



1 MALLOS DE RIGLOS

It is difficult to really know whether the little town of Riglos, located at the foot of an almost unreal setting, is unnerved or serene about being guarded by a series of huge monoliths: the mallos (from the Latin word for mallet, which characterise these vertical rock formations). These geological monuments are formed by conglomerate rock, originating in ancient alluvial deposits that remain attached to the Pre-Pyrenean mountains despite intense erosion. The walls of these monoliths are sheer, 300 metres in height in the case of the Mallo Pisón, which is the most visible from the town. The first people to climb them faced a real challenge in planning their route back in the 1940s and 50s. Today they continue to be a world-famous training ground for climbing. They are also a drawcard for emerging tourism based on studying the great birds of prey, the latest strategy in this realm of sky and rock.

2 LA SOTONERA, ALBORÉ RESERVOIR

One of Hoya de Huesca's biggest natural drawcards is its wetlands and reservoirs, a series of exceptional habitats for the preservation of biodiversity. Featured among these is Alboré, a lake that is now part of La Sotonera reservoir. Its location at the foot of the Pyrenees gives it huge strategic value, particularly for the fascinating and enigmatic phenomenon of bird migration. The shallow waters of the lake and thickets of tamarisk along its shores seem to abound with life, and in winter are just teeming with ducks and other waterfowl that set up their temporary home here. But birdwatchers are in for a treat when the so-called pre-nuptial migration at the end of winter congregates the thousands of cranes that use La Sotonera and Alboré as a rest stop before crossing the Pyrenees to their destinations in Northern Europe.



3 SIERRA DE GUARA

Hoya de Huesca bears its physical description in its name. But there is more to the inherent, defining and extraordinary relief that helps define the living landscape for its inhabitants and visitors. A visually striking series of mountain ridges forms a mental and real horizon limiting the comarca to the north. And above them rises the most important of the Pre-Pyrenean mountain chains, the Guara Mountains, reaching their zenith at the peak of Mount Tozal de Guara, at an altitude of 2,077 metres. From Vadiello, this phenomenal rocky chain forms a familiar profile, a solemn and beautiful silhouette with a mantle of winter snow. Rough limestone forms the essence of Guara Natural Park, permeated by deep canyons and karst caves that make it a unique destination with a lot of different special sites, such as Salto de Roldán (Roland's Jump), Vadiello lake, Belsué lake, river Formiga canyon, Nocito valley or La Pillera canyon.

4 SALTO DE ROLDÁN

According to legend, the Frankish hero Roland was able to flee from the Moorish hosts because his horse jumped from Peña Sen or San Miguel to Peña Men or Amán. This gave rise to the name Salto de Roldán (Roland's Leap), a place that serves as a natural gateway between the Guara Mountains and the plains of Huesca. Its picturesque appearance is that of two towers of conglomerate rock carved by the patient erosive action of the River Flumen and the strength of the wind. It is at times of thermal inversion, when fog clings to the valley and the sun shines on the mountains that this vision is granted, offering a sea of clouds. And as if floating above the 1,123-metre Peña San Miguel, we stand next to the ruins of its Romanesque castle and chapel. Standing proudly opposite at an altitude of 1,124 metres is Peña Amán. The wonderful landscape becomes a grandiose spectacle that surprises and delights all who contemplate it from this site.



5 PEÑA MEDIODÍA, PIRACÉS

Silhouettes in stone have been carved by unseen water and silent wind in an ancient and evocative landscape. Platforms, gullies and craggy stone outcrops daringly compete with the twilight. Their eroded forms change with the perspective. Peña Mediodía is a geological fantasy with a life of its own, like many of the rock formations in the southern hills of Hoya de Huesca. Peña Mediodía is an important sandstone outcrop measuring 80 metres in length and standing 25 metres tall. Given that it stands prominently over the village of Piracés, dominating a wide stretch of country, its strategic location was used by the Moors to erect a fortress in the area during the 9th and 10th centuries. It is worthwhile climbing to the top to observe their imprint and, naturally, to enjoy the incredible panorama.

