

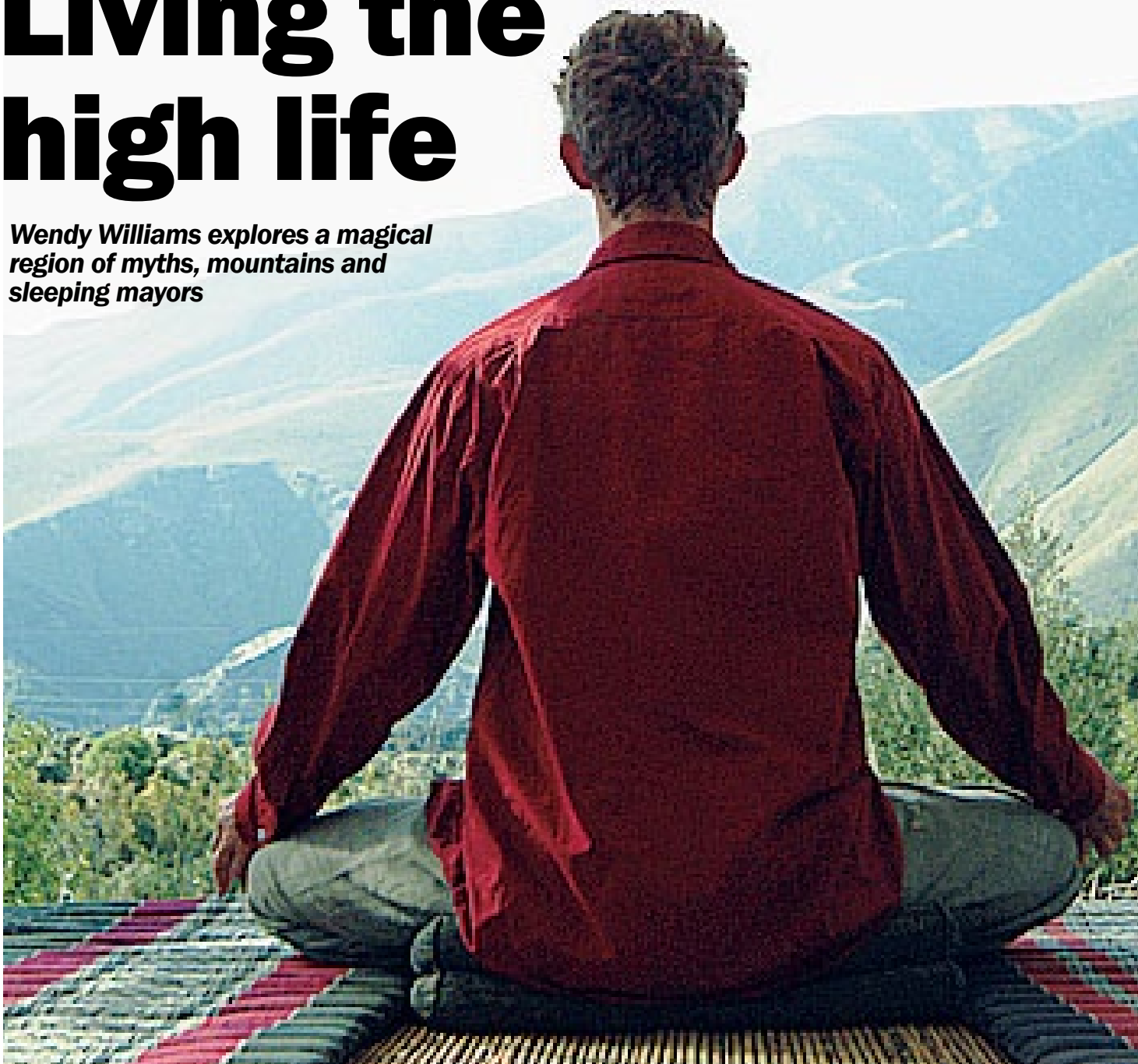
All about the Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley

July 2011

A 16-page Olive Press insiders guide

Living the high life

Wendy Williams explores a magical region of myths, mountains and sleeping mayors



Picture: FRED SHIVELEY

As the taciturn waiter served up an industrial strength coffee, I gently probed as to where I might find the local mayor to seek out an interview.

