

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

6



Contrasting
plains



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NB: Any established written accounts are limited in terms of concrete time and space. The natural evolution of the landscape and human activity can mean that some accounts may become less reliable over time.

6. *Contrasting plains*

The great Alt Camp plains stretch out beneath the Serra de Miramar, crossed by numerous torrents, surrounded by a mountain amphitheatre encircling Camp de Tarragona and completed on the horizon by the Mediterranean.

Three of the towns in the district, namely Valls, Pla de Santa Maria and Alió form a triangle of large industrial estates although the agricultural land, for the most part, remains untouched. The land between Palau de Reig and Camí de Figuerola is good and fertile with sown fields, olive and almond groves, many of which are irrigated, whereas by contrast, in the camí d'Alió section, the lands are sparse with rocks appearing everywhere which favoured dry stone constructions such as walls, shacks, cisterns etc. authentic marvels of rural architecture. Many of these fields are now disused, the land gradually being reclaimed by woodlands and forests but the almond, olive and carob trees remain. We also come across some well-cultivated stretches with sown fields and new vineyards with trained vines.

Baiona, close to Valls, is an area where strong human pressure has come in to play with the resulting construction of many second homes. In Mas d'en Llop many important medieval remains have been preserved including: the Torre de la Mixarda and the Pont del Diable and also the Cova del Gat, used as a sepulchre in Neolithic times. The area of Aiguamolls del Pla is a wetland which has been created by the waters from the purifying plant for the town and industrial estate and is of great ornithological interest and unique to the area.

This is a comfortable, albeit rather long hike, but easy enough and highly recommended for the entire family as well as for bikes. It is important to take both water and sun protection.





Font de la plaça de Jacint Verdaguer or del Soldevila

6. *Contrasting plains*

Time

0:00
Partial



0:00
Total

Distance

0,000
Partial



0,000
Total

Pla de Santa Maria. *This town is located in the northern part of the district, at the foot of the Serra de Miramar at an altitude of 381m.*

We set off from the town's main square, plaça de la Vila, where we also find the town hall or Ajuntament building. We take the street named Carrer de la Réria, heading south 150 metres on and we pass by the side of the church square or Plaça

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de l'Església, presided over by the Mare de Deu de l'Assumpció church, a notable late 18th century baroque style building with a particularly interesting square bell tower and octagonal shaped tower with unfinished balusters. Inside there are three naves, a transept and vaults crowned by a large cupola. at the time it was built the construction provoked a confrontation between the residents, namely the Gavatxos, who wanted to knock down the old Romanesque church to make use of the building materials, and the Marrocs, who wanted to build new at the same time respecting the old, who fortunately won the battle.

0:05  0:05

0,300  0,300

Plaça de Jacint Verdaguer. This square, known locally as the plaça del Soldevila is presided over by a drinking trough and a fountain with a cross. We continue by taking the street by the name of Carrer d'Anselm Clave and soon we come to where it forks with Carrer del Sindicat, the street by which we continue, and that of Santes Creus which follows the GR 175, Ruta del Cister. We pass by the grand neoclassic building Xalet del Tosas and the Celler Cooperatiu, the work of architect Claudi Duran i Ventós, constructed at the beginning of the 20th century.

0:07  0:12

0,500  0,800

C-37 road. We cross this road by the pedestrian crossing. On the other side there is a garage repair workshop and houses on the camí d'Alió road.

0:03  0:15

0,200  1,000

Track. End of the asphalt. On the left there is small factory producing wooden packaging and behind the republican airfield from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This airfield extended from this point to the site of the present day industrial estate and from the Valls road up to the Vila-rodona road. The airfield was mostly for small aircraft known as caces or fighter planes. These planes played an important roll in the Battle of the Ebro. We finally take our leave of the town and begin to walk between planted fields.

0:08  0:23

0,600  1,600

Roundabout at the Pla industrial estate. We go round the island and continue by the road on the opposite side, making our way between the fences of companies Precat, on the right and Ursa, on the left.

