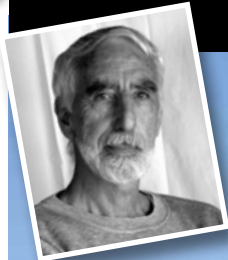


All about the Axarquia



Issue 148 November 15-28 2012



Frigiliana-based writer David Baird has witnessed the land of rebellion and resistance turn into a true tourist paradise

PEAK PRACTICE: Hiker arrives at the top of the El Lucero summit

How the Axarquia awoke from its slumber

WAKING up on the summit of El Lucero is a little like having a ringside seat at the birth of the world. As the dawn sky shifts from purple to gold, you glimpse the mountains of Africa rising on the horizon above a silver sea. To the north, pine forests swim in the mists of Granada province, while below stark crags thrust up from dark valleys to catch the first rays of dawn. Here and there a column of smoke reaches up from a faraway farmhouse or hamlet. You are high above the Axarquia, the 988-square-kilometre eastern corner of Malaga province. And El Lucero, a limestone buttress soaring 1,700 metres above sea-level, is as good a place as any to appreciate this region's natural grandeur. I had spent the night shivering in the ruins of an old Civil Guard post atop the mountain in order to research a book on the region. It is one of a number of relics left from the bitter struggle that during the 1940s and early 1950s saw guerrillas vainly attempt to overthrow the Franco regime. Their leader was a ruthless, charismatic character named El Roberto and legends about him and his band still circulate among the villages of the Axarquia. For quite a while after his rebellion was crushed, not a lot happened in the Axarquia (which comes from the Arabic *sharquiyya*, meaning the eastern zone).

Turn to Page 22



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Axarquía special

From Page 21

Europe's best climate

While tourists began flocking to Torremolinos and Marbella in the 1960s and 1970s, it slumbered.

Poor communications meant the Eastern Costa del Sol was largely bypassed by travellers. And that's the good news. For this zone largely avoided the worst aberrations of the development boom. Mass tourism has not swamped it and the jetset has focussed on other parts, thank goodness.

The locals of Frigiliana, one of the least-spoilt villages, seem to have heeded the words of King Juan Carlos when he visited in 1998. Highly impressed, he commented: "You have a very pretty *pueblo*. Do everything to conserve it."

This is also largely the case in villages around the region, including Comares, Riogordo and Sedella (pictured right). When I came here first, stepping off the bus in Nerja one December when fewer than a dozen foreigners were wintering in the town, land was selling at about two pesetas a square metre and wine was 10 pesetas a litre.

Great, for the visitor. But not for the locals. A medieval life-style prevailed. The nearest hospital was in Malaga well over an hour away up a pot-holed road and ambulances and dentists were unknown.



EXQUISITE: Scenic Sedella and (right) Comares' beautiful Mozarabic church

No longer. These days the Axarquía is truly part of the 21st century, with all the amenities you could expect... and all the pros and the cons that come with it. Ancient vines and olive groves have been uprooted to make way for urbanisations and villas. Hundreds of old farmhouses and village dwellings have been renovated and thousands of northern Eu-

ropeans have either bought second homes or arrived to live permanently under the sun.

Along the coast apartment blocks have sprouted where once the main crop was sugar cane. Cane was king for 1,000 years, but the last refinery on the coast closed in 2006.

Fortunately, although concrete has scarred parts of the coast, it hasn't ruined it and inland the Axarquía is still an escapist's paradise of sleepy villages and dramatic sierras. By far the largest town is Velez-Malaga, praised by Ibn Battutah, greatest of

medieval Arab travellers, as 'a beautiful city with a fine mosque and an abundance of fruit trees'.

Although now surrounded by modern development, the old town is well worth visiting. Cervantes passed this way as a tax collector and even mentions Velez in his epic novel *Don Quixote*.

Nearby is Torre del Mar, once a huddle of poor fishermen's dwellings. According to one story, things took off when a local builder built apartments to house a string of Malaga businessmen's mistresses. Soon after, the Germans started buying and scores of

and decent eating possibilities. And now Spanish visitors flock in too.

Just along the coast, the first language at bars and restaurants along the Torrox-Costa seafront would appear to be German. Torrox insists it has the best climate in Europe, although its neighbours, such as Nerja, are inclined to argue the point. This all stems down



apartment blocks now line the seafront. Decent amenities were a long time in coming, but the town has spruced itself up, with an excellent promenade

to the high mountain ranges behind that not only help bring cooler breezes in summer, but keep out the cold north winds in winter. One thing Torrox can legitimately claim: it stages one of the coast's biggest annual beanos. On a Sunday in mid-December tens of thousands scoff vast quantities of *migas*, a belly-filling dish served with torrents of Moscatel wine.

In 1959, five locals discovered vast caverns with amazing rock formations

Sweet, high-alcohol wine and raisins are Axarquía specialities.

In autumn you will see grapes laid out to dry on *paseros*, earthen beds facing south.

No wonder the wine is often

termed 'bottled sunshine', which you can verify by attending Competa's celebrated wine festival in August.

Be sure too to try the raisins, a luscious, mouth-watering experience. And for an idea of the work involved in producing them visit the Museo de la Pasa in Almachar.

On the coast the biggest single reason for the Axarquía becoming an internationally-known tourism venue lies underground: la Cueva de Nerja. On January 12, 1959, five local boys discovered these vast caverns with amazing rock formations and traces of Paleolithic man.

General Franco himself came to view this phenomenon. Today in Andalucía only the Alhambra palace in Granada draws more visitors.

The rest of Spain finally woke up to Nerja's attractions when *Verano Azul*, a popular TV series, was filmed there.

Talk about a reality show, when Chanquete (an old fisherman in the series) died, Nerja Town Hall flew its flag at half-mast. And today an oil painting of Antonio Ferrandiz, who played the part, hangs there, while one of the boats from the series takes pride of place in the town.