He looked at his watch and, almost cracking a smile, replied: "At this time? He'll still be asleep."

It was actually already 9:45am in the heart of July, yet in Capileira most of the locals were still sleeping and only one of the dozen or so cafe/bars was actually open for business.

Strange for such an emblematic village - Spain's second-highest - and a regular stopping off point for tourists and hikers from around the world.

Life certainly starts later in the Alpujarras and the pace of life is slower than the majority of its waiters.

But this, of course, gives you all the more chance to absorb the beautiful scenery.

And there is certainly no shortage of that in this charming region, made famous first by British writer Gerald Brennan in his book *South from Granada*, and more recently by Chris Stewart, of *Driving over Lemons* fame.

La Alpujarra (or Las Alpujarras depending on who you ask - even the road signs can't make up their minds) is a landlocked mountainous region which stretches south from the Sierra Nevada mountain range, around 40 to 50kms inland from the coast.

A colourful region of legends (and perhaps even more colourful people), it is one of the driest spots in Spain although this is anything but obvious, its terraced farmlands well watered by melting snow carefully channelled into water courses.

It is this series of *acequias* - first installed by the ancient Moors - that have helped to make the upper valleys an oasis of green, in dramatic contrast to the arid foothills on the facing slopes of the Contraviesa nearer the coast.

On first glance, the region is a pastoral paradise, its 50-odd villages

Turn to Page 2



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From Page 1

apparently alive from farming and a generous smattering of tourists. Decidedly rural and great for a holiday, these villages (along with those in the nearby Lecrin Valley) were also as it happens the last stronghold of the Moors.

This apparently sleepy enclave has a very bloody history due to the Reconquest

Indeed, this apparently sleepy enclave has a very bloody history, following the Reconquest of Granada in 1492, in which the muslim Moors were forced to convert to Christianity. Those who refused took to the hills, settling in this remote area where they were able to maintain a distinct culture for decades. But the peace wasn't to last and in 1568 there was a bloody uprising - the Morisco Rebellion - which was ruthlessly crushed leading to their eviction from the area, with the exception of two Moorish

Spirits in the sky

BLOODY PAST: Remains of Lanjaron's Moorish castle, where countless battles took place

families for each village. Legend has it; these families were ordered to remain by the Spanish crown to maintain the complicated irrigation systems. Certainly, the unique villages have retained much of their traditional Berber-style architecture with terraced clusters

of white houses with flat clay roofs and chimneys, which are unique to the region. And the locals don't seem to be losing sleep over their violent past. In fact, they are getting plenty of it... certainly if being a mayor is anything to go by. For the following day we were to be confronted by yet another sleeping mayor after my colleague left his camera in another town hall which by the time we returned was typically shut for the day. Told that nobody would be back until the next day, we eventually tracked down the mayor, who conveniently owned the local supermarket. The only problem... he was already taking his daily siesta and couldn't be disturbed. But then his wife, who was cutting ham on the deli counter, promptly came up with a solution and without comment, simply handed over the

Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley

keys to the town hall. Now, I don't know if this is common practice but it showed a level of trust scarcely seen where I grew up and where I currently live in Malaga. It also added to a growing impression that the people of the Alpujarras belong to a different time, largely untouched by the modern world. The whole feel of the region is distinctly rough and ready, unpolished and parochial, yet with none of the pretensions you find on the coast. Further proof of this came in the evening when, while enjoying tapas in a leafy square, the waitress asked if she and her husband could lock up and we simply leave our glasses and plates behind a plant pot. "It is certainly a timeless place" explained Chris Mann, 52, who splits his time between Brighton and the village of Cañar. "We absolutely love the Alpujarras because it is still distinctly the real Spain. "There are no English breakfasts and no fish and chips... and I don't think they'll ever change that." He added: "The Spanish here are very hardworking, strong mountain people." "But," he quipped, "it takes six months for your neighbour to first say hello." This is another case, with locals showing a distinct wariness as we went about seeking information, photos and anecdotes. Reticent to open up and some openly hostile, it is largely thanks to the large influx of Spaniards from the north and the rich mix of expatriates, that the region keeps its balance. Plus there is another dimension to the Alpujarras with the two biggest towns Lanjaron and Orgiva, offering an entirely different flavour to the mountain villages. Lanjaron is famous around Spain for its waters... and rather like Bournemouth, is full of old folk who flock to the area for its apparent healing properties. In a scene more reminiscent of a Roman hospital than a relaxing retreat, as you enter the Bañerario you are greeted

