MAD RURAL

Landscape, memory and heritage on the former battlefronts



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GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA · MINISTERIO DE INDUSTRIA Y TURISMO

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

Comunidad de Madrid

MAD RURAL

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CIVIL WAR IN THE MADRID REGION

The Civil War left a deep mark on the Madrid Region, one that can still be seen in the landscape. Amongst hills, pastures, pine forests and fertile plains, there remain outposts, trenches, bunkers, shelters and defensive lines that formed part of a front which remained stable for much of the war across large swathes of the region. Today, almost nine decades later, these remnants continue to emerge from the vegetation and the terrain as silent witnesses to one of the most decisive episodes of the 20th century.

Walking through these places allows you to engage with history from the very terrain where it unfolded. The positions dug into the hillsides, the machine-gun nests overlooking the valleys, and the fortifications built to protect roads and mountain passes serve as a reminder of the strategic importance of many of these sites and help us understand what life was like on the front line.

Following these traces invites you to explore the former battlefronts in the mountains, cycle along the paths of the Jarama Valley, discover the strategic landscapes of Guadarrama, Jarama and Brunete... or visit interpretation centres that help to preserve and explain the memory of the conflict. A journey through history, landscape and heritage that allows you to view the Madrid Region from a different perspective: that of the places where the past remains ever-present.



MADRID DESTINO RURAL

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SIERRA NORTE DE MADRID



PAREDES DE BUITRAGO — THE WATER FRONT

Trenches, bunkers and strategic reservoirs

Heritage · Nature · Hiking

The area known as the 'Water Front' is one of the best- preserved historical-military sites in the Madrid Region. This sector of the front line protected two essential pieces of infrastructure for the Republican capital: the Puentes Viejas and El Villar reservoirs, which were vital for Madrid's water supply during the war.

The strategic importance of these facilities led to the construction of a complex defensive system comprising bunkers, machine-gun nests, command posts, shelters and an extensive network of trenches that can still be seen in the landscape today.

The circular 'Frente del Agua' route, some 8 km long, starts at the Paredes de Buitrago Interpretation Centre and takes visitors past 26 restored positions. The itinerary combines nature, historical memory and educational elements, offering a clear insight into how the defence of the reservoirs was organised and what daily life was like at the frontline positions.

PIÑUECAR — GANDULLAS — FRENTE DE SOMOSIERRA

Heritage · Hiking · Nature

In the area around Piñuecar and Gandullas, various positions linked to the Somosierra Front have been preserved; this was one of the defensive sectors protecting the northern approaches to the Madrid Region.

A circular route of around 7 km takes you past several bunkers and fortifications scattered between Cabeza Piñuecar and Peña Zorreras, showcasing the extent of the defensive lines established in this mountainous area. Along the route, you can identify various defensive structures that are now integrated into a landscape of great natural value.





EXTRA EXPERIENCE

THE BATTLE OF BRUNETE (1937)

Heritage · Cycle tourism · Historic landscape

In July 1937, the People's Army of the Republic launched a major offensive in the vicinity of Brunete with the aim of relieving the pressure that the rebel army was exerting on Madrid. For several weeks, this agricultural region became one of the fiercest battlefields.

The fighting resulted in tens of thousands of casualties, the intensive use of artillery and the largest concentration of tanks in the entire conflict. The landscape of dry fields was scarred by fortifications, trenches and defensive positions that can still be identified today.

Today, it is possible to explore this historic site via a route of approximately 21 km, which is particularly well suited to cycling. The route passes through vast agricultural fields where the small concrete domes characteristic of the Republican fortifications can still be seen.

We suggest... cycling the route at sunset. The low-angled light highlights the contours of the fortifications, and the silence of the landscape contrasts with the intensity of the fighting that took place here.

CONCRETE AND ROCK

Navalagamella + Fresnedillas de la Oliva

Scenic · Heritage

Amidst holm oaks, gentle hills and dirt tracks, this route winds through a landscape that still bears the silent traces of the Spanish Civil War. Navalagamella, the starting point, was a strategic enclave on the Madrid front, where the terrain dictated positions and decisions.

