see a cascade. As tempting as this may sound, you may want to leave it for the end of the route as a rewarding and relaxing prize.

The river we now cross is the stream of the Touza, which will accompany us all the way round the Marcofán towards the north. This stream flows very close to the road, crossing the bottom of the valley on the right hand, but it has its source pretty close to Chancela, the farthest point in our route from the village of Magros.



## THE VILLAGE OF MAGROS

## STAGE 1

Once the road is crossed we initiate our ascent, leaving the riverbank vegetation behind and gradually coming upon pine trees, gorse and carquesias, which are more common in the highest areas. The hill we find on the left is the "castro" of Marcofán, the remains of a small prehistoric village with impressive walls that was located at the top of the mountain. There are a lot of legends about these ruins—as happens to many other places in Galicia—and they all speak of the "mouros", mythological beings who had no connection whatsoever with the "castros".

Legend has it that a boy went to the "castro" to see the gold that the women would lay in the sun. When he was reaching the village he saw a beautiful she-"moura" and fell in love with her, but when the other "mouros" discovered this they sentenced him to death. The loving "moura", willing to save him from death, casted a spell on the boy and turned him into a pine tree so that they could be forever together without anyone else knowing. Nobody ever saw him again and the "moura" would spend the days by a pine tree, where she eventually died. Soon after, the pine tree dried up.

The legends about the "mouros" are but a reflection of the aura of mystery created around the "castros" by the former locals. They poured all their imagination and fantasies about hidden treasures on these sites, most of which were therefore spoliated. These fictitious stories gained momentum at a time of feudalism and unequal opportunities, when the access to the mythical would let people dream of prosperity and freedom, but would also break the social rules and make them suspect of witchcraft or deals with the devil.

After a short walk down the road we will find the stream of the Touza again as it slips in a narrow corridor, and we will then start going round the Marcofán.

Along the way we may encounter different animal species, perhaps even birds of prey—especially eagles—looking onto the ground in search of small animals to prey.

This part of the tour has plenty of pine trees as well as some other surprises, such as an astonishing eucalyptus whose trunk is a few meters in diameter. There are very few specimens of this tree in Beariz, but in the coastal areas in Galicia the widespread eucalyptuses are considered to be a pest.

The tour will allow us to have a clear picture of the orography of Beariz, above all its long valleys crossing it from north to south—like the one we are just leaving behind on our right, whose sunniest sides to the south and to the west hold most of the villages in the area.

As we approach Chancela we see less abrupt lands that were in the old days among the most fertile for the agriculture. They are the "estivadas", often used to grow huge amounts of rye. Thanks to the "estivadas" (fields of rye in apparently fruitless mountains), the postwar years in Spain did not result in a complete famine in the Tierra de Montes region. The mountains were hoed, the scrub burnt, and the lands were plowed and sowed with rye, the single kind of cereal that would grow in such a bad soil, only after mixing it with the fertilizing ashes of the scrub previously burnt (the "tella" in Galician). The peasants may use large expanses of land to grow rye, use them intensively for several years in a row and then abandon them for new "estivadas". This cyclic system would let them make the most of the entire mountain.

The rye harvested from the "estivadas" was then sun-dried in the "eiras", where the locals also gathered to select the grain afterwards in the so-called "mallas" (two to three days-long works in which the whole village participated and had shared responsibilities). In some places there are still "mallas"—not only for selecting rye, but also wheat—that have survived up to the present day.

Corn, rye and potatoes used to be the most common crops, followed by beans and some other vegetables. The corn was a fundamental part of people's sustenance, the guarantor of their survival, for the corn bread was the main food at the time. Therefore, the best lands—those with more hours of sun and plenty irrigation—were used to grow it. Nowadays we may still find corn fields, but they provide food for the animals instead. As for private consumption, potatoes, vegetables and fruits are the dominant crops.

There are several "mámoas" (prehistoric funerary constructions) in this part of the route and, since they are always buried, they may be taken for ordinary mounds in the ground.



## THE "CASTRO" OF MAGROS AND THE MARCOFÁN

## STAGE 2



Despite the almost complete lack of shade, the way back will be much easier. The area covered is rich in ores and was intensively dug in the past. The wolfram was highly appreciated until World War II and it was extracted following the veins and building galleries underneath the mountain. At present they can hardly be found due to the lush vegetation; yet, we may see the big craters that form craggy mountainsides and through which the highly valued ore was extracted.

Afterwards, this was purified and melted in Beariz. The miners would sell carts of ore—whose price would depend on its purity—, then take them to the foundry and sell them. In the 20s, however, the price was established by law and became lower than that in the market. This made such small mines unprofitable and resulted in the development of an important black market. Here the ore would carry fake inscriptions that made it impossible to identify its actual origin. Later on, by the 40s, another law would dictate the closure of all the small foundries, which were considered inefficient, and would leave many people without their basic means of sustenance. Forest exploitations were a poor alternative, and the migration—mainly to Mexico—becomes an escape valve that leaves the villages empty.

In this area we can also find the quarries from which the stone slabs used in construction works were manually extracted

Before going back to Magros, we should not forget to visit the church of Saint Mary in Beariz. It was started in 1612, and we must pay special attention to its baroque altarpiece and modern tower, sculpted by the distinguished artist Xosé Cerviño.

We now return through the narrow street and go past ancient houses, "hórreos" and stone walls. The houses often have a chestnut tree next to them, for they provide chestnuts, shade and good wood.

Our route ends after completing the way back to Magros, were we strongly recommend you to bathe in the river's deep pool at the fluvial beach or to walk in the shade in the lower side of the village. Either way you may enjoy the last hours of the day listening to the sound of the water as it playfully flows between the rocks in the river.



## THE MINES IN THE MARCOFÁN AND BEARIZ

## STAGE 3