ins of a Moorish castle which stands precipitously above a ravine. According to legend when the castle was stormed by the Christians some of the Moors actually threw themselves off the edge. Lanjaron also boasts a number of craft shops selling wickerwork for which the town is well-known. This all stands in contrast to nearby Orgiva which is the veritable new age capital of Spain with three camps for travellers located just outside the town. Here you are more likely to find people with dreadlocks and dogs on strings than grandpas in socks and sandals. While the famous 'flute woman' has apparently now disappeared from the steps of the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Expiracion - the impressive church that dominates the skyline - there are plenty of other colourful people to make up for it. In fact I was lucky enough to come across 'the cigarette man' not once but twice, in two different towns. A slightly dishevelled looking figure, he gruffly asks for cigarettes before snatching one and disappearing without so much as a thank you. "He's infamous and weirdly no one has ever seen him smoking," explained one local expat. Of course Orgiva seems positively bustling in contrast to the nearby villages. Car horns were beeping as a traffic jam along the main road seemed to bring the town to a standstill. But in truth, Orgiva is also incredibly laid back, with rumours there are lay lines that run through the town. There is certainly an indefinable quality felt by the hundreds of expats, who have been drawn to the town like magnets.

People can come here and live how they like without being judged or being afraid

FAITH: Orgiva's Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Expiracion

"There are a lot of different people here - Muslims, Buddhists, hippies - many of whom have travelled a lot and then stayed," explains Qasim Barrio, 38, who runs the restaurant Baraka. "Orgiva might not have that much or be the most beautiful place but people can come here and live how they like without being judged or being afraid, it offers the possibility to be themselves." This is a view also supported by writer Bill Crossick, 45, originally from Yorkshire, who

settled here after travelling for 23 years. "I went through Israel and Eastern Europe. But I was limited by my fear of flying so I had to drive everywhere or go by bus, train or hitchhike," he explained. "Then I arrived in Orgiva 10 years ago as a volunteer on an organic farm, I did a few months and went home and then came back. I bought a truck and converted it as a way of staying permanently, before eventually buying land below Cañar where I built a

house." Crossick, who has written two anthologies of poems and short stories about his experiences added: "The area reminds me a lot of the Middle East, it is very similar in many ways and I have very happy memories of it so I stayed here. "Plus it is the only place where I could manage to sustain myself, live cheaply and buy land. "In the beginning I was actually selling books on the church steps to get some money together. "I couldn't have done that anywhere else." Quite simply, the Alpujarras is like nowhere else on earth. From the time of the Moors to the modern day it has provided a refuge for those that were running away or who just wanted to be free to live in their own way. Ultimately it is a magical place full of contrasts; it boasts lush greenery next to arid landscapes, it is one of the driest places in Spain, yet famous for its water, it is a timeless zone, yet modern in thinking, and it offers 'real' Spain, while attracting interesting people from all around the world. And to top it all off, sometimes you really do drive over lemons to get there.

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RELAX: Life in the slow lane in a backstreet of Lanjaron

Variety spice of life

SET up by Qasim Barrio eight years ago, Baraka, a Moroccan restaurant and tea shop in the heart of Orgiva, is by far the best known cafe in town. "Baraka was born to provide a meeting place for all the alternative people living in the area," explains Qasim, 38, who converted to Islam eight years ago. "Everyone comes here... a real diverse crowd from Buddhists to hippies and from businessmen to the local Spanish." The kitchen specialises in showarma and typical Arabic cuisine but there are also a variety of Spanish dishes on the menu and home-made ice cream in the summer. Almost uniquely, they now have a 'certified organic menu' for those who want to eat 100 percent ecological. No alcohol is served but there is an extensive menu of tea, coffee and juices - and it has been a strictly non-smoking venue since long before the ban came into force across Spain. "You can't really find that anywhere else in Granada," adds Qasim.