As you make your way along paths and tracks, the terrain reveals discreet vestiges: remains of positions, defensive lines and concrete structures, set into the rock, designed to monitor and control the territory. These are not monumental ruins, but almost hidden fragments that invite you to imagine life on the front line.

The route continues to Fresnedillas de la Oliva, where the height and sweeping views help one to understand the military logic of the place: commanding the landscape was key. Here, the present-day silence contrasts with an intense past, offering an experience that combines nature, history and reflection.





THE EDUCATIONAL LANDMARK

Colmenar del Arroyo

On this route, the highlight is one of the best-preserved examples of military architecture from the Civil War: Blockhaus 13. Set in peaceful surroundings, this concrete bunker formed part of a defensive system that protected key access points in the area.

Its design — with loopholes, thick walls and strategic positioning — gives an insight into how these structures were conceived to withstand attack and keep watch. Viewed from the outside, the Blockhaus becomes a veritable open-air history lesson.

The walk is rounded off with a tour of nearby paths, where the networked logic becomes apparent: these structures were not isolated, but interconnected to form coordinated defensive lines. A short but highly revealing route.

HILLS AND LINES

Quijorna

Scenic · Family-friendly

Quijorna was the scene of intense fighting during the Civil War, and its landscape still bears the marks of those days. This route takes in an area where the contours of the terrain —hills, valleys and ridges—shaped the course of the front line.

As you walk, you can identify former military positions and understand how the defences were organised: trenches, machine-gun nests and observation posts adapted to the terrain. All of this is now part of a serene landscape, where nature has softened the scars of the past.

The stops along the route invite you to interpret the terrain, to read it as those who occupied it decades ago did. It is an experience that combines hiking with a deep historical connection.





COMPARING TYPOLOGIES

Valdemorillo → Navalagamella

This route offers an interesting contrast between different types of defensive structures from the Civil War. In Valdemorillo, the landscape features more open positions adapted to paths and access routes, whilst in Navalagamella, structures integrated into hills and high ground predominate.

Throughout the two walks, visitors can observe how construction methods varied according to the terrain and function: from lighter defences to more complex concrete fortifications.

The route helps visitors understand that there was no single model, but rather a constant adaptation to the landscape. A journey between two settings which, although close to one another, reveal different strategies.

WATER AND THE REAR GUARD

Navas del Rey → Pelayos de la Presa → San Martín de Valdeiglesias

Landscape · Nature

Beyond the front line, this route explores the so-called "rear", where life went on amidst the conflict. Navas del Rey provides an introduction to the region, whilst Pelayos de la Presa, next to the San Juan reservoir, offers a setting where water and the landscape soften the experience.

Although the traces of the war are less visible here, the area formed part of the logistical and su-pport system for the front line, which was essential to the running of military operations.

The day ends in San Martín de Valdeiglesias, where history blends with heritage and local life. It is the perfect finale to a route that combines remembrance, landscape and relaxation.



SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA



TRENCHES, MOUNTAIN PASSES AND ELEVATED POSITIONS

Scenic · Hiking · Family-friendly

Sierra de Guadarrama was one of the most intense and protracted theatres of the Spanish Civil War. From the summer of 1936 onwards, its peaks, passes and mountain passes became strategic points that both sides sought to control in order to secure access to Madrid or protect the northern plateau.

The complex terrain of the massif — mountain passes, rocky ridges and vast pine forests — facilitated the construction of numerous defensive positions. Trenches dug into the rock, concrete bunkers, observation posts and shelters were built at high altitude, under extreme conditions, forming a front that remained virtually static for months.

Today, many of these remains form part of one of the most iconic natural landscapes in the Madrid Region. Exploring them reveals how the war transformed these mountains and how nature has, little by little, reclaimed the sites of the former front line.

GUADARRAMA — THE JAROSA TRENCHES TRAIL

Nature · Hiking · Family-friendly

The La Jarosa Trench Trail winds through a landscape of replanted pine forests where various defensive structures erected during the early days of the fighting are still preserved. Along a circular route of around 5 kilometres, visitors can spot the remains of trenches, command posts and machine-gun nests hidden amongst the vegetation.

In the summer of 1936, both sides occupied these positions to secure control of the access routes to the Guadarrama Pass, one of the most important passes between Madrid and the northern plateau.

