

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

10



*From Nulles to Vilabella
and the meanderings
of the Gaià*



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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.

10. From Nulles to Vilabella and the meanderings of the Gaià

This hike makes its way through the most southern part of the district. This is a rugged area created by the pre-coastal mountain buttresses of the Serra de Montferri and the Massís de Bonastre, where the Gaià opens up to become the gorge or Congost del Baix Gaià. This route takes us through a varied landscape combining wide roads and tracks across flat cultivated plains and footpaths which make their way through the steepest of terrain, alongside the river and amid lush vegetation.

This long hike begins in Nulles, a small town, well adapted to modern times and offering a good selection of wines and cava and excellent tourist facilities. The route continues along the Vilabella road, a typical rural byway, through vineyards and almond groves. At the halfway point, we are surprised to come across a dry stone conduit, a formidable construction of rural architecture. Before very long, we will be able to make out Vilabella, with its hillside properties and bell towers, new and old, rising above all. We leave the village behind us and make our way down to the Gaià valley. Before taking the plunge, we see the river making its spectacular meanderings along the gorge. Alongside the river are the remains of Molinet and Molí del Mig, which serve to remind us of the time water was an indispensable source of energy. We continue upstream and begin to climb up the old track from Vendrell. We come to the plain to be met by the open valley to the north and the entire amphitheatre of mountains encircling el Camp. We return to pass Vilabella again, this time taking the Valls road. Afterwards we turn round to make our way through the small village of Casafort and back to Nulles.

The hike, in all, thirteen kilometres, can be split into two routes: from Nulles to Vilabella and back, an easy and relaxing route, and from Vilabella to Gaià and back, more arduous with more hilly terrain. If the Gaià is fast flowing we will have to forget this section as the river has to be crossed four times.

In any eventually, whether you chose to do the entire route or just a section, for sure you will be amazed by these incredible places, unknown, even by the locals.



River Gaià

10. From Nulles to Vilabella and the meanderings of the Gaià

Time

0:00
Partial



0:00
Total

Distance

0,000
Partial



0,000
Total

Nulles (225m), an example of the landscape typical to the zone, surrounded by vineyards, which demonstrates that agriculture and particularly the cultivation and processing of grapes is the basic activity, along with tourism (especially restaurant facilities and rural accommodation).

Of particular interest is the *Vinícola de Nulles*, a modernist Celler or winery, built by Cèsar Martinell and declared in 2002 to be a *Bé Cultural d'Interès Nacional*, or a *Property of National Cultural Interest* and thus protected as a historic monument. Also of interest is the church, the *Església de Sant Joan Baptista* as well as the old castle walls.

This small town has all the necessary facilities including two restaurants, a local produce shop at the cellar, as well as three “cases de turisme rural” providing accommodation.

We start off from the Sant Joan Baptista church, opposite the Ajuntament building or town hall. We make our way down

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the street Carrer de la Font, which takes us to the Plaça del Portal square. Many of the houses display large gateway arches made with cut stone ashlars. We continue heading north along the wide Passeig de Catalunya, broken by the train line which we pass beneath, taking a narrow bridge, having left the main road or Carretera to Valls on our right.

0:03  0:03

0,200  0,200

Intersection. Just past the railway line, the track makes a sharp turn to the right and an asphalt track begins here, which we don't take, where the GR 172 makes its way to Puigpelat. Twenty metres on and we meet up with the asphalt track which goes to Casafort, by which we will make our return. We pass in front of the gates to the modernist Celler, or winery and leave the road and train station on a level below. We turn to make our way alongside the right hand side of the building, able to see the side and rear façade.

0:03  0:06

0,200  0,400

Flat open space. From behind the cellar, we take the cart track to the right. We pass between a house and a barn. On the other side of the vine terrace (right) is Mas de l'Arbonés.

0:04  0:10

0,300  0,700

Intersection, with the road from Tarragona to Pont d'Armentera and the branch which goes to Nulles. We continue on the track ahead, now starting to climb upwards, and we notice the first hundred metres has been surfaced to avoid erosion. Before crossing the main road, at the side, we have the restaurant Coll de Nulles.