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4 Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley *special*

IN FOCUS: The people and personalities of the Alpujarras

HAVING sold over two million books on the region, he is understandably one of Andalucia's best known expats.

But in the Alpujarras, Chris Stewart is nothing short of a hero. Indeed, the ex-Genesis drummer has arguably done more for the region than anyone else.

For since settling in his farmhouse, El Valero, near Orgiva, with his wife Ana over 20 years ago he has worked tirelessly to put the region on the map.

His trilogy of books, starting with *Driving over Lemons*, has now been translated into Spanish and sold around the world.

Yet, for the first 10 years he lived in 'pleasant and agreeable penury', he tells the *Olive Press* at his charming farmhouse.

"Then, as soon as the book went wild I started having Japanese tourists beating down my door and my face got put on a local town postcard."

Indeed, he is now so much a part of the community that as a joke, some of the locals put up notices around Lanjaron advertising the 'annual open day' of Chris Stewart's property on April 1.

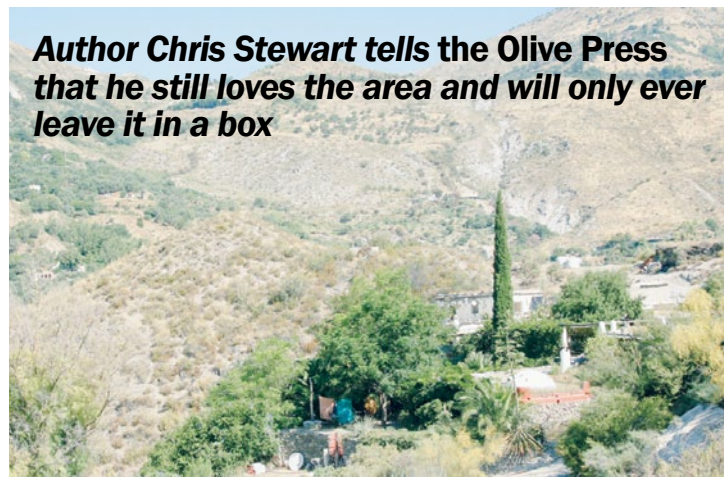
"But then every paradise has its flaws," he said. "We liked what we saw 20 years ago and, to be fair, we like it even more today."

He continues: "I somehow turned into more of a writer than a farmer, but I still find it hard to get used to this idea of making a living without getting dirty."

"But farming is a hard way to earn an honest crust at the best of times, and I feel lucky to have discovered

MAKING A LIVING WITHOUT GETTING DIRTY

Author Chris Stewart tells the Olive Press that he still loves the area and will only ever leave it in a box



RURAL: Stewart's home and (right) beside his 'green' reed pool a new crop - books - to keep the wolves from the door."

He adds: "I had imagined the appeal of my stories was pretty much limited to the British but it turned out

that Spaniards, too, liked to read about our isolated rural corner of Andalucia with its oddball mix of peasant farmers, new-age travellers and expats."

The vivid pictures he paints are indeed full of interesting characters and scenarios that are difficult to really imagine until you visit the Alpujarras and see how true to life his books are.

But despite his new found fame and fortune he has no desire to sell up and live the high life somewhere else.

"The one question that never fails to pop up, in either country, is: 'Now you've sold some books, are you still living on that dump of a farm?'"

"It's true that the farm has its less pleasing aspects. It's

baking hot in summer, freezing in winter; the house has an immovable colony of fleas and thick stone walls teeming with ants.

"But simply being on the farm keeps me in a state of bliss - which is just as well because we've come to accept it

is impossible to make any kind of living out of it.

"That's why people abandoned these small mountain farms: the work is just too hard and there's no

real money in it."

He continues: "But what it gives us is quality of life: freshly picked and pressed oranges for breakfast, our own olive oil by the gallon, home-reared meat and fruit, vegetables and eggs."

"We still love El Valero and the only way we're leaving here is in a box - perhaps not even then, as it happens, for both Ana and I plan to lay our bones beneath an orange tree on what is known as the Mandarin Terrace, and there for all eternity enjoy the view of the Cadiar river mingling with the waters of the Trevez, below the great blue snow-capped Sierra de Lujar."