6. Contrasting plains

0:08 🕒 0:32

0,600 🚶 2,200

Solid asphalt. We now come to a section of the camí d'Alió road which is asphalted. We leave the industrial estate factories behind us and return once more to cultivated fields.

0:06 🕒 0:38

0,400 🚶 2,600

Ostrich farm and right turn. On the right is the fence to an ostrich farm. A few metres on we leave the camí d'Alió road and turn right on a side road (west). We make our way between the finca or farm fences with ostriches on both sides. 150 metres on and we come to a fairly large barn, with the yard facing south and the runs facing west, now abandoned. We dawdle a little and then continue to make our way west in the midst of planted fields bordered by Holm oaks and pine trees.

0:07 🕒 0:45

0,500 🚶 3,100

Aiguamolls (323m). We leave the more well-trodden path and take ourselves off to the right towards the little bird watchers observation cabin built on a level with the lagoon. To be able to observe the birds there has to be absolute silence. The Aiguamolls de Pla wetlands are actually the outcome of the water purifying plant for the town and industrial state. Unique in the Alt Camp district, the wetlands have become a stop off point for many migrating birds (including protected species). Once we have seen



Aiguamolls del Pla

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the nature reserve we have to find the irrigation drainage ditch, full of reeds and follow it towards the south.

0:03  0:48

0,200  3,300

Intersection with the Mas Mahanaim track. Here we take a right turn to join the track (east) which looks towards the Cogulla de Miramar. The track on the left leads to this large *masia*, now a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts. There is also a small zoological centre, open to visitors, with a good selection of different bird species.

0:04  0:52

0,300  3,600

C-37 between Valls and Pla de Santa Maria. We cross this road and continue along the old cart track on the other side. On the way we spot a landmark for the water channel from the Ebro, bearing the inscription Pla 6, and also a well. Afterwards the track goes by a cistern and the remains of a shack.

0:04  0:56

0,300  3,900

Torrent de la Forcada. We make our way down to the bed of the stream, full of stones and gravel, this section being fairly wide and passable. We then start to make our way back up, heading north. Holm oaks and pine trees, of considerable proportions, are to be seen growing on the banks of the stream.

0:04  1:00

0,300  4,200

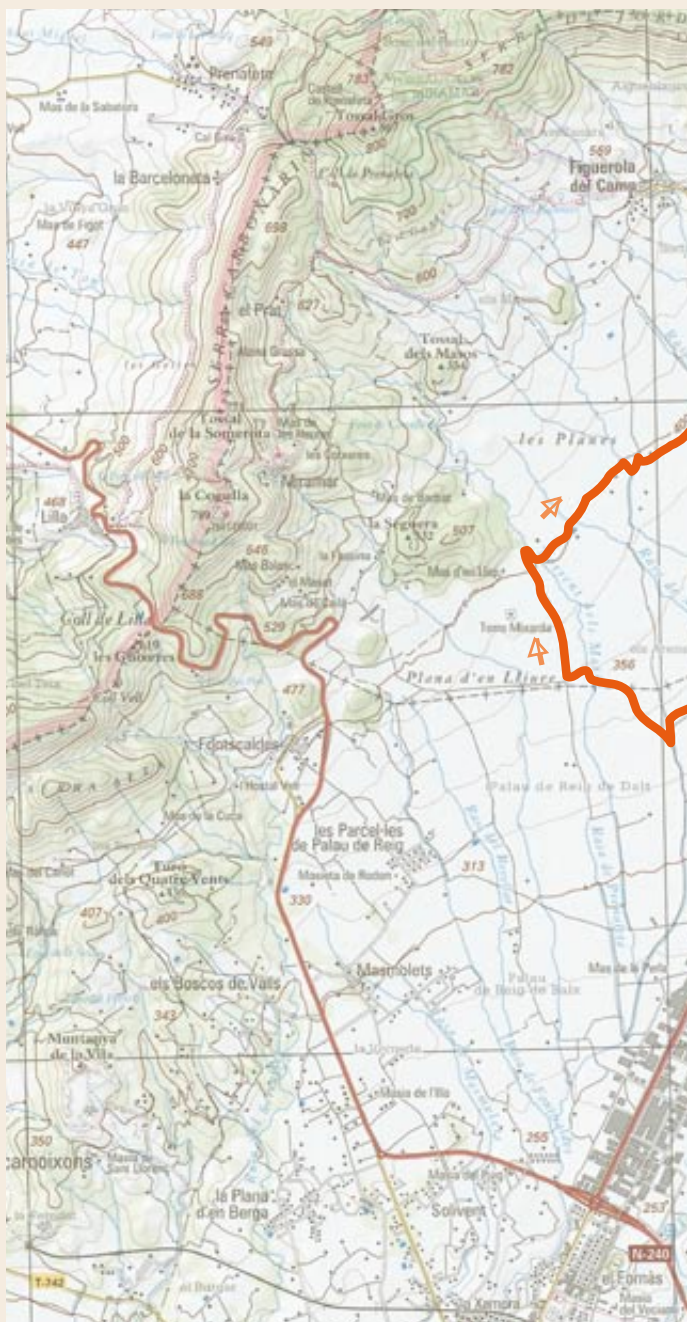
Embankment. We leave the bed of the stream to make our way up the footpath on the right embankment, close to some large Holm oaks. Once at the top, we come across a row of withered almond trees and barren land with small Holm oaks. This continues to be much the same until we come to a vineyard and a small barn. We continue to follow the footpath, heading northwest, which takes us close to another relatively deep ditch.

