

# Cuevas Negras

A story of  
reconquest



AUTOGUIDED TRAIL

PR-TF 53



PARQUE RURAL DE TENO



# A STORY OF RECONQUEST

The diversity of Tenerife's vegetation is impressively in evidence on this route. Fields of crops around the village of Erjos will guide you, without your realising, into the heart of the forest. The paved camino real (royal road) which for centuries has led to Los Silos, will gradually reveal to you the vegetation that once populated this fairy-tale forest and that, today, is trying to recover its territory.

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## ATTENTION

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This itinerary starts in Erjos, where you'd find point number one.

The story was planned for the route starting in Erjos direction Los Silos.




However, it can be done from here, taking that into account.

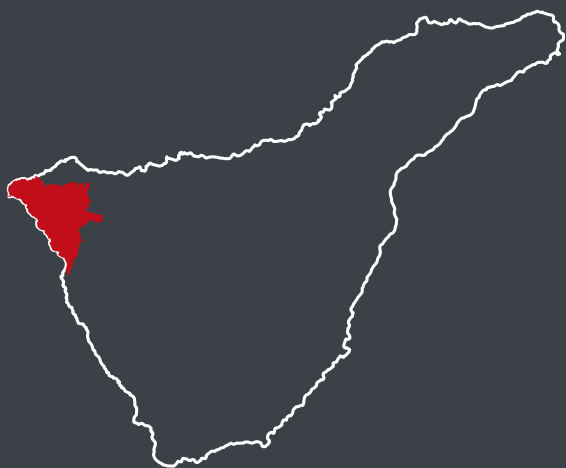
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2022