Chris Stewart's third book *The Almond Blossom* Appreciation Society has just been translated into Spanish

It has less appealing aspects but being on the farm keeps me in a state of bliss



Lorca: My 'exotic' trip to the Alpujarras

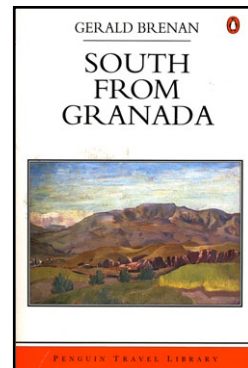
HE is Spain's most famous poet, murdered by Franco's troops during the Spanish Civil War, becoming a martyr and a legend in the process.

Granada-born Federico Garcia Lorca was also a regular visitor to the Alpujarras, particularly to Lanjaron where his mother was sent to drink the waters.

Clearly taken by the area he wrote in a letter to his brother: "I did a little excursion to la Alpujarra. It took us two days. I have never seen anything so exotic and mysterious. I can't believe that it is in Europe."



The area's bible



BRITON Gerald Brenan is the writer who first put the Alpujarras on the map with his insightful book *South from Granada*, written in 1957, which is long revered as the archetypal tome on the area.

Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley 5

Obit: David Dry 1934 to 2011

A man who helped to build Orgiva

HE was certainly one of the true characters of the Alpujarras. A gentle man, full of excellent advice, who became known as one of Andalucia's best expatriate architects.

So it is with great sadness that David Dry passed away in May, leaving his third wife Shujata in their beautiful, recently-completed town centre project of four townhouses in Orgiva (see advert below).

David and his second wife Dot had first moved to the area in the 1990s, when they bought a finca on a hillside near Orgiva where they set about building a small cluster of holiday cottages grouped around their own house. Over the next 20 years David gained a considerable reputation locally for his design of private houses, all charmingly detailed, showing great respect for local building traditions, yet innovative and energy efficient. He was always drawing, even in meetings with clients; and was a great communicator who could quickly and graphically depict their aspirations.

Back in the UK, his group of farm buildings at Fulmer, Bucks, led to him being compared to the great architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the *Telegraph* in 1963. His then company Dry Halasz and Associates was involved in a myriad of project types, including the design of nautical instruments, hotels, restaurants, hairdressing salons, offices, cinemas, yacht interiors, and local authority housing for Camden, Islington and Haringey in the golden age of the then groundbreaking 'high density, low rise'. His commissions included London restaurants, the Snooty Fox in Mayfair and the Isaac Walton in Chelsea, and he worked on the Hotel Carlton in Cannes, as well as the Metropole in Monaco.

Ultimately David was an optimist, relentlessly enthusiastic and a gifted architect. He was generous of spirit and touched the lives of so many who were fortunate enough to count him as a friend and colleague.





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The Lecrin Valley is also popular with numerous celebs including Paul Weller and Alexei Sayle, discovers Wendy Williams

"It is a beautiful area where people can have their privacy if they want it, but there is plenty going on here and nearby in Granada," adds Scarlett, who runs La Finca guest house near Murchas-



Why the 'valley of happiness' is big in children's TV

Comprising a wealth of pretty villages and charming countryside, it is little surprise to

"The area attracts some rather strange, but interesting people," explains painter James Connell, who has

It is easy to see why.
Scattered with lemon, orange
and almond trees, this beau-

The Lecrin valley is what you think of when you conjure up traditional images of the sun-drenched south of Spain;

**The indelible
mark of the
Moors remains
in the names and
architecture**

Where this becomes apparent is in the history of the valley, which is dotted with

Yet today the only hint of the devastation

It has once again become a Valley of Happiness and it is no surprise that so many people have come here to create their own idyll.

It has a hidden cache of treasures on offer, including paintings, decorative objects, furniture, textiles and vintage clothes. You can also unwind with a Moroccan tea at the 'Last Straw' café on the roof terrace.

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The Flavours of Andalusia (19-23 Sept 2011) a fun introduction to Spanish cooking and tapas.

Prayer and Art (20-24 April 2012) a retreat with Bishop Stephen Cottrell, based on Stanley Spencer paintings.

Love and Freedom (18-22 June 2012) conversations with Bishop Alan Wilson & Rev Rosie Harper (Oxford Diocese).