0:03  1:03

0,200  4,400

Intersection. Here we turn left (west). A power line runs parallel with the track. Three hundred metres on and we cross a stream narrowed by reeds and various accesses to the cultivations. Looking towards the northwest, we can see the magnificent crags of the Tossal Gros with the dense forest of Holm oaks in the foreground.

6. Contrasting plains



Time  3 h

Difficulty



13,050 km  Distance



6. *Contrasting plains*

0:11 🕒 1:14

0,800 🧑‍🌾 5,200

Rasa dels Magraners. Here we cross over the bridge and we continue to wind our way but rapidly returning to the original direction (west) accompanied by olive groves, vineyards and sown fields. The name comes from the great many specimens we happened to come across of this particular species of fruit. The fruit — the magrana or pomegranate — is edible and in season in autumn and winter. Where the pomegranate shrub grows literally creates authentic green strips of lush vegetation. Many animals make this their habitat as it provides them with a way through to the mountains, refuge from the plains, and a source of food.

0:04 🕒 1:18

0,300 🧑‍🌾 5,500

Intersection. Here we continue straight ahead (southwest), alongside a power line with the valley of Brugent opening up to the west. On our left, halfway up the Puig d'en Marc, we can see the Castell Dalmau monolith. Camp de Tarragona opens out to the south, dotted with numerous towns and villages with Alió and Puigpelat in the foreground. The roofs of the industrial estate buildings appear to be just a step away. Another 200 metres on and we pass close by a cypress hedge and restored barn.

0:06 🕒 1:24

0,500 🧑‍🌾 6,000

Camí de Figuerola and conduit. We turn left to join the Camí de Figuerola, a track also serving as a conduit, in this case downstream. If we want to take a short-cut we can follow this same track upstream, without losing sight of north, and by continuing as far as the intersection with the Mas d'en Llop track, where we pick up on the description of the route at the 10,200 kilometre mark.



Sunset as seen from Camí de Figuerola

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0:02  1:26

0,150  6,150

Where the track forks (324m). Here we turn right, as if we were going back, to take a track, which like the Figuerola version, serves as a conduit and therefore appears sunken and destroyed by the water. The Camí de Figuerola continues on to the town of Valls, but now only as far as the town's industrial estate.

The surfaces of these tracks have been seriously eroded by water, to the extent that sand and stone is visible. These tracks often serve as drainage ditches for the crop growing lands as well as to provide access, which means there is some maintenance work involved for the locals, continually repairing holes and trenches. Once these lands are abandoned and these tracks fall into disuse, they will soon become real torrents and the vegetation wont waste any time in taking over, as in the case above.