0:01  0:11

0,100  0,800

Fork. Here we take a right turn on to the better track from Nulles to Vilabella. The one we leave passes close by a large pine tree. We head east, between the borders of the adjacent terraced cultivations. We pass beneath two power supply cables.

0:04  0:15

0,300  1,100

Entrance. On the left, a rough path leads to the cultivations and twenty metres on, another, albeit better and on the opposite side, which does the same. We pass close by a water cistern for the young carob tree plantation.

10. From Nulles to Vilabella

0:03  0:18

0,200  1,300

Right turn. The track turns right and runs alongside the carob tree plantation. From where we turn right, two other tracks head off towards the cultivations.

0:01  0:19

0,100  1,400

Left turn. The track is now heading east again. We leave the track which continues to make its way ahead. To the right we can see the dry stone culvert, which takes the water from the track and cultivated terraces towards the brook. Here it's well worth taking a good look at the bridge to appreciate this marvel of rural architecture. By taking a walk along the track opposite, we will be able to enjoy an excellent view, with the village of Renau in the foreground, and the Mediterranean in the background. Looking over the land depression we can just make out Argilaga and Secuita. Rock frequently appears on the surface in the middle of the track. Scattered amongst the cultivated terraces are some very modest sized barns.

0:03  0:22

0,300  1,700

Fork. We continue along the best track. We pass by a rock ledge and a track which goes off to the right into the woods. Behind us we leave a clearing with four pine trees and come to the bottom of a small vale.

0:01  0:23

0,100  1,800

Entrance to a farm shop, on the right. We come to the start of another valley, this one longer than the previous one. Once on the flat we can see Tarragona in the distance, towards the west.

0:04  0:27

0,300  2,100

Turn off. We take the track right towards the woodland covering the nearby hillside. Once at the top we are joined by a track on the left. From here we can make out Vilabella with its three bell towers and the public water tank.

0:01  0:28

0,100  2,200

Fork. A track goes off to the right passing close by a barn. A hundred metres on and there is another on the left and, two hundred metres beyond that, we pass another two. Behind the

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vineyard, on the right, there appears a fairly large solitary house accompanied by two trees, this is Hort del Vidal.

0:08  0:36

0,600  2,800

Road. We come to the road and an irrigated almond grove. We set off to the right and come across a gate to a finca surrounded by a stone wall. We turn right, leaving branches off to the left. There are fairly high dry stone walls both sides of the road. Now the village is directly ahead of us and we pass a track off to the right.

0:04  0:40

0,300  3,100

Road from Renau to Vilabella. We take this road to the left. Barely fifty metres down is the *masia* Hort del Vidal with two plane trees, the water spring and washtubs. We enter Vilabella via Carrer de la Font, with houses on the right and vineyards on the left. Also on this side, we come to Avinguda de Catalunya, an undeveloped road which goes around the outside of the village. At this point Carrer de la Font narrows to become typical of an old village street.

0:05  0:45

0,400  3,500

Vilabella (255m) is located on the plain between hills. This is a farming village, clearly reflected in the structure and appearance of the houses. Of particular interest is the late 15th century Casa del Castlà, more commonly known as Cal Cristí. Also from the same period is the Portal de Sant Pere, with its semicircular arch, and the old town streets together with the old church or Església Vella. There is also a magnificent collection of religious paintings from Catalan, Spanish, Italian and Flemish schools in the Pinacoteca Mossèn Romà Comamala.

In Vilabella you will find a restaurant and accommodation in the “casa de turisme rural”.