Find your Voice (16-20 July 2012) a singing retreat with Vincenzo Scarafile (Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford).

Towards a Larger Christ (3-7 Sept 2012) retreat with musician, author & broadcaster John Bell (Iona, Scotland).

Reading Paintings & Seeing through Words (10-14 Sept 2012) with author Colin Thompson (Oxford University).

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8 Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley *special*

With your head in the clouds...



IDYLIC: Reading beside Casa Iberos pool in Bubion

Take a ride up the Poqueira gorge and beyond to appreciate the best that the Alpujarras has to offer

It is really the only way to see the Alpujarras - from above.

As you make your way up to the three white villages - Capileira, Bubion and Pampaneira - that straddle the Poqueira gorge you ascend to the heavens catching glimpses of snow, even in the height of summer. Capileira is the highest of the three pueblos at 1,435 metres making it the second highest village in all of Spain, behind nearby Trevelez, which sits at a vertiginous 1,500 metres. Boasting a dramatic position with a mountain backdrop of the Sierra Nevada - where blue skies meet pure white snow - one of their greatest assets is their fantastic hiking opportunities.

It is little wonder that 19th century traveller Richard Ford described the area as the 'Switzerland of Spain'. Later, Spanish poet Garcia Lorca and English writer Gerald Brenan both waxed lyrical about its people and landscapes.

Initially a little chocolate-box in feel, once inside you will find some great shops and surprisingly good restaurants in the villages, which fill up on weekends. Precariously sited, the steepness of the land means that the houses in the villages seem to be piled on top of another.

Their architecture is characterised by over 500 years of Moorish occupation with flat roofs, distinctive chimneys, and steep



MASTERCLASS: Teaching flamenco in Capileira, (right) a view of La Taha in snow and (below) rugs for sale

narrow streets giving them a unique and picturesque appearance.

And as if to remind you where this style first came from, the Rif Mountains of Morocco are sometimes

clearly visible.

From here it is also just a short journey along the high mountain road east towards Trevelez, and the five nearby villages that make up the Taha region.



The town of Trevelez is well worth a visit and has become famous for its curing of hams and the place is literally full of ham shops and factories. Meanwhile east of Trevelez you will find Juviles, an important silk centre in Moorish times, Berchules, a high village of grassy streams and chestnut woods, and Cadaiar, which Brenan described as the 'navel'. Beyond this the rolling countryside heads off towards Almeria and the charming towns of Ugijar and Yegen, where Brenan lived for a decade.

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BREATHTAKING: Capileira (left and above) and two shots of onions and a street scene in Pitres (right)

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Finca Los Llanos rural hotel is located in the beautiful town of Capileira. Sit above the Poqueira River, Capileira is the highest of the ancient, little white villages that cling to the mountainside.

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The restaurant offers typical Alpujarran cuisine using products from the region.

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cafe bar ambientza



views right across the Lecrin valley.
La Finca, also known as Casa Amelia, has finally opened offering guests the most amazing range of comfort and hospitality.
Run by the perfect hostess Scarlett Farrow and husband Chris (above), the estate operates as a centre for permaculture and has been restored with a keen eye for detail. Boasting solar panels and two generators run on olive pips, the guesthouse, comprising four spacious and beautifully appointed suites, strikes the perfect balance between sustainable and luxury.
As well as sumptuous decor and furnishings, guests are treated to home-cooked, organic meals, and Scarlett even runs cookery courses, on a range of themes. "My dad, who was a film director at Pinewood was always a gourmet so I think that's where it comes from," explains Scarlett. "The Lecrin valley really is a fabulous place to have a break."
Visit www.newcasaamelia.com/lafinca





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under new ownership

12 Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley *special*

A green guesthouse with true luxury



Bedtime prayers

SET amid 21 acres of almond and olive groves in the Sierra Nevada National Park the stunning Hacienda Los Olivos is a wonderful place to unwind. While it is officially a Christian Retreat Centre, everyone is welcome to come and enjoy the incredible peace, high in the hills above the Lecrin Valley. Open just a few months, the retreat, run by Church of England curator Dani Muñoz, 35, and his partner Guy Wynter, 39, has an emphasis on the spiritual. While importantly for the green traveller, Los Olivos – which received an EU grant for being a sustainable tourist project – is carbon neutral, generating all its heating and power from renewable energy sources. It is a great place to unwind enjoying the stunning views from the pool terrace or for hikers with the renowned international trail the GR7 running right past the doorstep.