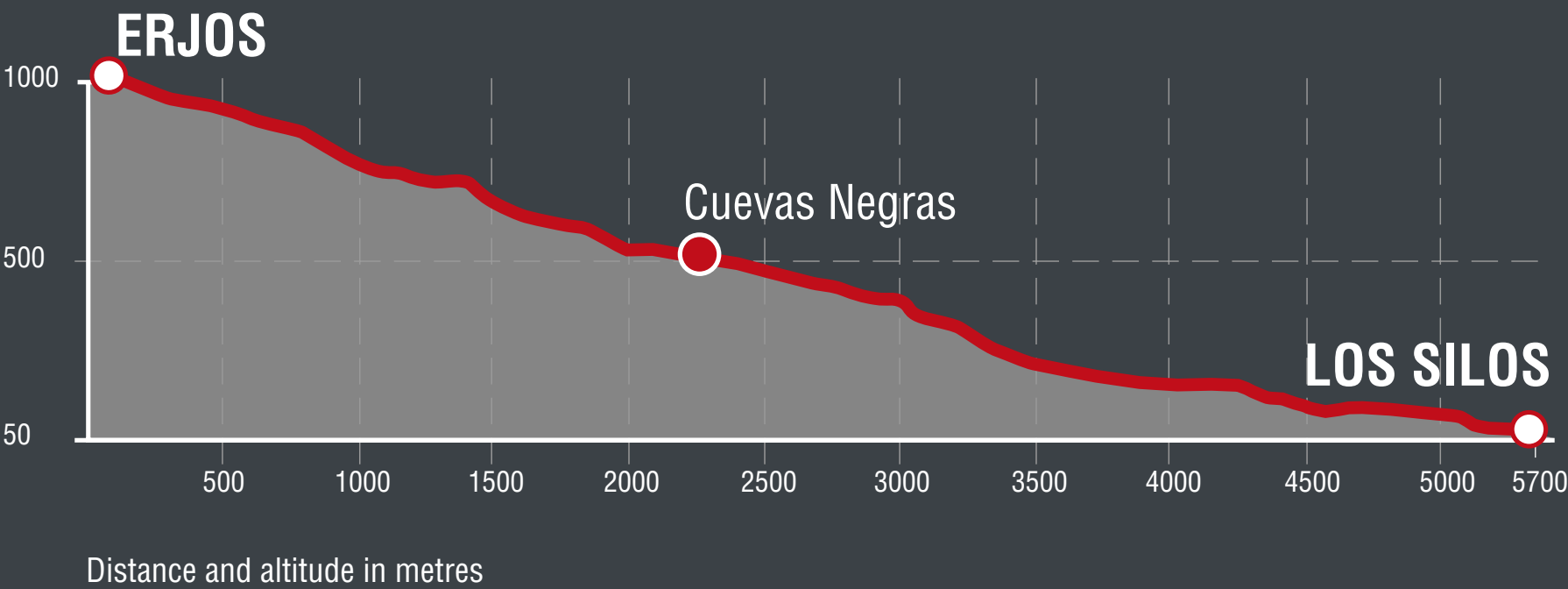
# TECHNICAL DETAILS OF THE ROUTE

-  **ROUTE:** Erjos—Cuevas Negras—Los Silos
-  **START:** In the plaza de la iglesia (Erjos)
-  **FINISH:** Back of the convento de San Sebastián (Los Silos)



-  **APPROXIMATE DURATION:** 3 h
-  **APPROXIMATE LENGTH:** 5,700 m
-  **COMMENTS:** Paved areas that may be slippery when wet.
-  **CLIMATE:** Cool and humid in the wood and, in the low-lying area, often hot. Showers and sharp changes in temperature are possible.
-  **RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** Strong and comfortable walking footwear, something warm, a cagoule, a sun hat, sun cream, water and something to eat. Walking sticks may come in handy.

## ROUTE PROFILE





N

1 Press



1 km

Sibora

La Caleta  
de Iterián

# Los Silos



TF-42



9



8



TF-423

7



Tierra del Trigo



6



4



Cuevas Negras

5



TENO RURAL PARK

Ruigomez

3



TF-82

2



# Erjos

Monte del Agua

1





# 1 A PATH WITH CENTURIES OF HISTORY

The village of Erjos marks the starting point of a journey to the coast

Houses in Erjos are spread between the municipal areas of El Tanque and Los Silos. The village links not only the two municipalities, but also the coast and the mountain top and the Northern and Southern faces of the Island.





The ancient camino real (royal road) that linked Puerto de Santiago with Los Silos ran through here. In fact, the founding and subsequent growth of Erjos has had a lot to do with communications, the ancient roads and, nowadays, the tarmac road.

The camino real, built on an ancient aboriginal track, was constantly used by people and animals toing and froing with all kinds of trade goods.

In these exchanges, Erjos provided its high-quality wheat and potatoes, and also various wooden tools and charcoal, made from wood from the nearby forests of pine and evergreen laurel forest.

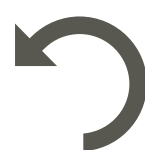
It was only a few decades ago that this foot track was replaced by roads. The ancient path is gradually crumbling and its beautiful paving getting more and more overgrown.

Having said that, the path still refuses to disappear and there are still some sections that show just how important it was in the past.

Today you are going to take this old path, which goes down the gully of the Cuevas Negras to Los Silos. On route, you will see that the land was used intensively at a time when people lived off it alone.

Nowadays the vegetable plots, almost completely abandoned, are being recolonised by the wood.

Once you pass the last of Erjos's houses, the forest proper begins. Here you will also find traces of mankind.





## 2 IMPORTED PLANTS

Some plants introduced by man are quite at home here

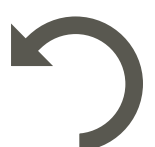
After some very narrow sections, it is a relief to come to this wide, flat stretch of the path, in the shade of several Monterrey pines.

These huge trees are not Canarian, but American, and were planted in the second half of the twentieth century, in several places on the island where the original forest had been cut down.

These pines grow faster than Canary pines, but have the disadvantage of taking up the space of the indigenous vegetation. Despite this, the planting of the Monterrey pines helped slow down soil erosion, preventing it from disappearing altogether.

Other plants, like gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), grow on the sides of the path, where there is most sunlight. This is a dark green bush from Europe that is easy to recognise because... it pricks! This plant does not, strictly speaking, have leaves, but sharp spines. For this reason it was used to make living barriers that cut off access to the vegetable plots. The gorse, however, spread very far, invading the abandoned fields.

The gorse gradually disappears as the path enters the shade of the evergreen laurel forest, where it cannot live due to lack of sun. Here, too, you will find signs of man's presence through the ages.