Often you will hear more English than Spanish in Nerja. Back in the Napoleonic Wars the British bombarded Nerja's fortifications into rubble, but the locals don't hold it

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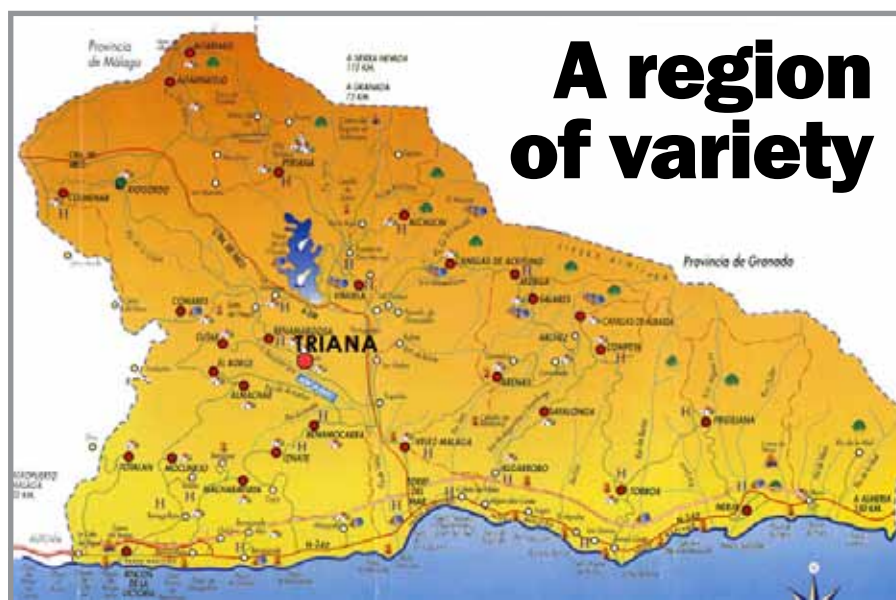
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A region of variety



Each of the Axarquía's 31 towns and villages have their own distinct charm and a history more eventful than you may imagine.

In El Borge, which is famed for its raisins and as the birthplace of El Bizco, a blood-thirsty, one-eyed bandit, you will find street names reflecting the fact that today's mayor is a little to the left of Mao Tse-tung.

Tiny Macharaviaya has interesting street names too... Pensacola, Mobile, New Orleans. They recall the days when it was known as Little Madrid, thanks to the Galvez family who achieved power and wealth and aided the USA's fight for independence.

Riogordo is the place to be on Good Friday and Easter Saturday. You are likely to meet Roman centurions strolling down the main street and Galician shepherds refreshing themselves in a bar. Hundreds of villagers take part in the annual Passion Play.

High up in Comares you will find a fascinating town going back to the Phoenicians, where the Arabic Moors later created a key settlement, testament to which is the Patio de Comares in the Alhambra.

In Colmenar, meaning bee hive, you will appropriately find the region's honey museum and a charming village of cobbled steep streets.

EVOCATIVE: The boat Verano Azul from the celebrated soap opera and (inset) buskers in Nerja street



against them. Brits run many local businesses and are the mainstay of tourism.

Without doubt the most spectacular scenery along the Costa del Sol lies beyond Nerja. From the town's Balcon de Europa you gaze at mountains which tumble sheer into the azure Mediterranean and the area is now protected as a marine sanctuary, great for snorkelling.

But, for me, the best part of the Axarquía is to be found inland. Here lies the Spain where my wife and I, after working around the world, finally discovered the ideal place to unpack our bags and take up residence.

As we'd dug our way out of dust traps on the tracks of the Outback, as we'd struggled through the crowded streets of Hong Kong, we'd dreamed of an easy-going place in the sun where we could unwind.

There is no sight more attractive than the cubist dwellings of the Axarquía bathed in golden light

Like many other expatriates, we found the ideal spot. What matter if the toilet was only a hole in the ground, the roof beams were near to collapse and the house could only be reached up 40 or so cobbled steps.

It was autumn and there is no sight more attractive than the cubist dwellings of the Axarquía bathed in that golden light.

The one we finally found in Frigiliana looked down on a mosaic of carefully-tended fields, irrigated by channels first built by the Moors.

To the rear rose the precipitous slopes of the Sierra Almijara.

It is up here in the heady heights of the Tejada and Almijara sierras, forming part of a 40,000-hectare nature park, that one can really see the best of the Axarquía.

Once mule trains, charcoal-burners, smugglers and wood-cutters trod the paths through the mountains. Now they are largely deserted, except for hikers, bikers and bird-watchers.

The last wolf disappeared a century ago, but you can catch



glimpses of mountain goats, wild boar, foxes and other wildlife amid these tortuous ranges. Maroma, the highest peak in Malaga province at 2,068 metres, is often wreathed in cloud, in winter sheathed in snow.

In the past *neveros* (snowmen) would pack the snow in esparto baskets in summer and bring it by mule to the coast to use for refrigeration. For *Malaguenos*, hiking to Maroma's summit is something of a pilgrimage. Quite a number trek up at the summer solstice to enjoy the dawn (best to be fit and well-equipped). See Summit to get excited about on page???

Just to confirm that you have made the right choice in coming to the Axarquía, a plaque at the top records: "This mountain is the centre of the world./This mountain like any mountain is a sacred place./That's why you are here..."

David Baird is the author of several books on the Axarquía, including *East of Malaga – Essential Guide*, *Sunny Side Up – The 21st century hits a Spanish village* and *Between Two Fires – Guerrilla war in the Spanish sierras* (Maroma Press). More information at: <http://maromapress.wordpress.com/>



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Like something out of *The Hobbit*



Eloise Horsfield describes how she ended up on a 'village hop' tour of the Axarquía after getting lost

BREATHTAKING: Rural idyll and (inset) a church tower in Colmenar

WE arrived after nightfall, having left Granada late in the afternoon and woken through the Andalucía countryside in our hire car.

