

29 BÉRCHULES: PR28 JUNTA DE LOS RÍOS & TAJOS DE REYECILLO

The **Bérchules** valley is a perfect example of that protean aspect of the Alpujarras I was banging on about in the introduction, its high pasture dotted with *cortijos* that bear a distinct resemblance to the cabins of the transhumance hamlets of the Atlas mountains, while the paths traversing the wooded slopes below **Cerro Gordo** are straight out of the Pyrenees. Our old version of the classic walk to the Junta de los **Ríos Chico** and **Grande** above **Bérchules** used to follow the lovely **Acequia Nueva**. Unfortunately, the **Acequia Nueva** is no longer quite so lovely, having been abandoned, jewelled with rubbish, and blocked half way along.

Happily, the newly wayposted **PR28** neatly replaces both our **Junta de los Ríos** itinerary and the old **Cerro Gordo** route, exploiting the best of what is still feasible in the former and providing something comparable to the latter, but with a better path in the middle. Congratulations to whoever invented the itinerary. It's a beautifully conceived walk, marred only by a mildly monotonous descent and a heartbreaking little climb at the end. The wayposting and waymarking are reliable except at Wps.4 and 11.



Access by car:

We start from the parking area on the right beside **Bar Duende** at the entrance to **Bérchules** village, where there is generally plenty of room, the space reserved for the bus stop notwithstanding.

From the entrance to the parking area (Wp.1 **0M**), we head into the centre of **Bérchules** along **Calle Iglesia** then cross **Plaza Abastos** into **Calle Real**.



The *lavadero/fuente* at Wp.2

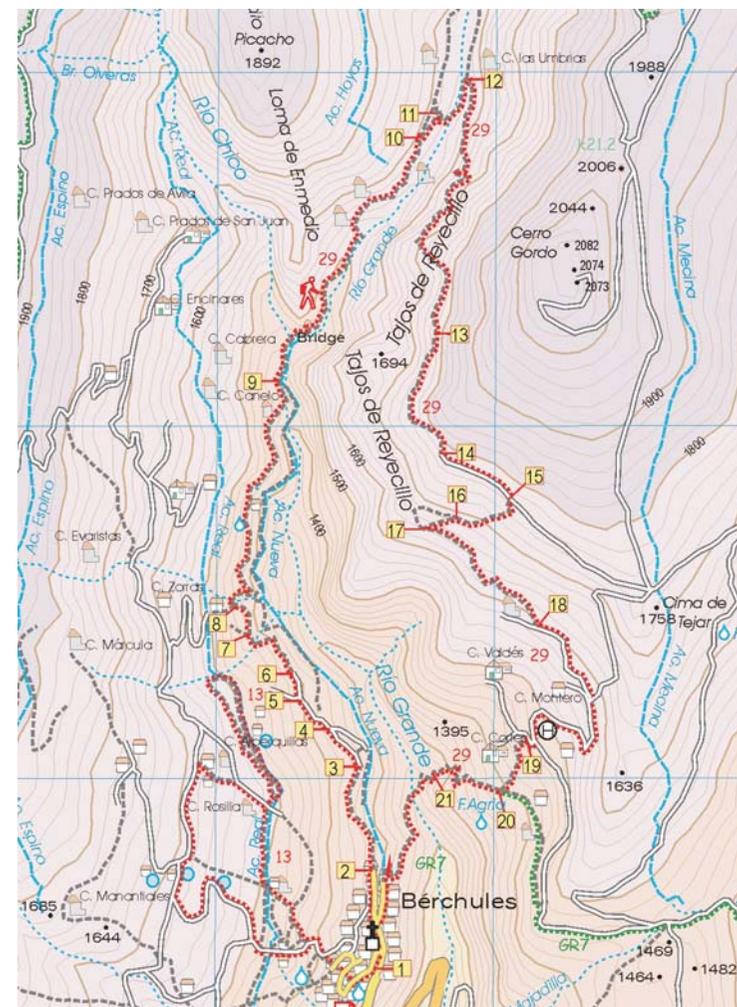
Following the arrow signs guiding motorized traffic through the village, we reach **Calle Garcia**, which leads into a concrete lane with black railings. At the end of this lane, we come to a *lavadero/fuente* (Wp.2 **10M**) where there's a mapboard of the new green and white waymarked **Junta de los Ríos sendero local** and a PR waymarked sign for **Junta de los Ríos**.