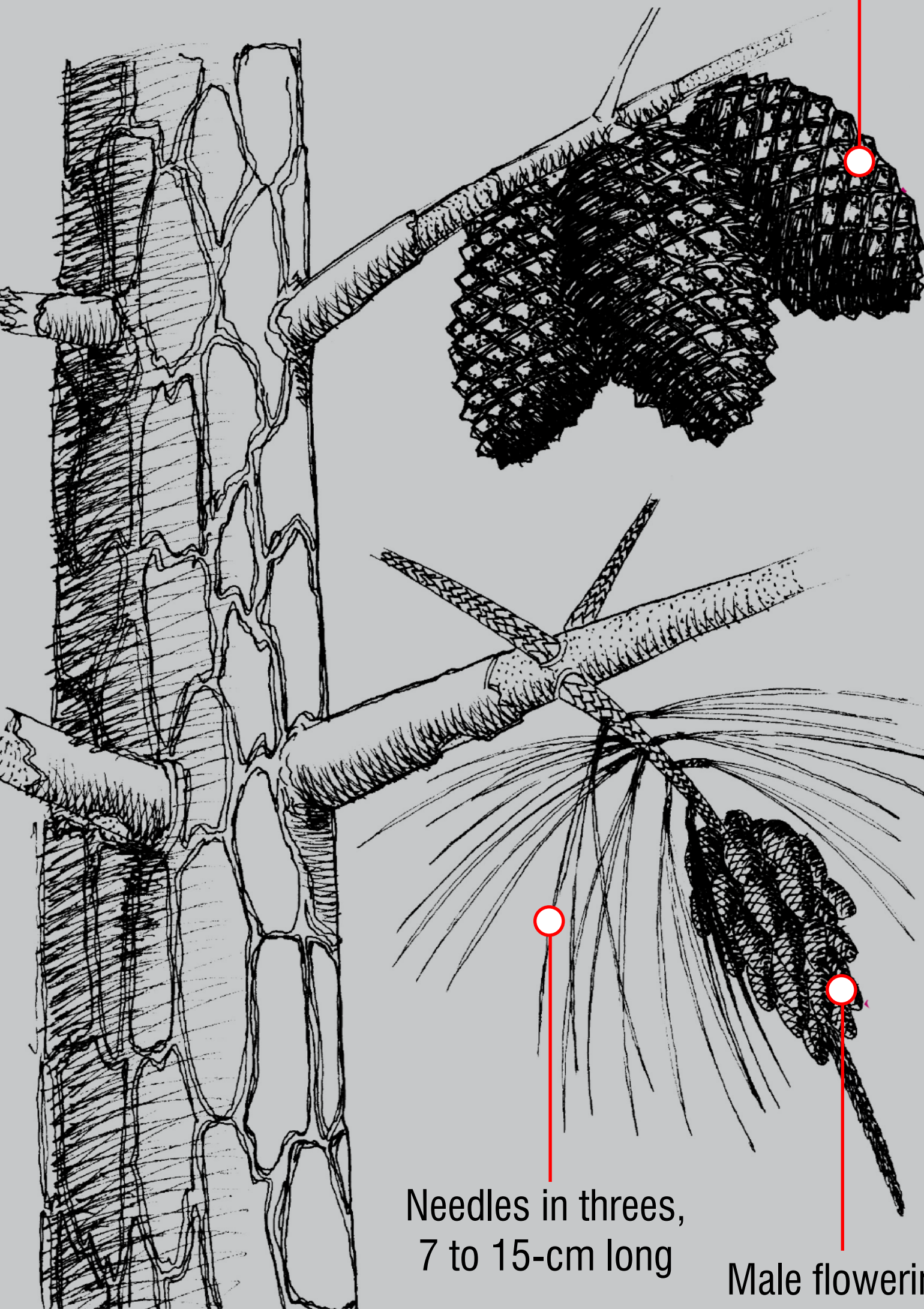




# Monterrey pine

*Pinus radiata*

Female flowering



Needles in threes,  
7 to 15-cm long

Male flowering





### 3 WHERE THE FOREST RECONQUERED ITS KINGDOM

Now that the vegetable plots have been abandoned, the original vegetation is beginning to reappear

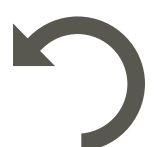
Around lies an expanse of woodland that appears to have been here for some time. However, on both sides of the path are successive terraced sections which show that this area was once cultivated.