6 LOARRE CASTLE

This huge mediaeval fortress is one of the greatest artistic icons in Hoya de Huesca and the entire region of Aragon. Founded by Navarre's King Sancho III the Great, it was started in the early 11th century as an outpost on the border with the Moorish kingdom. It was later turned into a provisional base for the Augustinian Order, who would later move to Montearagón Castle. The entire framework is preserved in good condition for this military and religious structure: a defensive wall with nine towers, a free-standing watchtower, the Tower of the Queen or keep, the bailey, Homage tower, a curtain wall and two religious areas - the church of San Pedro with a crypt and the chapel of Santa Marta. Located at the foot of the Pre-Pyrenean mountain chain of the same name, this is the largest Romanesque military complex in Europe and, therefore, the world. This image of strength has been used on more than one occasion as a setting for films and the subject of documentaries.



7 SANTIAGO CHURCH, AGÜERO

Agüero is located at the foot of the mallos of the same name, merging with them as part of a magnificent scene. Close to the village is the church of Santiago, a monumental but unfinished building consisting of the cloverleaf apse with three semicircular chapels and the transept. Standing out from its voluminous forms, particularly those of its chapels, and the excellent sculptures, is the ornate portal featuring a capital with a dancer with a sinuous and acrobatic design, enabling her to fit the support. This motif, in turn, is one of the characteristics of the sculptor, known as the master of San Juan de la Peña, who left his mark on other monuments in Aragon.

8 BOLEA COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Bolea's origins are lost in the depths of time. However, its history became accessible during the dominion of the Moors, who made it an important stronghold in an area watched and protected by the lofty mass of Mount Peña de Gratal. Its importance grew towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of the Modern Age, when its imposing collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor was raised. Designed along the lines of a hall church, it features superb columns and beautiful filigree gracing its stellar vaults. And while the building is unique, its main altarpiece is even more so. Although the carved relief features Gothic forms, the interconnected paintings follow the lines of a new style - the Renaissance.



9 SAN MIGUEL DE FOCES

Almost lost in its natural setting, in the vicinity of the village of Ibica and where the village of Foces once stood, stands the majestic church of San Miguel de Foces. Against the backdrop of the Sierra de Guara, this magnificent building was raised during the transition between the Romanesque and Gothic styles and features surprising apse chapels, an ornately carved portal and a lofty interior space. The tombs of the Foces family are found in both arms of the transept, the walls of which are completely covered in Franco-Gothic and early Gothic murals with an almost endless succession of images and scenes, and expressive, eye-catching figures in bright colours.

10 DANZANTES DE HUESCA

It's eight thirty on the morning of 10 August. This is the big day of the Festival of San Lorenzo (St Lawrence). The Danzantes de Huesca are dressed in white with headscarves, different coloured (red blue, green, etc.) sashes around their torsos and espadrilles. They begin their beautiful old dance with sticks, swords and ribbons in front of the Basilica of San Lorenzo. Hundreds of locals have been waiting since the early hours to take up the best positions, forming a perfect circle around the dancers. Later, also dancing while they are cheered on and accompanied by people thronging the pavements, they escort the 16th-century reliquary shaped like the bust of Saint Lawrence in a procession through the streets of the city. Watching the saint and the danzantes pass this morning, the inhabitants of Huesca - a city decked out in green and white - are filled with great emotion.



1 MALLOS DE RIGLOS



The Mallos de Riglos are one of Aragon's most identifiable features. These impressive conglomerate monoliths are the most photographed souvenir of any visitor taking the road from Murillo de Gállego to La Peña Reservoir, or approaching the town of Riglos. Any of the purpose-built lookouts along these roads or where the hard shoulder is wide enough to park make perfect vantage points. The light at dusk cannot be beaten for photographing them. (Photographer: E. Anía)

2 LA SOTONERA. ALBORÉ RESERVOIR



This wetland is of international importance for birds, particularly owing to the large concentration of cranes during their pre-nuptial migration. The reservoir is reached from Montmesa, where a stop at the bird museum and visitors' centre is a must. A sign-posted path leads from the village to the reservoir and there is a bird observatory before reaching the wetland area. The best time of year to see the cranes in this area is in February and March. (Photographers: M. Bellosta and E. Anía)