Aiming for Colmenar, we had somehow ended up a little too far south. But none of us were complaining since the roads were pleasantly empty and the views nothing short of delightful.

"Um, how about Canillas de Aceituno?" asked Mario as we reached yet another crossroads, dusk by now well upon us.

And what a charming choice it turned out to be, this stunning spot, sitting high up in the foothills of the Sierra Tejada.

Within an hour we were supping a welcome *cana* at Bar Sojahi, whose friendly barman had helped sort us out with our own apartment for the night, for just €45.

We later dined at the Asador la Maroma, which offered massive portions, great wine and a chatty waiter.

By the time we left we had discussed the local team's football loss that day and learnt all about his love of snowboarding in the nearby Sierra Nevada.

"I go there every weekend in winter but I always love coming back to Canillas, my real home," he said.

It was only the next morning however that we discovered Canillas' true glory, as we took breakfast in its tiny square while soaking up in the autumn sunshine.

Surrounded by towering peaks such as Rompealbaldas and Maroma - Malaga's highest mountain at 2,068m - the village boasts fabulous views, stretching all the way to the sea, some 20 clicks south.

We then set off towards Colmenar, of course stopping to admire Lake Viñuela, a peaceful oasis in a landscape of gullies and rolling hills, rather like a scene out of *The Hobbit*.

The rather sleepy village of Colmenar is named after the Spanish word for hive, *colmena*, and - unsurprisingly - has a bee-keeping tradition dating back to the 18th century.

There is even a honey museum, which aims to explain the importance of bee-keeping and revive its origins.

"Families have passed on the knowledge from generation to generation," explained museum director Fernando

de Miguel Rey, one of just 10 beekeepers left in the village.

"And while there is more modern technology today, the process is basically the same and you can still get stung."

He added: "The honey here is more expensive than the cheap stuff you get in the supermarket but it is much better - and you can taste that."

After a picnic lunch - only in Andalucía is this possible in early November - we set off to visit one last Axarquía village, Riogordo.

This historic, little-visited town, sitting in a dip in the landscape, is known for its rich mineral water - which was probably what attracted Neolithic settlers to it.

After a brief clamber along its river bank, we grabbed a quick coffee before jumping back in the car, full of pleasant memories of the Axarquía.

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Axarquía special

Goat jams,

TRAFFIC jams around my village of Competa are not usually a problem. But you do need to look out for goats, who cause regular blockages in the lanes around the area. They mostly come first thing in the morning or at dusk when the goatherds are bringing their flocks down from the high pastures above the village.

The locals know how to handle them, but the reaction from tourists is often hilarious, with some looking utterly terrified, while others jump out of their cars to take hasty photographs and, in turn, block the traffic flow from behind.

My next door neighbour is a goatherd, as it happens, the third in a generation and whose father still does his share of the work at the grand old age of 91.

It is an admirable pastime, and the real joy is receiving fresh goats milk in exchange for allowing their goats to graze the olive groves surrounding our home.

UK government advisor Ray Rowden finally moved to Competa to open a restaurant



VILLAGE CHARM:
Competa's
16th century
church

when all of the land to the coast was agricultural and no motorway existed.

While things have certainly changed, on arriving as a resident I was struck by the way in which rural Spain still generally ticks along at quite a gentle pace.

In one local bar, for example, the farmers roll up on their donkeys or horses, tie them up outside, get plastered,

I moved to Competa from Sussex four years ago, having first visited the white village on holiday 30 years ago,

and finally allow their steeds to take them home, often well after nightfall.

Competa is a lovely spot,



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Axarquía special

politics and all

clinging precariously to the mountains of the Almirajara range, dominated by Maroma, one of the region's highest peaks.

Once a key battle ground in the final struggle between the Moors and Christians over 600 years ago, it has a very historic feel.

The church, built in 1512, dominates the main plaza with an elegant tower added two centuries later.

The village centre has changed little over the centuries, with winding narrow streets and beautifully kept old houses, many with distinct Moorish influenced architecture. Roaming through the village streets is a great way to spend a day.

The surrounding countryside is popular with expats, who speak 32 different languages

The village and surrounding countryside has a population of around 4000, with the village itself remaining quintessentially Spanish, while the surrounding countryside is extremely popular with expats, who speak a total of 32 different languages.

It is a cosmopolitan place and becoming increasingly interesting for arts and music.

We have a local recording studio, a number of local flamenco stars living in the town and Competa buzzes with cultural activities of all kinds.

The Alberdini hotel boasts regular flamenco nights, using authentic local artists, while my own restaurant El Pilon offers monthly ballet and opera nights on a big screen during winter.



CONGESTION: Local goat herd blocks the road near Competa

The Competa Amateur Performance Organisation put on regular events throughout the year, including ballet and dance gala performances, using local artists and some of the best dancers from London's West End, variety shows and even an annual adult pantomime at Christ-

mas, which is tinged with blue humour. The village is also home to many painters and sculptors, who open up their studios for Competa Art Walkabout every May. The village knows how to mark saints days and holidays, with magical candlelit

processions, but highlight of the year is The Night of the Wine on August 15. As a political advisor for the Labour Party in the UK, I have been fascinated by the local politics. What is also so different here is that elections really matter as the locally-elected mayors

Where to stay and eat

A good bet is El Pilon, a charming and usually buzzing restaurant run by Ray and Tom, with a great varied menu and delicious tapas.