Can you imagine what this gully must have looked like when it was cultivated, just over 50 years ago? It's amazing to see just how fast the trees have recovered their former territory.

Bolle's pigeon  
*Columba bolii*



This type of woodland is called “monteverde” or “evergreen laurel forest”. It is constituted by various trees, bushes, grasses, ferns and mosses. Areas with a great variety of trees are called laurisilva (laurel forest). At this time, we can't yet apply this word here, but the woodland is recovering quickly.



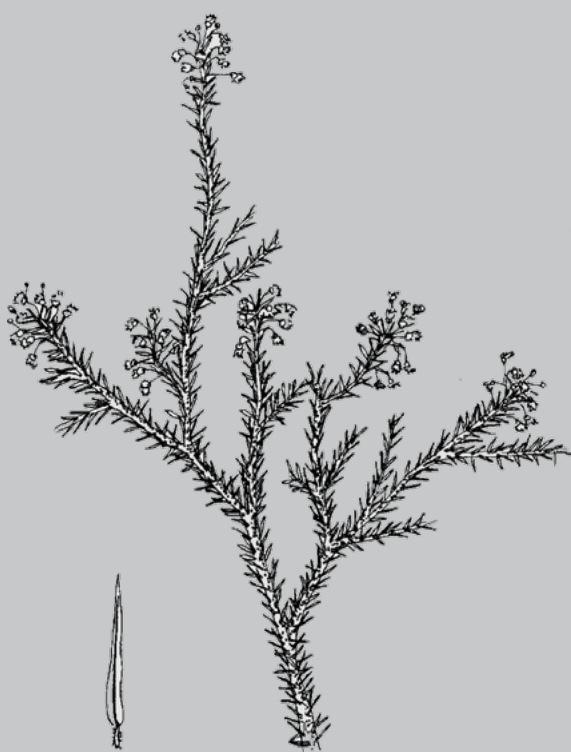


In the undergrowth live two very shy species of pigeon unique in the world, the laurel pigeon, and Bolle's pigeon. The sparrow hawk feeds on these and other birds, manoeuvring through the branches with its short wings.

The route continues along sections of the path with a kind of "natural paving". You are, in fact, passing over a lava flow from the volcano Montaña del Viento, in Erjos, almost one million years ago. This lava flow used the old gully as a channel through which to descend, although today it is hidden under the vegetation.

You will continue down along this highway of rock, between old hidden vegetable plots, to seek out the houses of those who lived and worked on this land.

## How can we recognise trees of the varied evergreen laurel forest?



The leaves of the **heather** (*Erica arborea*) are very small and narrow.



The **wax myrtle** (*Morella faya*) has serrated or undulating leaves, depending on its age. Its fruit is black, round and edible.







The **canary viburnum** or “follao” (*Viburnum rigidum*) have white flowers in bunches and their leaves are covered with fine hairs.



The leaves of the **paradise tree** or “palo blanco” (*Picconia excelsa*), large and shiny, always leave the stem two on one side opposite two on the other.



The **laurels** or “loros” (*Laurus novocanariensis*) tienen have leaves with little glands and are very similar to the laurels used for cooking