0:02  1:28

0,150  6,300

Where the path forks. Here we make our way up to the left (northwest). Once at the top we leave a road on our left. We leave the bed of the Masos stream, which is now impassable and make our along the edge of the crop growing land, at the end of which we find a padlock. Before us, we have a beautiful view of the Serra de Miramar together with Cogulla and beneath, the little hamlet set on a cliff.

Once passed the cultivations we also pass a vineyard and the track then continues alongside an abandoned almond grove, which the woodland has already begun to invade. On the opposite bank of the stream, on the other hand, we see perfectly cultivated lands and barns in good order. As we continue to make our way, the woodland becomes increasingly thicker.

We come to an area where the water branches off and we have to make our way around the bed of the stream. We continue and, on leaving the woods, the track veers to the west and we cross another stream. We leave the track following the stream, equally the one above as below. At the end of the cultivations on the left, we come across a landmark, a roughly shaped stone marker indicating the boundary limits of either a property or district. Now ahead of us we can see the Torre de la Mixarda.

0:12  1:40

0,900  7,200

Road. We come across the old road from Valls to Prenafeta. We follow the road heading north and at first the track is a little sunken but soon it levels off to the same height as the surrounding fields.

6. Contrasting plains

0:04  1:44

0,300  7,500

Access track to Torre de la Mixarda. On the left, we come across the track leading to the foot of the tower. If we take this way, afterwards we will have to return back here to be able to continue north on the Prenafeta road.

Torre de la Mixarda. *A medieval colonization tower dated somewhere between the 11th and 12th centuries to be later extended and fortified in the 15th century. The tower is round and stands eighteen metres high but there remains nothing of the roof. The tower has visual links with other towers and castles in the mountains around Camp de Tarragona.*

0:07  1:51

0,500  8,000

Access road to Mas d'en Llop. We continue straight ahead making our way north. The track to the left leads to this *masia*, just beyond the hazelnut groves, at the foot of the hill and finally only three kilometres on, the track comes to Fontscaldes.

0:04  1:55

0,300  8,300

Torrent dels Masos (403m). We make our way down to walk by the bed of the stream, literally in the opposite direction to which we came. We can take a footpath setting off from the same bend if we wish to go to Miramar. The footpath winds its way upstream until coming to the asphalted track to Masos, very close to the one for Mas Barbat.

Roughly 200 metres on and we begin to climb up the left bank to make our way out of the bottom of the gully.

0:04  1:59

0,300  8,600

90° turn to the left. The track makes a 90° turn to the left heading northeast. As we continue to make our way by the side of the ditch, within a minute or so, a less obvious path appears at the bridge known as the Pont de Diable or sometimes referred to as the Pont de Moro.

Pont del Diable or Pont de Moro. *This bridge, constructed in medieval times, probably around the same time as the Torre de la Mixarda, consists of a slender semicircular arch supported by the rocks in the relatively deep gully wall. It has never been established as to whether this was originally built as an aqueduct or a footbridge.*

We leave the shade of the trees and the water behind us and, for the sake of good paths, we head for open countryside between the cultivations. We cross two, almost imperceptible streams.

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Pont del Diable or Pont del Moro, over the Torrent dels Masos gully

0:14 🕒 2:13

1,000 🚶 9,600

Rasa dels Magraners. We make our way down the paved ramp and continue heading downstream. We avoid the path heading in an anticlockwise direction and walk on the gravel.

0:08 🕒 2:21

0,600 🚶 10,200

Intersection with the road from Valls to Figuerola. Here we take the one which forks to the left in the direction of Figuerola. The one to the right goes towards Valls, this being the route we would have taken if we had taken the shortcut at the 6,000km point. Pomegranate trees are growing alongside the ditch and, when in season, will provide some very tasty pomegranates.