3 SIERRA DEGUARA



The city of Huesca and any locations near the Barbastro road offer fantastic views of these mountains at any time of year. However, for easy access and proximity, visitors are recommended to take the road from Loporzano leading to Vadiello Reservoir. Just before it reaches the Peña Guara refuge, a path to the left ascends quickly, affording views of the phenomenal face of the Mallos de Liguier. If you raise your eyes slightly above them, the majestic Guara Mountains appear. (Photographers: M. Bellosta and E. Anía)

4 SALTO DE ROLDÁN



Access to this beautiful and solitary place can be made from Huesca via the village of Aniés, or from Nueno via Sabayés. The time to visit is at sunset. And if the phenomenon of thermal inversion occurs when Hoya de Huesca is covered by an immense sea of clouds, a magical moment is guaranteed that will be hard to forget. (Photographers: E. Anía and M. Bellosta)

5 PEÑA MEDIODÍA. PIRACÉS



This formation stands over the village of Piracés like the prow of a ship carved in rock and becomes fully illuminated by the midday sun as it reaches its zenith. It can be reached from the upper area of the village. A series of wooden ladders and handrails at the end of the path makes it easy to climb to the top of the watchtower. As is usually the case, the light at sunset creates a series of superb hues. There are other rock formations worth visiting in Piracés, like Abuelo Roque (Old Man Roque), which resembles the head of an old man wearing a beret. (Photographers: E. Anía and N. Pardinilla)

6 LOARRE CASTLE



A service of guided tours is offered so that visitors can take in every detail of this magnificent Mediaeval structure. The castle complex is open all year except 25 December and 1 January, with winter, summer and spring-autumn timetables (morning and afternoon/evening). Further information is available at the castle entrance or by calling any of these telephone numbers: +34 974 342 166, +34 649 307 480 and +34 690 636 080. (Photographers: E. Anía and M. Tartera)