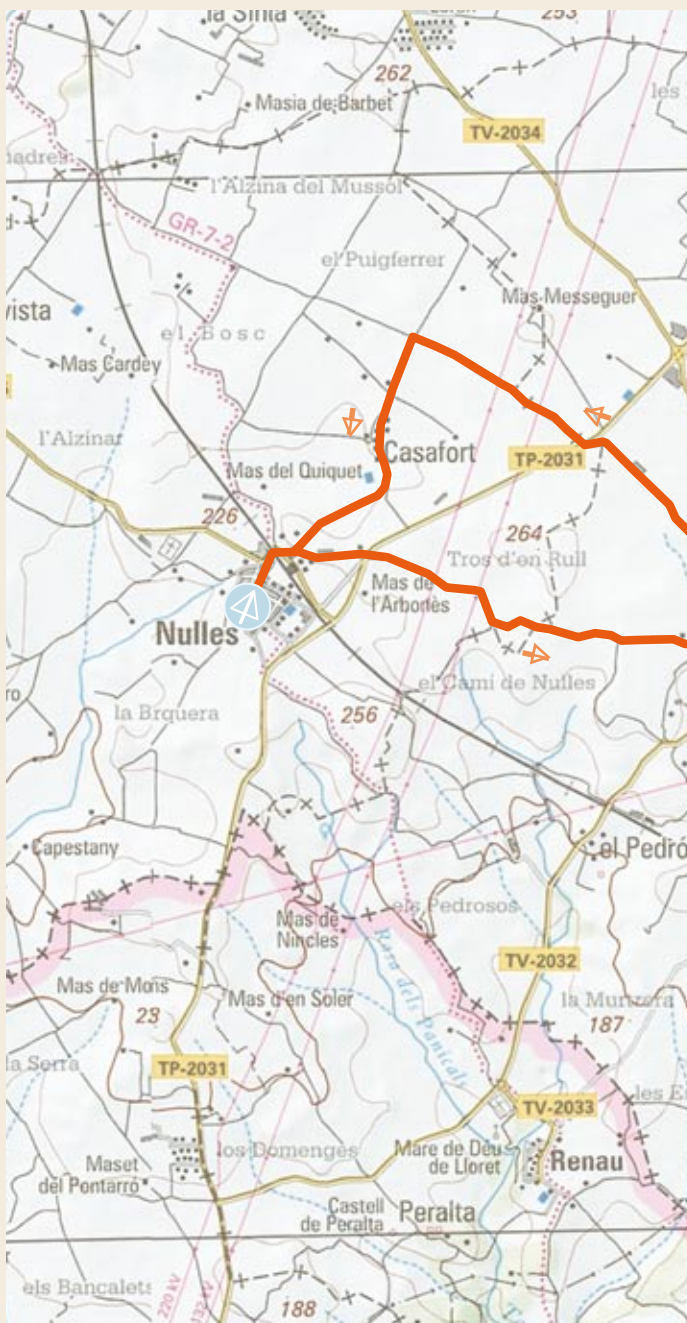
We continue by taking the street by the name of Carrer de Sant Roc, passing through the square or Plaça de Sant Pere, with a large plane tree in the centre, and along Carrer d’Avall, where the Ajuntament or town hall is located and which actually occupies the old gothic church, the bell tower of which has been made use of to install the village water tank.

0:03  0:48

0,200  3,700

Carrer del camí del Molinet. We continue to make our way down, on the outskirts of the village. On the right hand side, the schools and sports centre and ahead the GR 172-1 passes by,