WHERE TO STAY

The Lecrin Valley has a surprisingly large amount of good places to stay. In particular in Murchas with the opening of the fabulous guest house La Finca (see article left), which has also been designed with the environment in mind and boasts a prime location in the valley with enviable views. Meanwhile the delightful Bed and Breakfast El Cortijo del Pino at the top of the valley in Albuñuelas offers an unspoilt haven of peace. Offering sweeping views of the Lecrin valley the magical guesthouse is named after an extremely old pine tree, which is said to be one of the oldest in Spain. Run by artist James Connell and his wife Antonia – whose hospitality is second to none – it has been charmingly decorated to

make you feel right at home. A little less off the beaten track is Los Narajos in Mellegis, a great value option, which still offers a room with a view. Here you can also enjoy a delicious meal in the restaurant, which serves traditional food. Over in the Alpujarras there is a huge range of accommodation, one of the best being the three star Hotel Finca los Llanos in the stunning *pueblo blanco* Capileira. It was established in 1990 and offers 40 rooms with all mod-cons. Offering accommodation with a difference, Casa Ibero, in Bubion, boasts two colourfully decorated houses that are ideal for families and small groups, set among beautiful gardens. Run by the incredibly hospitable Montse, the houses boast a pool with breathtaking views of the valley; a perfect spot to unwind at the end of the day. Another great option in Bubion is Casa La Sevillana, which is a cosy hideaway, perfect for exploring the valley. Set up by Eva Love and her husband Julio, it is a comfortable house in a great location. Down in Orgiva, the pick would have to be Alma Alpujarrena if you are looking for value, while Hostel Semaforo in the centre has some excellent value rooms as well. If it is comfort you are after – and stunning countryside – you can do no wrong by staying at wonderful Los Pedaos, a famously green retreat.



ROOMS WITH A VIEW: Casa Ibero and (top) Olivos

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Alpujarras & Lecrin Valley *special* 13

THE Alpujarras is the perfect area for hikers, with a network of ancient trails linking the white villages and criss-crossing a landscape of olive groves and terraces. Walking though the lower hills of the region is a delight at any time of the year with countless routes running through the steep-sided valleys and crossing mountain streams using ancient pack-horse bridges. Here you can enjoy relaxed walking taking in the dramatic scenery before arriving in time for a refreshing drink in one of the many shady plazas. For many walkers though, the main appeal of the region is



A real high!

Walking guide Martin Riley on why taking a trek around the Alpujarras will never be forgotten

the soaring Sierra Nevada mountains which form the northern edge of the Alpujarras. Although not as rugged as other Spanish sierras it should not be underestimated. There are more than a dozen peaks over 3,000m including mainland Spain's highest peak, Mulhacen 3,482m.

And they are surrounded by remote valleys and corries bounded by narrow rocky ridges. Here are three of my top picks...

Martin Riley is a qualified British mountain guide. His company The Life of Riley offers clients a range of walks for all levels. Contact him on 696 354 824

Mulhacen

AT 3,482m the summit of Mulhacen stands above anything else, not only in the Alpujarras but in the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. No doubt then why an ascent is often the main reason walkers come to the area. Once clear of snow – usually by May – Mulhacen offers reasonably fit walkers a chance to experience walking in the high mountains. Walking in these rugged peaks is not to be taken lightly however as above 2,500m the affects of the high altitude begin to kick in and steep ascents of these 3,000m plus peaks can prove to be tough. The ascent of Mulhacen is best done as part of a two-day trek from the Poqueira Mountain Refuge. The rewards though for those who do summit Mulhacen are massive with dramatic views and magnificent mountain scenery at every turn.