The Gaudi-style Alberdini Hotel also has a superb restaurant, with a distinct slant towards local fare. It also offers accommodation in quirky bungalows, with a terrace with amazing views. Meanwhile, if you are looking for one of Andalucia's finest rural

retreats, head up on a mountain track five kms until you come to Casa de la Mina, which was recently renovated and is a great place to walk from, with an excellent restaurant to boot. A range of bed and breakfast choices are also available, including the wonderful Dutch-run Casa los Dos, sitting in an amazing spot down a country lane between the village and the sea. Simply breathtaking.



Dead interesting

SAID to have been designed so the dead would not turn their backs on each other, it is the only round cemetery in Spain.

Now locals in Sayalonga near Competa, hope that their unusual dead centre, built in 1840, is to be promoted better as a tourist attraction.

A visitor centre is now open and a local historian is urging the authorities to designate it a BIC, or site of specific cultural interest.

have real power in their individual communities.

It also has little to do with one's party allegiances, with many people voting for a candidate from a party very different from their beliefs. Our mayor Jose Luis Torres is in the PP party, but despite being a card-carrying member of the Labour Party I didn't hesitate to vote for him.

He was previously the parish priest, who was persuaded to give up the priesthood in order to help the village that had been wracked with corruption for decades. He has done loads for village, giving it back its pride, by repairing its charming cobbled streets and sprucing up its many charming corners.

Even better, the first thing he did on assuming office was to take substantial pay cut.

He felt that the economic crisis was hitting ordinary families and that he should share the burden.

He has since cleaned up affairs in the town hall and made it among Spain's three 'best run', so no surprise he

was re-elected last year with an increased majority.

Competa's annual 'blue' panto is Aladdin this year. It is running from November 29 to December 1 at the Museum

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Axarquía special

Jon Clarke discovers that the Axarquía has a long and rich history of winemaking



THE Axarquía was producing top quality wines way before Rioja and Ribero del Duero got into the mix. Indeed, in 1933 the region became the first in Spain to have its own DO – or *denominación de origen*.

But the area can also claim to have one of the longest traditions of winemaking in Spain, with vines first being planted by the Phoenicians up to 3,000 years ago. They were later heralded by the Roman poet Columella, and back in 1502 the Catholic Monarchs were so keen on the fabulous sweet wines that they took the first known measure to protect the regional wine from imported products. A century later Malaga wine producers formed a guild, the forerunner of today's 'consejos reguladores' (control boards). It came about just as the wines started to become fashionable abroad, particularly in the UK from the 17th century. At the time, there were said to be around 14,000 wine presses in Malaga and – along with Jerez – many British merchants

True vintage

moved to the area. Evidence of their success can still be found, for example, at Venta Galway, high in the Montes de Malaga hills, named after an Irish merchant who settled there then. But, as was the case in many European regions, the industry was destroyed by the phylloxera bug that arrived in the late 19th century. It wiped out the vast majority of vineyards and the amount of land under vine dropped from 100,000 hectares at its peak to just 6,000 hectares today; many for raisins or eating grapes. So the crucial work being undertaken by a number of companies today to make the sweet wines fashionable again is vital as a dynamo for the region.

One vineyard Bodegas Bentomiz is beating the crisis with international success, writes Rose Jones

Inspired by the vine



HARD work, luck and a little Axarquía magic have allowed a young, family-run winery near Sayalonga to overcome the recession and enjoy adventurous international success.

The position of Bodegas Bentomiz is breathtakingly beautiful, with the magnificent Sierra Tejeda dominating the skyline to the north and south looking down to the coast. Here, Clara Verheij and Andre Both have rescued the abandoned vineyard above which they built their home.

Recognising the enormous potential of the local Moscatel de Alejandria vines, they

have had rave reviews from wine journalists and sommeliers and are now selling their wines in no less than 20 Michelin-starred restaurants around Europe.

The Axarquía's unique terroir such as the vineyards steep slopes and the closeness of the sea – all provide an ideal microclimate for the grapes. The vines – some over 100 years old – are grown in hollows, to collect water, and are cut back to bushes, so that the leaves protect the maturing grapes from that scorching summer sun.

They make naturally sweet wines in temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks.

They also produce a red from a blend of grapes: Petit Verdot, Tempranillo and Rome, a little known vine indigenous to the Axarquía. They named their aromatic wines Ariyanas, after a nearby Moorish hamlet, which comes from the Arabic word for aromatic. The pair got their wine known by attending European wine fairs and celebrated restaurants, getting an 85% success rate. "If the sommelier tried our wine, the restaurant purchased it!" says Clara.

For a tour call 952115939 or visit www.bodegasbentomiz.com

Axarquía

In the footsteps of the bandits



THIS 63-km journey will take your breathe away as you drive higher and higher into the soaring mountains following in the footsteps of the many *bandoleros* (bandits) who once terrified the region.

In Alfarnate, for example, you can see the cell where *El Tempranillo* (the early one) was once held after threatening diners at the famous Venta de Alfarnate, built at the end of the 17th century.

He had previously made diners eat their wooden spoons and watched on as they cracked their teeth!

The government had actually set up the Guardia Civil in 1844 to try to stop this bandit activity and some of those arrested actually became Guardia themselves!

The villages we visit have all managed to keep their rich and varied legacies and their festivities, when not religious, are based on every day life or celebrating their Moorish past. Finally, we must make a mention of the many olive trees along this route, which go to produce some of the best olive oil in the world.

THE ROUTE

We start in La Vinuela, overlooking its famous reservoir, which was built in 1981. It is a rather sweet village and the lake itself is popular for non-motorised water sports, such as fishing and swimming.

From La Vinuela to Alcaucin, which has an annual fiesta at Halloween to celebrate the chestnut and the aroma of them roasting is delicious! It is a pretty town, sitting high up in the hills with quite a few sights worth visiting, in particular its lovely water fountain, where kids often play.