10. From Nulles to Vilabella



Time



3 h

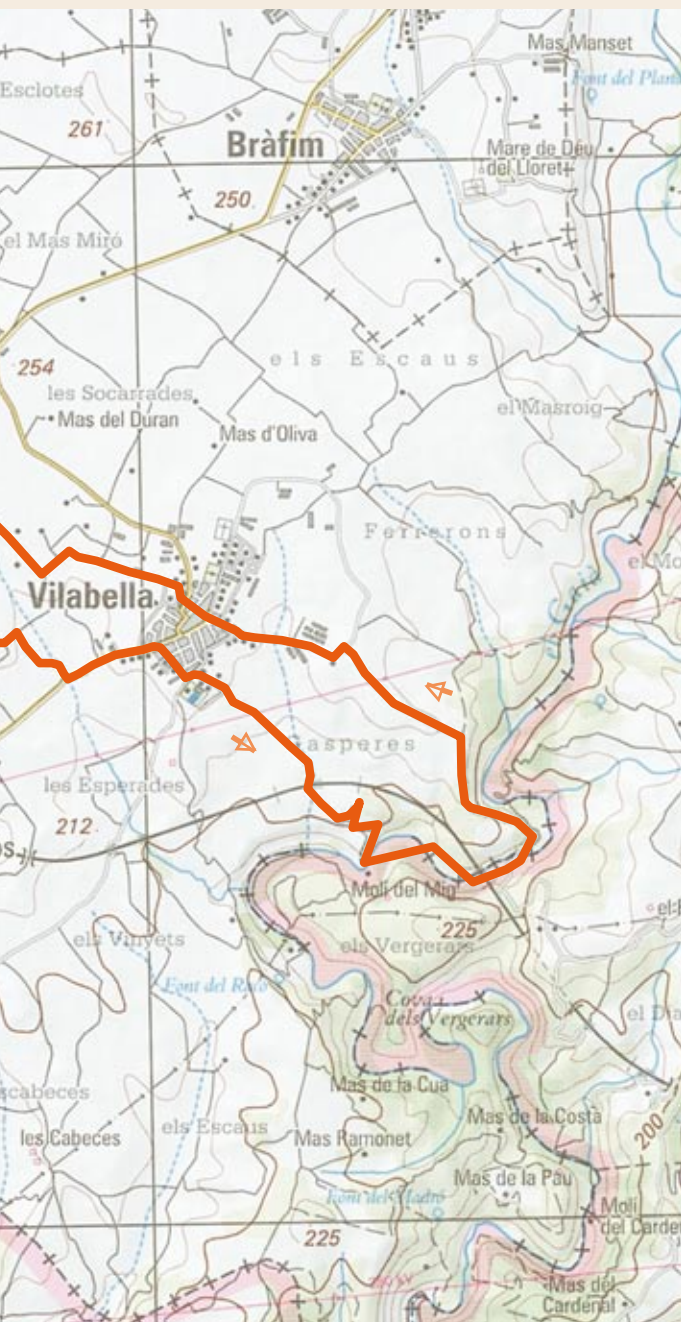
Difficulty



13,000 km



Distance



10. From Nulles to Vilabella

going to Renau. We leave the village behind and continue along the asphalted Molinet road. We pass beneath power lines and come across various tracks leading off to cultivations.

0:10  0:58

0,800  4,500

Railway bridge over the Picamoixons to Sant Vicenç de Calders line, which passes through at a fairly low level. We continue along the asphalted road. Here, many of what were formerly cultivated lands are now deserted and barren.

0:03  1:01

0,200  4,700

No more asphalt. We are close to the Gaià valley. Our route now descends steeply and takes a sharp turn to the left. From this point we have a magnificent view over the meandering river gorge as it makes its way towards the Mediterranean. We pass a small plateau with abandoned vineyards.

0:03  1:04

0,200  4,900

Fork. From here we continue along the main road. On the right, a road goes towards Coves del Gatell, below the crag on the Roques Planes, of the same name. On some maps shown as Coves del Groc, the striking caves on the right hand side. We zig-zag our way down. Two hundred metres on and we pass a track which runs parallel with the one before but which goes beneath the crag and which has been cut short by a rock fall. Right just here, we make a 180° turn to the right, and make our way down the embankment, where a footpath leads directly to Molinet.

We pass by a blackened crag where climbers have set up climbing routes. Once again we take a sharp turn to the right and, on the left, a barely noticeable footpath makes its way up the valley. We are alongside the Gaià now accompanied by the sound of running water. On the opposite side, the remains of Molinet can be seen amongst the vegetation.