## 4 LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE OF A PROSPEROUS PAST

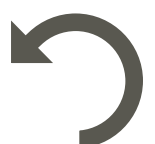
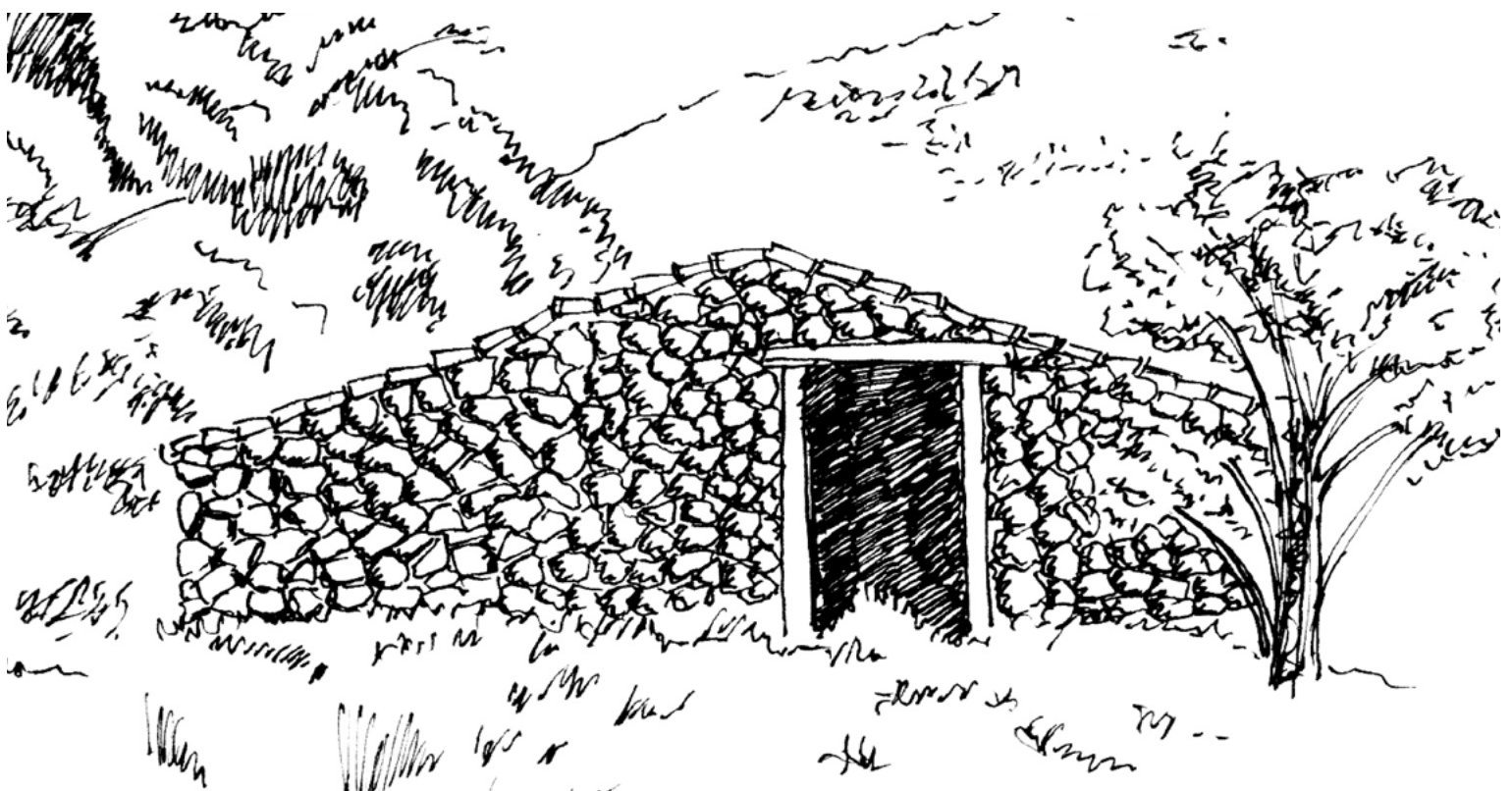
In 1950 the hamlet of Cuevas Negras, that you have just passed through, had a population of more than 60

Mr. Fernando González Meneses was born here, and being seventy years old, he still climbed the steep gully side to work on his potato plot. He himself recounts what life was like in Cuevas Negras:

"...A lot of people lived here. In my house there were eight of us children. You see there were a lot, fourteen of us men went off to fight in the War. Crops were grown everywhere: wheat, potatoes, orange trees, fig trees and a lot more..."

"...The paths were always clear because the animals ate the grass. We had cows and donkeys. In summer there were a lot of dances and we played musical instruments..."

"...Us men, as we went away more, learned how to read and write. I learned in the barracks. But the women continued illiterate. The animals gradually died off and we started to leave..."





Along the camino real there was a constant traffic of people and animals carrying “sardinas jareadas” (salt-dried sardines), dry figs from the South, coal from Erjos, wheat from Los Silos, fabrics from Santa Cruz...

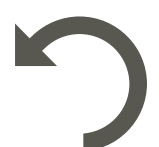
The hundred-year-old “barbusano” that shades you at this stopping point has been a silent witness to the prosperity and decline of the hamlet. Its trunk is covered with ferns and other plants, which use it as a ladder to reach the light.