From here we head to Periana where the views are hard to beat. The name dates from

The Route of Oil and Mountains is a wonderful driving tour around the north west of the Axarquía, writes Sally Harrison of Axarquía Properties



HAUNT: Venta where Tempranillo (top) preyed on diners

1761 but the town was rebuilt after an earthquake in 1884. Verdial olive oil is made in the village and sold far and wide. La Día del Aceite Verdial in late March is a festival to celebrate its natural, fruity flavour.

Moving on, there are sulphurous Moorish baths at Banos de Vilo, 2kms north of the village and then an oil museum in Mondrón, a good place to stop before the climb up to the

most northerly village in the Axarquía, Alfarnate.

Turning right onto the MA-4102 the drive here is spectacular with the rugged mountains towering

above. By contrast the land is rolling and cultivated, with farms dotted about and horses grazing contentedly.

Alfarnate is a charming spot, divided in two by the river Palancar with its three picturesque bridges. Make sure to visit the 16th century church of Santa Ana with its Mudejar minaret. Make sure to stop for lunch at the Venta de Alfarnate, complete with

Stop for lunch at the Venta de Alfarnate, complete with bandolero in his prison cell!

said *bandole-*

ro in his prison cell! We start our downward journey home via Alfarnatejo, which is small with streets wide enough to accommodate herds of goats and little else. Visit the 16th century church of Santo Cristo de Cabrilla, its square tower built in the Mudejar style. Bandits sheltered in the many caves surrounding the area and it is easy to imagine them out there.

Shrugging off these ghosts of the past we drive on to our final two villages, but first a strong dark cafe solo at the bar in Pulgarin to bring us back to our senses!

The route continues to Riogordo situated in a lush valley by the river Cueva. Here we can visit the Ethnographic Museum or the 16th century Virgen de Gracia church.

If you visit in May you may be offered a local dish prepared from land snails cooked in stock and served with olives as part of the Day of the Snail. We finish our tour up towards Colmenar where we can visit the Honey Museum and savour their cured meats and other traditional products, particularly during the Fiesta del Mosto y la Chacina in December.

Contact Sally at sally@axarquiaproperties.com

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BUMBER CROP: a bunch of bananas in Benamargosa

Go bananas in the Axarquia

Jon Clarke talks to local businessman Peter Langdale about his 27-year-old farming business which employs over 100 staff and provides much of the UK supermarkets' coriander and parsley

FEW things can be as joyous as picking your own bananas, although as Peter Langdale, boss of Garden Centre La Palma explains, it is not going to make you a living. "We get the odd few from our back garden, but not enough to make them commercial," he says. "Mangoes are a better bet and are doing quite nicely these days, while avocados are also doing well, but they have their ups and downs." He, of course, should know, having worked for 27 years as a fruit and vegetable producer in the Axarquia. Working with some of the UK's biggest supermarkets, including Waitrose, Tesco and Morrisons, he is currently one of Spain's biggest exporters of parsley and coriander, producing over 700 tonnes a year. Thanks to having the 'best climate in Europe', tropical fruit grows in abundance in the Axarquia. Keep your eyes peeled, if you'll excuse the pun, and you will see all sorts of weird and wonderful fruits brimming from trees. "We identified that this was one of the best areas in Europe to grow vegetables," explains Langdale, who sold up in England and arrived in Spain with his wife and three-year-old daughter in the mid 1980s. "Spain was signing up to the Common Market and everyone said that the south of Spain was to become the new California. We saw this as a Holy Grail." Having looked up and down the whole coastline, from north of Alicante to Huelva they settled on the small village of Trapiche, near Velez Malaga. "It was already a big strawberry area and I had a good gut feeling," explains Peter, who also owns seed and vegetable business Semilleros La Palma, in Velez Malaga. He initially started growing spring onions, radish and parsley for the UK market, but soon branched out into other herbs and vegetables. He is now the largest producer in the local cooperative Tropes that has an incredible 1400 members and a new €17m packing plant just opened, near Velez Malaga.



SAFE GROUND: Axarquia is ideal for growing tropical fruit, as well as coriander picked here

Axarquia special

Summit to

Walking guru Guy Hunter-Watts on the Axarquia exhilarating excursion: an ascent of the mighty

Getting to the beginning of the walk

Arriving in Canillas from the west head towards the village centre. Reaching a playground for children park on the left then continue along Avenida de Andalucia to lower end of the Plaza de la Constitucion.

The walk

The walk begins in Plaza de la Constitucion. Facing the town hall exit at its top, left hand corner then cut right past a statue following a sign for La Maroma. Angling left then right continue up a narrow street, ignoring a sign off right for La Rabita. Head straight on at the next junction passing left of an ornamental olive. Angling left the road descends to a junction then arcs left. Here turn right following a sign for Campo de Futbol.

Climbing a steep road, La Cuesta de los Picachos, you pass the village cemetery then a football pitch where the track angles right. After 300m cut left at a marker post up a narrow path. Reaching the track once again by a bird hide bear left. After following the track in a northwesterly direction look for a cairn to its right where you should again cut a corner, rejoining the track at a concreted section where you reach the Mirador de Castillejo. Follow the track to the right then as the concrete ends cut left at a cairn up a path which shortly angles back to the track which levels as it runs on to the east. Passing

Ascent of La Maroma Canillas de Aceituno

A TRUE five star walk, this routes leading to the summit. Departing from the lovely Canillas de Aceituno, there are glorious views of the magnificent Loma de Capellanes Barco (The Ship's Prow). From the summit, the vast panorama and are particularly memorable cloaked in its winter mantle of snow. The great thing about the Canillas back down at Los Charcones you to the village, descending parallel chares: a route once used to bring



The Nitty Gritty

Distance: 21 kms
Time Required: 7 hrs
Rating: Difficult
Total Height gain: 1625m
Map(s): ING 1:50000
Water: spring at 4 hrs

a forestry building after 600m you reach a sign post pointing left for La Maroma. (1 hr)

Cut left through the pines down a path which shortly crosses two (dry) stream beds then climbs past an old calera (a lime pit). Continuing up the footpath you pass a second calera. The pines thin out as you climb

INDISPUTABLY the spiritual heart of the Axarquia, Comares straddles a hilly outcrop and has heart-stopping views.