0:02 🕒 2:23

0,100 🚶 10,300

Junction with the Mas d'en Llop road presided over by a huge fig tree. Here we veer to the right, make an S bend and continue along this track. The track on the left continues on to Figuerola del Camp which is 2.5km from here. Six hundred metres on and we cross a second track, still heading northeast, as we have done since leaving the Masos gully. We continue to make our way on well-trodden paths.

6. Contrasting plains

0:12  2:35

0,900  11,200

Rasa de Mussoles. We make our way down to this brook and crossover to the other side. Before this however, we left a path to the left and, being in the same bed of the same brook, we leave another to the right. We make our way up the bank on the other side of the brook and continue to make our way, heading northeast. As we continue, we come across access roads to fincas and the surface on the track progressively deteriorates until it becomes no more than a footpath, sunken at that, to allow the water to pass.

0:10  2:45

0,800  12,000

Rasa d'Aligueres. Both the way down and the way up are in an equally poor state since the locals stopped using this section of the track to Mas d'en Llop. Once passed the brook we continue along a wide but stony path. This is actually one of the longest watercourses we have come across. It collects the waters from the slopes of the Serra del Jordà and meets up with the Forcada stream on a level with the industrial estate at Pla.

0:04  2:49

0,300  12,300

Intersection (394m) with the old road from Figuerola to Pla. We continue straight on towards the village of Pla, literally only a stones throw away. We leave behind the road to the left, coming from Figuerola and also the route by which the GR 175 circulates —la Ruta del Cister— towards Poblet. Soon we come to a surfaced section of the track where it bends round to cut cross another brook. We continue walking close to a very high dry-stone wall, which provides shelter from the strong winds that often blow in these parts.

0:06  2:55

0,450  12,750

Stream and ring road west of Pla. We take this road to the right. To the left, on a slightly higher level, there is a sports centre, football ground and schools.

0:02  2:57

0,150  12,900

Rasa del Tudores or Vall. Here we pass another stream, which upstream receives the name of Rasa del Tudores and in the south known as Rasa del Vall. We enter the town of Pla by the street by the name of Carrer del Terrassa and follow the signs for the GR 175.

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El Vall. Known in Pla de Santa Maria, as the torrent de la Forçada. This watercourse in fact collects the waters from the mountains of Sant Ramon as they come down the Camí dels Carpis road and the Rasa del Tudores stream, crossing the entire town from north to south. Once past the town, the gully runs parallel with the Carretera de Valls, until it comes to the Pont del Pagès bridge, after which it becomes known as the Barranc Sec. Later, on a level with Valls, it receives the name Torrent del Catllar. This watercourse passes through the Parc de Mas Miquel and alongside the Pius Hospital, its waters having come from the slopes of the Serra de Miramar. Now we come to the final section and its name changes once again to that of Riera de la Xamora, which flows into the river or Riu Francolí at the start of the Fontanals, a little beneath the bridge on the Valls to Alcover road. In spite of appearing to be an inoffensive watercourse, occasionally it does just happen to remind us of the force of unrestrained water, as was the case with the downpour known as the Aiguat de Santa Mònica, on the 28th August, 1987.

0:02  2:59

0,100  13,000

Plaça de Pau Casals or del Manescal. Here we continue straight ahead, taking the street by the name of Carrer de la Sardana. On the left, at the end of Raval de Sant Ramon, we come to the Romanesque church or Església de Santa Maria de Pla, which now goes by the name of Sant Ramon, dated around the end of the 12th century, built during the transitional period from Romanesque to Gothic and listed as being Romanesque Cistercian style. On the right, the Portal de cal Branca provides the entrance to Carrer Major, the town's main street and old walled enclosure.

0:01  3:00

0,050  13,050

Plaça de la Vila (388m), the town square, presided over by the Ajuntament building, or town hall. The end of the excursion.

Portal on Carrer Trinitat del Pla, close to the Ajuntament





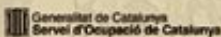
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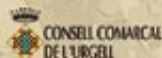
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Pacte de Santes Creus



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