7 SANTIAGO CHURCH, AGÜERO

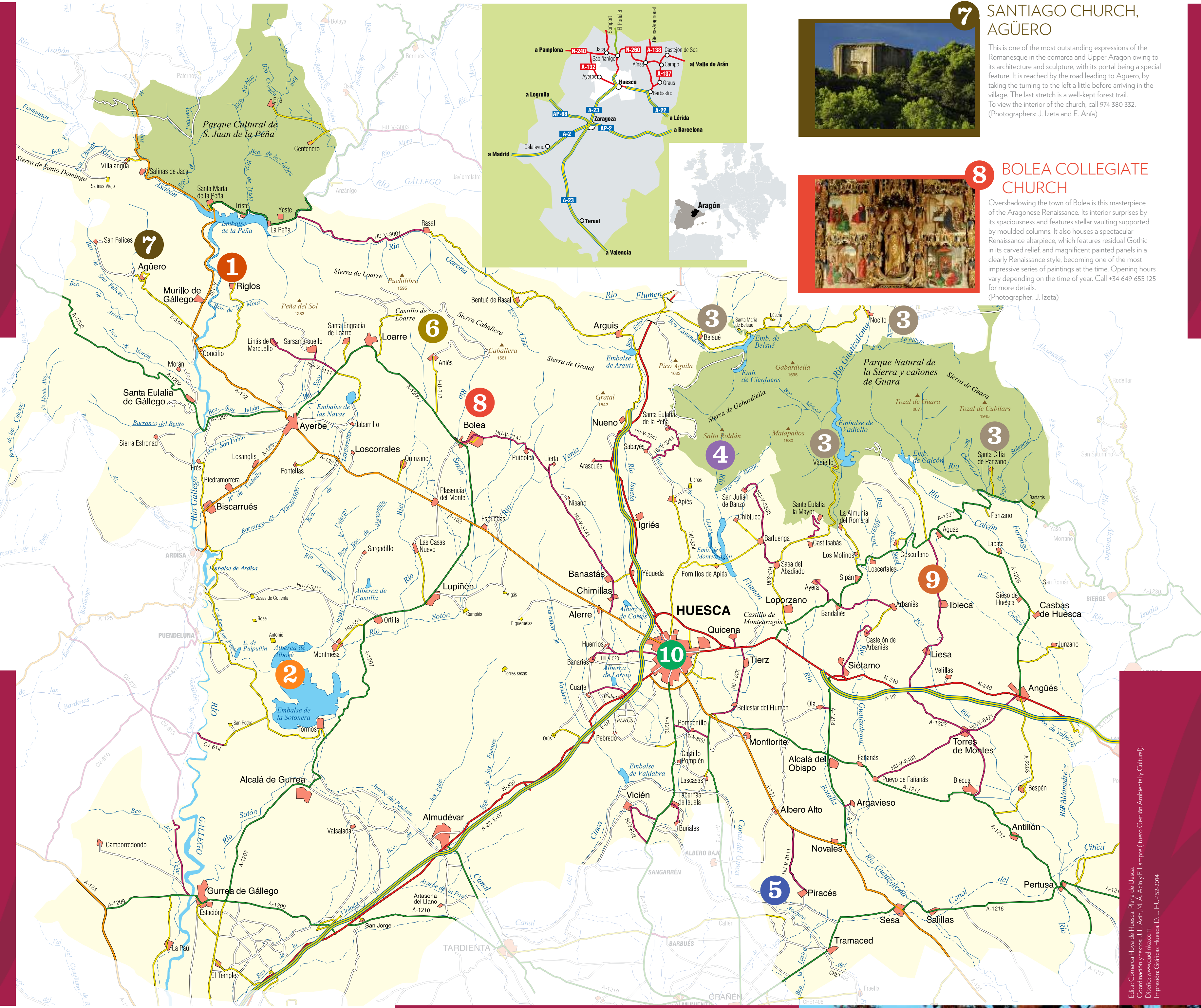


This is one of the most outstanding expressions of the Romanesque in the comarca and Upper Aragon owing to its architecture and sculpture, with its portal being a special feature. It is reached by the road leading to Agüero, by taking the turning to the left a little before arriving in the village. The last stretch is a well-kept forest trail. To view the interior of the church, call 974 380 332. (Photographers: J. Izeta and E. Anía)

8 BOLEA COLLEGIATE CHURCH



Overshadowing the town of Bolea is this masterpiece of the Aragonese Renaissance. Its interior surprises by its spaciousness and features stellar vaulting supported by moulded columns. It also houses a spectacular Renaissance altarpiece, which features residual Gothic in its carved relief, and magnificent painted panels in a clearly Renaissance style, becoming one of the most impressive series of paintings at the time. Opening hours vary depending on the time of year. Call +34 649 655 125 for more details. (Photographer: J. Izeta)



9 SAN MIGUEL DE FOCES



The church can be reached from the village of Ibieca following the signs from the main square. It is particularly striking owing to its monumental aspect and the merging of Romanesque and Gothic features, and because of its natural setting with the Sierra de Guara as the backdrop. However, the most outstanding feature is the two series of Franco-Gothic murals, unique in all Upper Aragon. To visit the interior, call +34 680 269 744. (Photographers: J. Izeta)

10 DANZANTES DE HUESCA



This is the most moving and traditional event of the Festival of San Lorenzo. If you would like to admire the danzantes from the front row, you will have to be there well before eight o'clock on the morning of 10 August. But it is worth the wait. It takes place in the Plaza de San Lorenzo in Huesca, beside the basilica of the same name. It is a special moment for locals and visitors alike. (Photographer: J. Izeta)

In Hoya de Huesca you can discover a wide expanse of land featuring marked landscape contrasts that equally delight lovers of wild and abrupt scenery and those in search of gentler open spaces.

Its more than one hundred inhabited towns and villages are also home to interesting examples of cultural heritage, mostly related to the Middle Ages, evidence of their past splendour.

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