Perched on two peaks of a hill, with parts of its old Moorish fortifications still in evidence, Comares has been an important town since being inhabited by both the Phoenicians and Romans. Later it became the home of the 9th century rebel leader Omar ibn Hafsun, when 12,000 'souls' lived in the town. Comares is certainly not short of references, having both a patio and tower named after it in Spain's most important monument, the Alhambra, as well as a key Middle Ages sketch to be found in Toledo. From here, tourists are spoilt with a series of guided walks, some of them heading off around the town by donkey. The first of these is a clever guided tour by terracotta footsteps, which are tiled into the town's cobbled streets. This takes you up to the castle, via the claustrophobic Calle del Pardon, where 30 Arabic families were spared their lives after publicly converting to Catholicism.

STEP IN TIME

The event has been sent day with each of the town's lovely church. It is one of Andalusia's most evocative churches, built over the original mosque, with a 15th century Mozarabic wooden ceiling designed by the old Moorish craftsmen. (See picture on page 2 of the supplement).

get excited about

ia's most
y Maroma

na from
O

is the best of the three main
mit of la Maroma (2068m).
y village of Canillas de Acei-
ea views as well as vistas of
ía and promontory of Proa del

amic vistas are hard to bete-
when the Sierra Nevada is
w.

is ascent is that once you're
follow a different path back
l to the gorge of Los Alman-
ice down from the summit.



Zafarraya 1040 (18-43)
s 50 mins

up the right side of the Barranco
de las Tejas. Soon the path be-
gins to descend.

25m before reaching the bed of
the barranco cut right at a cairn
and marker post. After running
directly away from the stream the
path arcs left, clearer now, as it
climbs parallel to the streambed.
Zigzagging steeply up you reach
a junction with a clearer path

as you come up to the Los Char-
cones pass. In front of you is a
sign post Sendero SLA-142. (1 hr
30 mins)

Here cut left. Running north the
path crosses a tributary of the Ar-
royo de las Tejas where you pass
another sign for SLA-142.

The path loops steeply up past a
rocky promontory as it runs west
before angling back to the right.
Zigzagging up to the north the
path again arcs to the west and
traverses a swathe of scree.

Passing green arrows on a rock
you reach the promontory known
as the Proa del Barco and a mark-
er post with a cairn at its base. (2
hrs 10 mins)

Here angle right. The path be-
comes less distinct but cairns
guide you across a vast field of
rock.

The Barranco de la Cueva de Don
Pedro is now down to your left.
Reaching a jagged outcrop the
path angles left.

30m before it reaches the tail end
of the barranco angle right, away
from the path you've been fol-
lowing, to pick up another which
leads to the summit, initially on a
due easterly course.

Angling back down to a (dry) stre-
mbed continue along its course,
passing just right of a fenced
enclosure then angle right. Care
should be taken: the path now
runs close to the steep southern
face of the Loma de Capellania.

It's a good idea to occasionally
look behind you: it will make com-
ing back down easier!

After angling left then crossing a
rise you'll see a nipple-like cairn
at the left side of the summit
ridge.

Head up to the cairn from where,
passing well to the left of a high
metal pole, continue up to the
tower-like trig point at the summit
(2068m). (2 hrs 50 mins)



GREAT VIEW: A marker at the very top

Leaving the summit make your
way back down to the point you
passed at 1hr 30mins, the Los
Charcones pass. (4 hrs 10 mins)

Here, instead of angling right
down the path you followed ear-
lier, cut left through a breach in
the rock.

Running south along the ridge
the path angles left then zig-
zags down and passes a (dry)
spring.

Running more level the path cuts
through a stand of young pines
before angling right to the top of
the Ravita ridge, marked on the
I.G.N. map as Collado de la Ravi-
ta. Here angling right you pass an
SLA-142 marker post.

Continuing south for 300m you
reach a junction. Take the right
branch.

The path adopts a south-westerly
course, descending towards Ca-
nillas across an area more de-
nuded of vegetation, high above
the ravine of the Arroyo de Alman-
chares.

Just before the path angles hard
right you reach the cave of La
Ravita and a signboard.

Angling right a few metres before
the cave the path passes a calera
then reaches a spring, El Fuente
de la Ravita. (4 hrs 50 mins)

The path now angles slightly left,
along a ridge, before adopting a
course towards Canillas.

Occasionally looping down to a
lower level the path eventually
drops down past a signboard Sen-
dero Casa de la Nieve to a track.
Cut right for 50m then reaching
a pylon cut left between two ram-
shackle farm buildings to reach
the first village houses.

Just before reaching a sign Calle
Sierrecilla cut right down a zig-
zagging path. Passing a sign for
La Rabita (sic) angle left then cut
right down Calle Calleja.

Pass beneath an arch then at the
next junction cut left to return to
the start point of the walk. (5 hrs
35 mins)

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remembered up to the pre-
the families being remem-
of the bells 30 times at the
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de la Encarnacion
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a view over Comares
towards Mt Maroma



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Axarquía special

Life on the lake



It has been a crossing point for travellers criss-crossing the Axarquía for centuries.

So, it is entirely appropriate that Puente Don Manuel is now the number one commercial hive for inland Axarquía.

Here, at the so called 'cruz de Periana' - overlooking beautiful Vinuela lake - you will find a bustling commercial centre with plenty of businesses and restaurants, including curry

A crossing point for travellers for centuries, Puente Don Manuel is now the main inland hub of the Axarquía, writes Jon Clarke

houses and The Town Frier fish and chip shop.