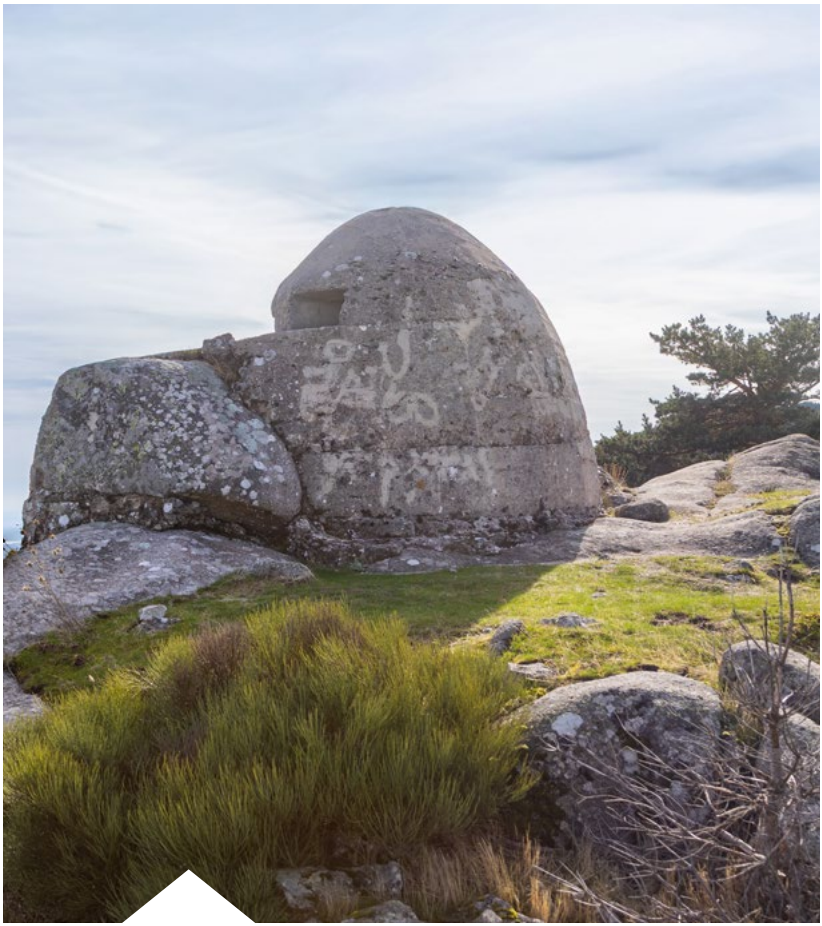


Microexperience

NO MAN'S LAND

Imagine this pine forest without trees, with the ground cleared to facilitate surveillance. Where today there are footpaths and silence, for months a labyrinth of trenches, parapets and opposing positions stretched out.

OTHER ROUTES IN GUADARRAMA:
https://sierraguadarrama.info/tras-las-huellas-de-la-guerra/



ALTO DEL LEÓN — NATIONALIST AND REPUBLICAN POSITIONS

Heritage · Scenic · Hiking

The Guadarrama Pass, known as Alto del León, was a key point for controlling communications between Madrid and Castile and León. From the very first weeks of the conflict, it became a strategic theatre where both sides heavily fortified the terrain.

Several trails lead from the pass's car park to bunkers, artillery positions and observation posts built on the nearby slopes. Among these, the La Sevillana position stands out; it is considered the largest and most complex in the mountain range, with a network of trenches, shelters and firing points that enabled the defence of the mountain pass.

COLLADO DE LA MINA — HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT AT HIGH ALTITUDE

Nature · Hiking · Family-friendly

The Collado de la Mina is one of the places where the opposing positions were closest to one another during the war. The path leading up towards Cabeza Líjar takes you past the remains of trenches and parapets built by both sides on two hilltops situated a very short distance apart.

The proximity of the lines meant that contact between combatants was constant, on a mountain front where the weather conditions and the rugged terrain made daily life in the positions all the more difficult.