0:07  1:11

0,500  5,400

Riu Gaià. Providing there's not too large a flow we can make our way across by the stepping stones. This is a surprisingly beautiful spot with well preserved riverside woods. If you are quiet and listen carefully, you will hear many birds. A little before crossing the river a rough footpath continues on towards Meandre de les Solanes and Estret de Vergerars, a delightful place, barely an hour away. We continue along the opposite bank

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to find ourselves in front of Molinet, also known as Molí Ròdec, totally demolished and overgrown by brambles and ivy. In front of the west facing door is a path which climbs steeply up to the Solanes corral and the Cova Fonda de Salomó and Vergerars. We continue upstream along a track completely overrun with vegetation. 250 metres further on we cross the Gaià again and continue along by the side of the water amongst the reeds.

0:04 🕒 1:19

0,350 🚶 6,000

Set Ponts. We continue along the left bank of the river, passing beneath the railway viaduct by the name of Set Ponts, the name of which refers to its seven arches. The central arches also have a lower arch as reinforcement and the entire viaduct is constructed in stone and bricks, as was the norm at the beginning of the 20th century. We walk between bramble bushes and reeds. We come to a hazelnut grove which extends through this entire stretch.

0:02 🕒 1:21

0,150 🚶 6,150

Cattle track from Valls to Vendrell. We take this track going left, in the direction of Vilabella. Right it goes to Salomó, 3.5km from here, although before that, the track meets up with the road from Polla-rossa and Montferri.

0:01 🕒 1:22

0,050 🚶 6,200

Riu Gaià. We cross the river for the fourth and last time, this time on a rather more convenient surfaced walkway. From here we embark upon a steep climb up to later come across a pumping station, by the side of which a track leads to a grassed area near to the river. On the opposite slope we can see abandoned cultivation terraces and a barn. Above and beyond the barn, at the foot of the Serra de Montferri, we have the Mas de la Polla-rossa. On our way up, we pass some tracks which appear to finish as quickly as they start.

Set Ponts



10. From Nulles to Vilabella

0:11  1:33

0,700  6,900

Mirador del Gaià. The end of strenuous climb, with the valley beneath our feet. From this viewpoint we can see what little there remains of the Molí del Mig. In front of us we have the Mas de la Polla-rossa, an important *masia* in the Salomó district, named after the blonde heiress who was to marry. The valley opens out to the north towards Montferri, the shrine of Montserrat and, behind, Rodonyà, surrounded by the Serra de Montferri, with Torre del Moro and Tossa Grossa, followed by mountain ranges Montmell, Muntanyes de l'Albà and Selma, and finally in the background the unmistakable peak of Montagut.

0:03  1:36

0,200  7,100

We turn towards the east away from the valley. We ignore various tracks leading into the woods. Soon we start to come across the first cultivations, leaving behind us the woodland or Bosc del Forneret.

0:07  1:43

0,500  7,600

Power lines. We pass beneath the power lines, leaving the access to a newly constructed reservoir on our right.

0:03  1:46

0,200  7,800

Asphalt track. We join this track and make a turn to the left. Barely twenty metres on and we come across the municipal water deposit and, at the entrance to the Terrablanc leisure zone, a splendid view of Vilabella, on the opposite side of the land depression and set on the top of the hill. The area is equipped with barbecues and picnic tables. We make our way down the hill to cross the valley floor, where there are farms on both sides. As we enter the village, what was the hill track has now become a street by the name of Carrer del Molí del Mig which, in turn, takes us to Carrer del Roser and the church square or plaça de l'Església.

0:12  1:58

0,900  8,700

Vilabella. We pass close by the foot of the Església de Sant Pere bell tower and make our way behind the apse, at the side of which we come across Casal de Vilabella. We make our way along the Valls road, to the left, until we come to the Celler or winery. We turn left onto a wide street which makes its way downhill. Behind the Celler we can see the stainless steel fermentation vats for the wine.

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0:04  2:02

0,300  9,000

Avinguda de Catalunya. We leave this street on our left which is actually devoid of properties. We continue to make our way west-northwest along a roadside track and 100 metres on, on the right hand side, we come to a farm. Our view to the left is blocked by a stone wall although halfway along there is an entrance to some corrals.