This fast-growing settlement, which is administered by larger Alcaucin, is where thousands of local expats stock up on all their essentials.

There is the excellent Rumours hairdresser, estate agent Villa Solutions and the famous Arkwrights food shop, run by Linda and Geoff, which has been the glue of the community for years (see below).

Thankfully, there are also a number of good places to get a coffee and lunch, such as Morenos, Meson Sara and Friends, and nearby, over the historic Puente bridge, you should look for popular Atila's, which is fast getting a reputation for its fabulous food.

Make sure to also take a ride up to the village of Alcaucin, which has a rich historical legacy and is full of narrow, winding streets and white-washed houses.

How Linda and Geoff Rowe turned Arkwrights into more than just a corner shop



Guts, determination and a lot of hard work

THINGS were so tight when they arrived in Spain from the UK in 2000, they had to borrow on their credit cards just to get their business going.

Starting out selling everything from antiques to sewing machines at markets up and down the Costa del Sol, Linda and Geoff Rowe never knew if they would make enough money to make ends meet.

"We went to some markets where we knew that if we didn't sell we wouldn't have had the petrol to get home," ex-

plains mother-of-two Linda, originally from Kent (pictured left).

"We had lost everything we had in the UK so Spain was a fresh start for us.

"We arrived here with 600 boxes full of collectables and started to build up quite a following at the markets."

Things clearly went from strength to strength with Arkwrights now one of the Axarquía's main British businesses; busy from dawn to dusk, and only closing on two days of the year.

It took a year of solid marketing though, before the customers started to arrive,

but the couple knew instinctively what their clients wanted and were put in the hard work to find the products.

"I would sit up until the early hours looking for suppliers, and ultimately by listening to our clients we have always stocked what they wanted," said the former bank worker who does the buying, while her husband runs the shop floor.

The ultimate compliment came when on an aeroplane Linda overheard someone recommending their shop. "I had a little chuckle to myself and Geoff was ecstatic," she explains, adding that there is no substitute for hard work and a good reliable team.

"Our shop has been built on hard work, guts and determination. We get up, work, go home and sleep, seven days a week. It is as simple as that."



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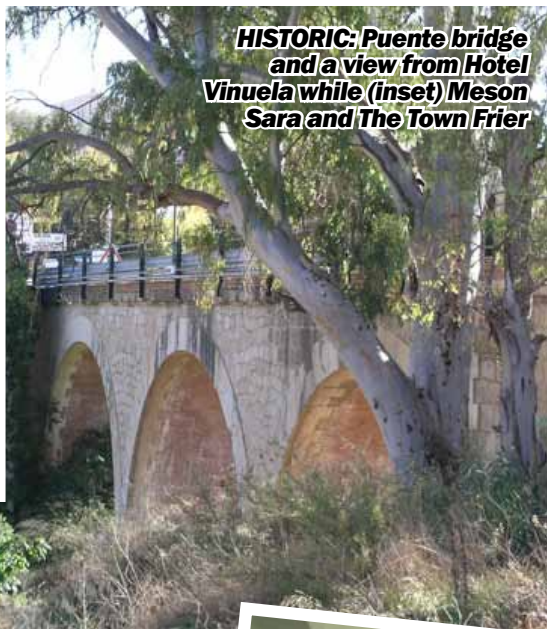
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HISTORIC: Puente bridge and a view from Hotel Vinuela while (inset) Meson Sara and The Town Frier



Alcaucin derives its name from the Arabic 'Al Cautin', meaning the 'arches' a possible reference to the town's aqueduct. Way before the Moors - and Romans before them - it is known that prehistoric man lived here, after the remains of a Neanderthal man were found in 1983 in a cave near to El Boquete de Zafarraya. Certainly though, it is scenery that is the biggest draw around here.

The lake of Vinuela, just a stone's throw away is a great place for a walk and a picnic, or if you are after a bit of luxury a stay at the region's top hotel Vinuela. As well as boasting wonderful grounds with tennis courts and two huge swimming pools, there is a spa and an excellent restaurant, which is one of the best in the whole region.

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Axarquía

Tim Whiteley of Villa Solutions+ (right) has become quite a TV property star selling at both ends of the spectrum



From snail farms to celebrity villas

It has been an exciting decade for Tim Whiteley, of VillaSolutions+, in Puente don Manuel.

Aside from becoming well known for offering a snail farm to clients on a hit TV programme in 2004, he is now known again for negotiating the sale of a property owned by pop star Mikey Graham of Boyzone this year.

It began with TV show *A Place in Spain*, in 2004, when he tried to find Welsh couple Lee and Cheryl the perfect home to buy in the Axarquía. "But I straight away realised that satisfying their limited budget and ideas was going to be a difficult task," explains the estate agent, 34, who has recently opened a new office in the heart of the commercial centre.

That said, the publicity was fantastically good for the company, which ended up featuring in 10 episodes of the show.

"Clients still ask me about the snail farm and how it is doing," explains the father-of-one, from Gloucestershire.

"While we never managed to sell it to Lee and Cheryl the experience put the agency on the map."

So it was perhaps no surprise that in April this year Whiteley was approached again by presenter Jasmine Harman to help find a suitable property for a client in a new show *A Place in the Sun - Home or Away*.

The buyers, a wealthy couple from Cornwall, looked at



CELEB SALE: Whiteley (top) sold Boyzone Mikey Graham's 4-bed villa

three properties for the show, eventually narrowing down their search on the amazing Casa Cantares, near Canillas de Aceituna.

Owned by an 'Irish singer', the home came with the furniture, the 4x4 car and even a stable and paddock. "It was also at an unbeatable price," adds Tim.

However, despite falling in love with the property and agreeing to buy it on the show, "the second the camera turned off", they changed their minds.