THE LOS MOLINOS BUNKER TRAIL

In Los Molinos, the Bunker Trail takes in some of the best-preserved remains of the Guadarrama front, amongst pine forests, hillsides and mountain paths marked by the memory of the Civil War. The route, which is around 7.4 kilometres long and of moderate difficulty, allows visitors to discover ten Republican 'casa-matas' (bunker-houses) from the second line of defence, built of concrete and stone to blend into the landscape and never used in combat.

The route is divided into two sections: Section A, a more urban and accessible stretch of 4 km taking around 90 minutes, and Section B, a more rugged 3.4 km section taking around 85 minutes, which heads towards La Peñota and becomes progressively wilder. It passes through sites such as Majaltobar, Balcón de la Peñota, Los Veneros and Las Encinillas, where trenches, impact marks and traces of camouflage can still be seen. Walking this route means entering a mountain landscape where history still echoes among the granite and the silence of the mountains.



LAS VEGAS & ALCARRIA MADRILEÑA



HISTORICAL CYCLING TOURISM

Cycle-tourism · Family-friendly · Accessible (Carabaña)

The Tajuña river plains and the open landscapes of the Jarama valley offer the perfect setting for exploring the recent history of the Madrid Region on two wheels. Amidst farmland, gypsum quarries and old railway lines, some of the sites linked to one of the most intense episodes of the Civil War in the region have been preserved.

Major military operations took place in this area, particularly during the Battle of the Jarama in February 1937, when both sides fought for control of the transport links between Madrid and Valencia. Today, old railway infrastructure, farm tracks and riverside landscapes allow visitors to explore these sites via accessible routes that combine nature, historical memory and cultural heritage.

Exploring these floodplains is also a different way of getting to know the area: cycling along old front-line tracks, passing through agricultural landscapes and discovering how time has woven the remnants of the conflict into one of the most unique environments in south-eastern Madrid.

THE '40-DAY TRAIN' GREENWAY — VILLAR DEL OLMO

Cycle-tourism · Nature · Family-friendly

The 'Forty-Day Train' Greenway, also known as the Vía Negrín, follows the route of the railway line built as a matter of urgency during the Civil War to supply Madrid from the Levante region, when other transport links had been cut off.

The name recalls the record time in which the infrastructure was built. Today, the route has been transformed into a pleasant, easy-going cycle route that winds through agricultural landscapes and offers the chance to explore tunnels, old railway embankments and natural viewpoints overlooking the valley.



THE '40-DAY TRAIN' GREENWAY — CARABAÑA

Cycle-tourism · Accessible · Family-friendly

In the area around Carabaña, the greenway features one of its most accessible sections. The tarmac route connects this town with Estremera, offering a comfortable route for cyclists and walkers, with sweeping views over the valley's landscapes.

From this junction, it is also possible to link up with the Tajuña Greenway and visit the nearby Risco de las Cuevas, in Perales de Tajuña, a unique archaeological site carved out of gypsum rock that forms part of the region's historical heritage.





JARAMA BATTLE HISTORICAL PARK

Heritage · Nature · Hiking

The Battle of the Jarama Historical Park offers a tour of some of the main sites of the fighting that took place in February 1937. Through ten signposted routes, visitors can explore trenches, shelters, defensive positions and various commemorative monuments set within the landscape.

Supported by several municipalities in south-east Madrid, this site functions as an open-air museum, allowing visitors to gain an on-the-ground understanding of one of the most decisive episodes of the Civil War.

During the Re-enactment of the Battle of the Jarama, the park takes centre stage with guided tours, educational activities and historical reenactments that help bring these events to life for the public.

Within the municipality of Morata de Tajuña, two particularly significant routes stand out: the route starting from the Camino de los Barranquillos and the Pingarrón – Cota 666 Route, a strategic enclave where intense fighting took place and where the remains of fortifications, integrated into the landscape, are still preserved.

MORATA DE TAJUÑA — MUSEUM OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND POST-WAR PERIOD AND ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

Heritage · Accessible

This museum houses an extensive collection of objects relating to the Spanish Civil War and the postwar period. Its collection includes military equipment, historical photographs, period newspapers and numerous objects recovered from former battlefields on the Jarama front.

A visit here rounds off the tour of the area by offering a closer look at the objects, testimonies and experiences that shaped everyday life during the conflict.



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https://www.madrural.com/en/experiencias-en/discovering-the-civil-war-battles/

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