Continuing on a broad path, we briefly follow an *acequia* and pass above a couple of large threshing circles, after which the path runs parallel to then joins a dirt track (Wp.3 **21M**). Turning left, we follow this dirt track as it climbs amid market gardens, ignoring two forks on the right, the first after 30 metres, the second (the old **Acequia Nueva** route) after 200 metres (Wp.4

Junta de los Ríos



26M). Bearing right at a slanting T junction (Wp.5 **29M**), we stick with the track until it dwindles to a broad trail (Wp.6 **32M**). The trail snakes along the hillside in a northerly direction toward the obvious confluence of the **Ríos Chico** and **Grande** below the wild terrain of the **Tajos de Reyecillo**, last refuge of the leaders of the 1568 Moorish rebellion.





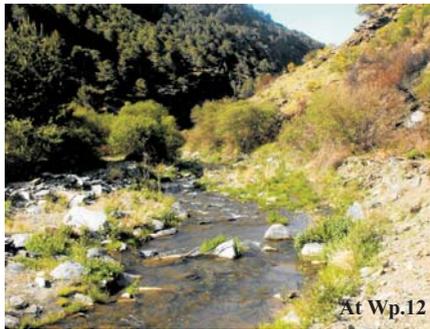
The trail after Wp.8

After crossing a dry stream bed, we pass a cluster of derelict cabins, ignoring en route two forks up to the left (Wp.7 37M & Wp.8 41M). As we approach the **Junta de los Ríos**, the **Acequia Nueva** path feeds in from the right (Wp.9 72M), immediately after which we see the **Fábrica de los Moros** ruins at the confluence of the two rivers.

Crossing the footbridge over the **Río Chico**, we climb behind the *fabrica* on a broad, partially paved trail, enjoying fine views over the **Reyecillo** cliffs, then follow a contour line high above the **Río Grande**.

After crossing a rockslide of thick slates and climbing gently, we pass in front of a ruin and traverse a stretch of holm oak and chestnut trees, beyond which the head of the valley comes into view, and we see two farmsteads off to our right above the left bank of the river. We cross the river below the lower of these, the **Cortijo de las Umbrias**, the *umbria* being the shady side of the valley as opposed to the southern facing *solana*. At a clearly wayposted Y junction (Wp.10 94M), we leave the *sendero local* and fork right, following the PR, immediately bringing into view the line of our return path climbing above the left bank of the river.

140 metres later (Wp.11 96M), we again fork right, this time on a cairn marked path (confirmed lower down by wayposts) that zigzags down toward the river then follows the right bank upstream toward the **Cortijo de las Umbrias**, just short of which we reach an idyllic ford with a rather fragile looking footbridge (Wp.12 103M).



At Wp.12

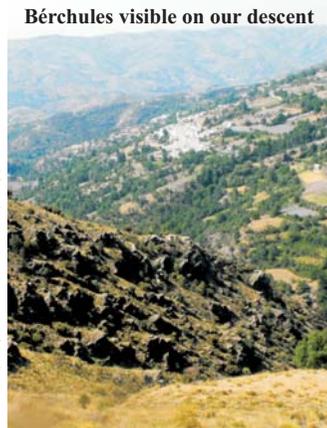
Crossing the river and bearing right, we follow an exceedingly pretty path climbing gently to steadily amid pine and jagged outcrops of rock. There's nowhere to go wrong here, so stow the book and enjoy, both the cool of the shade and the spectacular views up and down the valley. Passing directly behind the **Tajos de Reyecillo** (Wp.13 135M), we descend 50 metres, then follow a contour and climb briefly before a final balcony path brings us onto the end of a logging track, from where we can see **Bérchules** (Wp.14 146M).

400 metres later, at a leftward bend beside a 'Parque Nacional' perimeter sign (Wp.15 151M), we bear right on a rough track descending to a wire mesh gate in a fence, beyond which a waypost confirms our route.

Following traces of a rough track, initially heading toward a distant helipad and reservoir (S) before bearing round to a more westerly direction, we descend steeply to a corner of the fence on our right. Bearing right, we follow the fence for 100 metres toward a stand of pine, where we turn left on a steep shortcut track (Wp.16 157M).

At the bottom of the shortcut (Wp.17 160M), we again turn left, back toward the helipad and reservoir. Joining a broader, better stabilized track leading to the **Corrales de Valdes** (Wp.18 168M), we bear left and follow the track as it meanders down to pass below the helipad and reservoir to reach the **Cortijo de Valdes**.

15 metres after the U bend in front of the *cortijo* (Wp.19 183M), we fork right on a broad trail that descends steadily to join the clearly wayposted **GR7** (Wp.20 188M).



Bérchules visible on our descent

Bearing right, we simply follow the GR for a steady to steep descent down to a footbridge over the river (Wp.21 205M), from where a brief, but mildly heartbreaking climb brings us back into **Bérchules** at the end of **Calle Agua**. Bearing left then forking right at the fountain fifty metres later, we rejoin our outward route just short of the bar in **Plaza Abastos**.