Ruta Medieval

THE Ruta Medieval shows off the best that the lower hills have to offer. The route threads its way through the villages of the Taha, an area of the Alpujarras east of the Poqueira Gorge made up of about a dozen small villages ranging from the largest, Pitres, right down to Altabetar, a small hamlet of around 20 properties. Steeped in the folklore of the Alpujarras, the walk is great not only for walkers but also for those with an interest in the history of the area. Well signed with its own distinctive ceramic plaque the route takes you across a dramatic 'Roman' bridge high above the Rio Trev-elez, passes long-disused corn mills and threshing circles, or 'eras', and via the ruins of Arab bathhouses.



Monachil Gorge

THE Monachil Gorge is a deservedly popular short walk close to Granada. While strictly speaking not quite in the Alpujarras this walk is close at hand and has to rank as one of the best short walks in the region. Reputed to have been used in one of the Indiana Jones movies, the gorge is a spectacular cleft through high mountain cliffs. The route uses suspension bridges to cross the mountain stream running through the spectacular rock scenery of the gorge. A narrow 'path' is followed with the aid of well placed steel staples fixed into the rock. Other sections have to be taken on all fours and rock tunnels negotiated. It sounds scary but it is in fact easy enough if you have a reasonable agility and a head for heights. Once through you can laze by the river and take your time over a picnic.



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Home of home-cooking

ALTHOUGH it is not exactly the food capital of Andalucía, more and more places are starting to emerge in the

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Alpujarras and nearby Lecrin Valley for a decent meal. Restaurante Garvi, in Lecrin for example offers delicious no-fuss food. Though perhaps designed more for carnivores than vegetarians the house speciality is delicious 'choto' or goat and the fabulous old photos and paintings on the wall add to the atmosphere. Moving into the Alpujarras you will find Ambienza, recently taken over by a young Israeli/English couple, offering service with a smile. The buzzing café/restaurant in the heart of Lanjarón has already established itself as the main hang out in the community. As well as a healthy, organic menu it boasts a great shaded terrace where you can unwind to the sounds of reggae or enjoy the regular entertainment on offer which includes a popular

WHERE TO EAT

open mic night. Over in Orgiva you should check out the recently renovated El Viejo Molino, which is a spacious restaurant with impressive wooden beams, a traditional open fireplace for winter and two great open air terraces. Baraka is also well worth checking out if you are in Orgiva. A gathering point for the many different tribes who gravitate to the town, there is a clear Moroccan influence on both the menu and the décor. Moving up into the Poqueira gorge you will find Casa de Paco y Pilar in Capileira. Run by the local mayor, Paco Lopez, it has a great shady garden with superb views. Even the Prince of Asturias has given his seal of approval after he dropped in a few years ago. Nearby, you might also want to hunt out Casa Ibero, particularly in winter, when the charming dining room is warm with a roaring fire. Nearby in Bubiñ you

TALENT: Ramon at Estacion 4, El Viejo Molino and Cafe Ambienza (inset)



should look out for homely Estacion 4, one of the finest restaurants in the region. Tucked away in the winding streets this hidden jewel has an intimate setting and is perfect for a romantic dinner. It excels in

local, home-cooked food. Just down the hill in Pampaneira you should also definitely look out for the highly recommended Ruta de Mulhacen, which has great local food and some wonderful views from its terrace.



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Map of the Alpujarras

By Wendy Williams

Where the mountains meet the sky

NESTLED in the heart of the Alpujarras where the mountains meet the sky you will find La Taha. This group of villages, clustered together in the Sierra Nevada National Park, includes Pitres, Capileira, Mecina, Mecinilla, Fondales, Atalbéitar and Ferreirola. Echoes of their Roman and Muslim heritage are traceable around every corner and their charms include natural springs, rivers and, in particular, exceptional views. La Taha is an ideal place for hiking, cycling and horse riding with three international walking trails (the GR-7, GR-142 and GR-240) winding through. But the area also offers an oasis of tranquility long admired by generations of photographers and painters who have come to capture its beauty. One of the most interesting places to visit is the Casa Arte cultural centre, which is a creative space for artists involved in ceramics, leather, carpentry and jewellery. There are also lots of paintings and photographs. A Site of Cultural Interest since 2007 La Taha is one of the most protected municipalities in Spain and one of the few to manage to implement an environmental management system (ISO 14001), making it a truly 'green region'.



La Taha is a picture postcard escape doing its bit for the environment



OASIS OF TRANQUILITY: Centre of Pitres and women hard at work

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