The “barbusano” is known as the “canary ebony” for the hardness of the wood. For this reason, this species was over felled and there are now few of them left, none of them as magnificent as the one you are now looking at.

Today there is less exploitation of the forest, and so the ironwood population is starting to recover. You will see this at the next stopping point.



Barbusano close-up  
*Apollonias barbujana*







Tit bird  
*Cyanistes teneriffae*

## 5 THE LANDSCAPE CONTINUES TO CHANGE

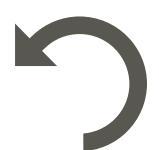
The young “barbusanos” are the forest’s advance party, recovering its territory

Until recently it was difficult to find “barbusanos” here, but today they are growing back, no longer used to feed livestock or cut down for their wood.

The woodland’s recovery is evidence that the landscape is evolving, changing with time. You will see more evidence of this type if you look down, right to the bottom of the gully, where water is working away, drilling an ever-deeper channel.

Near the bottom of the gully creatures bustle, attracted by the humidity. Laurel pigeons are a lot bolder here, perched on branches, you can hear them cooing. Accompanying them is the strident call of blackbirds and the song of other birds like tit birds, canaries and hoods.

You will soon leave the wooded area and enter a landscape dominated by the sun, where water is not in such great abundance. There, animals and plants have had to adapt to harsher conditions.





## 6 A CAKE MADE OVER MILLIONS OF YEARS

The dark walls of the gully are a view of the insides of the earth

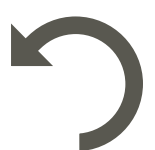
Far from the constant shade of the forest, plants have to stand more sun and dryness. Therefore, there is less undergrowth and this has not invaded the camino real, so you can see how well paved and wide it was.

Above it rise the vertical walls of the gully formed, over more than a million years, by successive volcanic eruptions.

The water has patiently cut away at these, to reveal the earth's interior. It's like a slice of cake in which the layers of biscuit and cream can be seen.

These volcanic layers are of different consistencies and hardnesses, so that erosion has affected them to different degrees, producing this cave effect, which is probably where the gully got its name from.

The path now steepens and zigzags down the slope. If it's a sunny day, dozens of lizards will rush across the path, announcing that very soon we will come to the coast





# Formation of the walls of the Cuevas Negras gully



The island is formed by successive layers of volcanic rock of different compositions and hardnesses.



Erosion acts differently on these.



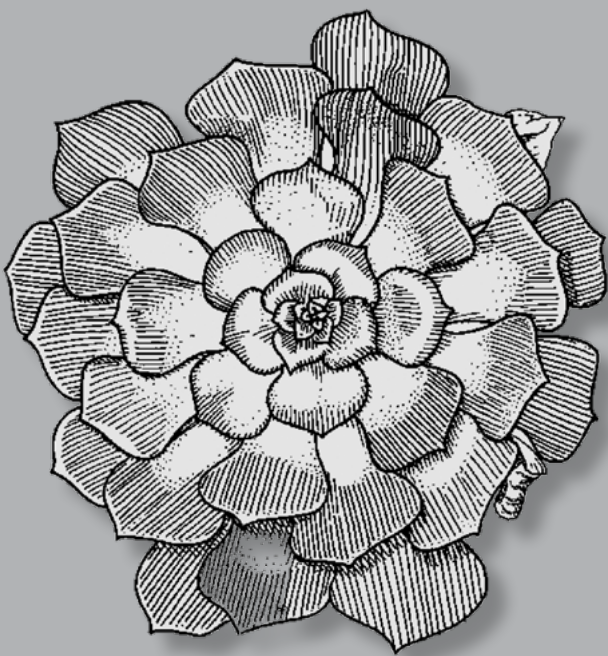
This is why the wall looks like it does, full of hollows.