0:04  2:06

0,300  9,300

Crossroads. We continue straight ahead towards a finca with a very slender palm tree. The left branch goes to the fields and the right links up with the Valls road. A little further on and the track makes a pronounced detour to the left leaving a path on the right. We make our way walking between fields of calçots (a cross between a spring onions and leeks).

0:04  2:10

0,300  9,600

Cal Manyé. Having left the path on the right, we pass in front of the boundary wall to the finca Cal Manyé, also known by the name of Palmera.

0:02  2:12

0,100  9,700

Crossroads. Here we take the right branch, continuing along the boundary wall. The track to the left returns to the village and the one ahead, towards the cultivations. The track surface here is firm with a gentle uphill slant and takes us through olive and almond groves.

0:07  2:19

0,500  10,200

Fork. We continue straight ahead, towards the north, and pass by a farm. The branch to the left goes down to the fields which spread across the land depression. Also on the left is a barn, of which the roof is covered in holes.

0:06  2:25

0,400  10,600

Track running parallel to the road. Here we join the road and turn left. We see a small shelter, dug out of the wall at the side, for travellers awaiting the tartranes, the old carriages, which went between Vilabella and Tarragona. From here, a road also goes off to the right, which we won't be taking. Earlier, on the right, we passed the road from Creu de Castellet.

10. From Nulles to Vilabella

0:01  2:26

0,100  10,700

Road from Tarragona to Pont d'Armentera. After crossing this road diagonally, we take the narrower, less transited, road on the opposite side. This is actually the old road from Valls to Vilabella and still has the original borders. We make our way gently uphill between vineyards until we come to the top, wherupon we make our way down again. We pass beneath two power lines. From here there is an excellent view of the mountain amphitheatre surrounding Camp de Tarragona.

0:11  2:37

0,800  11,500

Fork. A footpath meets up on the right from the cultivations. We make our west, towards the Serra de la Mussara, where the telecommunication antennae are clearly visible.

0:02  2:39

0,050  11,550

Branch off. We continue straight ahead along the grassiest and least used track. We leave the track, in a very good condition, which goes towards Casafort, alongside an irrigated vineyard with trained vines.

0:02  2:41

0,150  11,700

Crossroad. Here we take the road from Puigpelat to Casafort heading towards this population nucleus and we take a left turn. Opposite the old road from Valls to Vilabella continues ahead. Behind we have left the branch which goes to Puigpelat. The crossroad is presided over by a well proportioned Holm oak. 200 metres on and we pass between two barns, leaving behind a track which branches off to the left. We continue alongside a stone wall.

0:06  2:47

0,400  12,100

Fork. Here we continue straight ahead, ignoring the road on the right, which makes its way around the village to avoid passing through the centre.

0:02  2:49

0,100  12,200

Casafort. *This is a hamlet which comes under and is located north-east of the municipality of Nulles. Nowadays few families actually live here.*

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Buildings of interest include the Casa dels Comtes de Peralada. Probably constructed in the 16th century, according to what can be made of the date on the oldest portico. Although renovated a few years ago, some of the original building has been preserved. The portico has an elliptical arch in which the keystone has a shield in relief, with a lance, a sword and a cross in the middle, surrounded by garlands and a crown at the top. Also engraved is an inscription from the time of the Inquisition dated "1767". The inscription on the shield reads: "The Lord will provoke and be the judge of your cause".

In Casafort we will find a restaurant and accommodation in a "casa de turisme rural".

We enter this small hamlet protected by two very high walls. We cross the square and make our way out along the one and only street which becomes an asphalt road to Nulles.

0:03 🕒 2:52

0,200 🚶 12,400

Turn. The track turns right between hazelnut groves and vineyards. We leave behind the dirt track leading to the main road.

0:08 🕒 3:00

0,600 🚶 13,000

Cooperativa de Nulles. We come to the back of this wine-making cooperative's modernist building. We continue to make our way by taking the road to the centre of this town, and the end of our hike.



The modernist Celler de Nulles



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