They admitted to Whiteley they were not cash buyers and still had to sell their home back in the UK to finance the purchase.

But the blow was to be short lived for just two weeks later Whiteley saved the day by finding another buyer for the house, owned, it can be revealed by the Olive Press, by Boyzone star Mikey Graham.

"It was a bit of a hit for Mikey, but a great deal for the buyers"

A young family from Manchester, they picked up the amazing property for the bargain price of just € 215,000, minus the 4x4.

"It was a bit of a hit for Mikey, but a great deal for the buyers," explains Whiteley, who moved to Spain a decade ago. "They managed to swap a three bedroom townhouse in Nerja for an incredible four-bed villa in Canillas. They did very well."

And to complete the picture, the first couple have now also returned to the Axarquía to buy a 'much more appropriate property', reveals Whiteley. "And guess what, they even ended up buying Mikey Graham's 4x4, a Nissan Patrol." "It is incredible the way it has all ended with everyone happy," concludes Whiteley. "And I guess we are very happy the way that VillaSolutions+ has progressed."

A Place in the Sun - Home and Away is now being aired on Channel 4

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Axarquía special

Where to eat

A ROYAL SEAL

WITH some of the best ingredients in Spain there is no excuse to serve up bad food in the Axarquía. And thankfully there is a nice range of restaurants doing just that.

One of the most stylish is Fountainhead, high in the hills, near Riogordo. An evocative place, chef Helen is both talented and erudite and well deserving of her success.

If you are looking for a grander affair the fabulous dining terrace at Hotel Vinuela, is



WARM WELCOME: At Alberdini's and (below) Insolito

reminiscent of the Days of the Raj, and it is no surprise that the King is said to have eaten here.

Aside from its modern touches, the terrace is, without a doubt, one of the nicest places to eat in summer.

As a town, Competa has come on leaps and bounds in the culinary stakes over recent years.

El Pilon, in particular, is a charming and buzzing spot run by talented couple Ray and Tom, with a great varied menu and delicious tapas.

Without a doubt, the village's main social hive, you will often find live music and even ballet and opera nights.

On the outskirts you might also try the highly rated Alberdini, where Inez and Emmanuel have created a wonderful retreat, both warm in winter and breathtaking with its views and terrace in summer.

A cultured pair, the menu is thoughtful and most of the vegetables are locally sourced.

In Puente don Manuel meanwhile, you will find the Town Fryer serving up the best fish and chips for miles and Bar Atila, where Kim Whitworth, is a real whiz in the kitchen.

You will also find the excellent Friends, which is a buzzing spot with its popular terrace, and nearby Morenos, which is an upmarket spot now with its own pool table.

Longest-running is the excellent Meson Sara, where Antonio Martin and his team have been serving the local expat community for nine years. There is a menu del dia for just € 10 and an incredible 30 different tapas.

One of the really exciting new



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RATED: Team at Atila

venues meanwhile, is that of Ivan and Nenno's Insolito in Benalabon.

Former bosses of Comares' Molino de la Abuelo, they have switched to this charming little village, often seen as the gateway to the Axarquia. Set on the charming main square, they still have flamenco most weekends and are also planning other dance nights.

In Comares keep your eyes peeled for Restaurante el Molino or Restaurante Atalaya, while in Periana Cantueso comes highly-rated.

In Torre del Mar many people swear by Safari Bar on the front, but Vintash up by the former tram stop is also a fabulous spot. Stylish and geared towards the more discerning palate, it is a pleasant place to while away a long lunch.

In Nerja tapas bar Pata Negra and Carebeo 34 come highly recommended, as do Au Petit Paris, Calabaza and El Olivo. Down on Burriana beach try Belgium-run Bruxelles.

Where to stay

Sweet dreams

FROM rural, rustic retreats to grand beach-side hotels, the Axarquia has got the lot.

But few places beat the amazing Hotel Vinuela, a modern, but tasteful, four-star affair, with comfortable rooms, and superb views across a lake and into the mountains.

Come and hole up for a few days, using it as the perfect base to explore the nearby area and enjoy the excellent restaurant and facilities.

Meanwhile, if you are looking for one of Andalucía's finest rural retreats, head up to Casa de la Mina, near Competa.

Recently renovated, this is the perfect place to walk from, with an excellent restaurant to boot. Run by a friendly architect, you will wake up to the sound of birdsong and see nothing but mountains and views to the sea.

Nearer to Competa there is the wonderful Dutch-run B&B Casa los Dos, sitting in an amazing spot down a country lane between the village and the sea.

Also near Competa is Hotel Alberdini, where many rooms come in Gaudi-style casitas with spectacular views. There

is the added advantage of its excellent restaurant.

In Nerja, you are spoilt for choice, but Toboso Apart Hotel, which couldn't be in a better location in the heart of town by the Balcon de Europa, takes some beating.

The rooms are fantastic in size and you are right next to the excellent Cochran's Irish restaurant and bar, which is good for a local meal and has the best terrace in Nerja.

Stylish

A totally different option is Hotel Avalon, which sits in a great location with amazing views up into the nearby mountains. The rooms are comfortable and the restaurant has a good name.

Last, but not least, if rural chic is your thing, then Fountainhead really takes some beating. This stylish place near Riogordo, offers beautiful rooms, all with their own splash pools and private terraces. With a great restaurant to boot it is easy to see why you might want to hole up here for a weekend and go nowhere else.

Nerja never looked so good...



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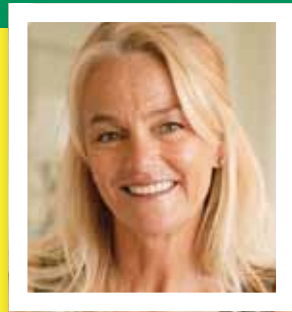
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