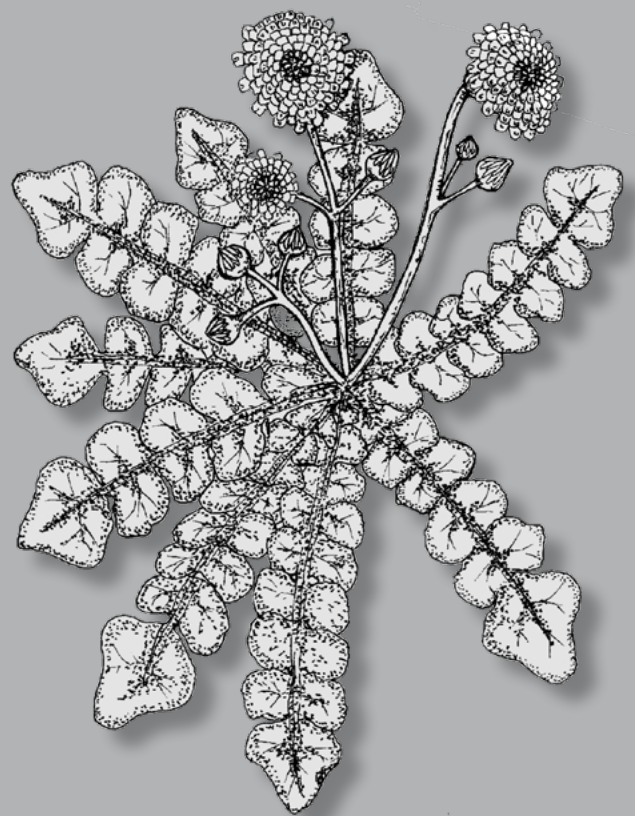


# Plants that live vertically

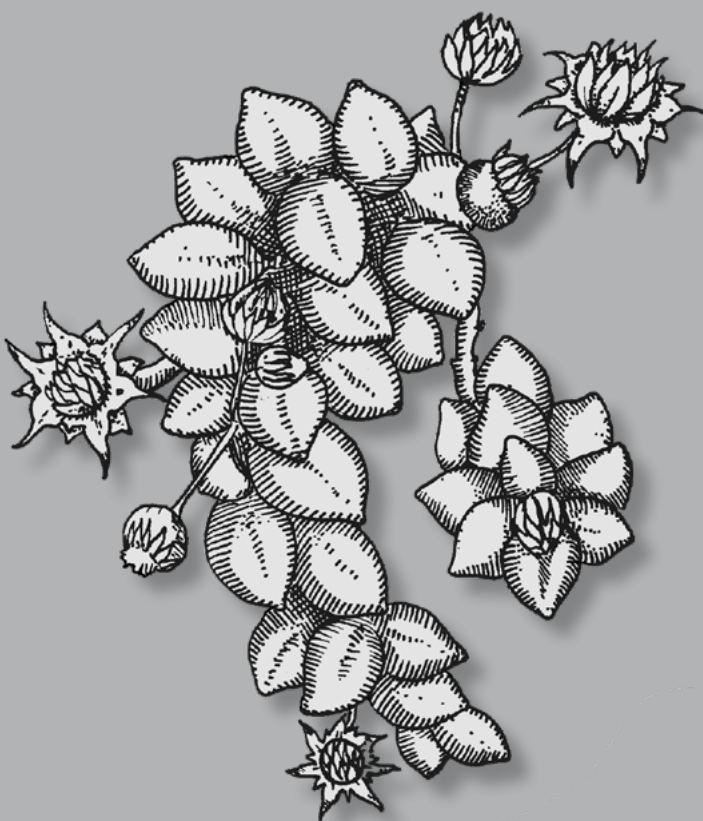
Even the gully walls have been colonised by life. Here you get a close-up view of several gravity-defying plants that anchor themselves to the walls with their long, thin roots.



The “**pastel de risco**” (*Aeonium* sp.) spreads its leaves like ceiling rose, flat up against the wall.



The **running grass** or “cerraja” (*Sonchus* sp.) has serrated leaves and bright yellow flowers.



The fleshy leaves of the “**hierba puntera**” (*Monanthes laxiflora*) store its surplus water.



## **7 DISPLACED PLANTS LOOK FOR ASYLUM**

The clearance of the coastal land changed the distribution of plants

The lava flow that accompanied you down the gully gave up before it got to the coast. However, other flows did get there, helping to form the coastal plain that stretches across the gully mouth you now have before you.

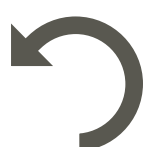
This “Isla Baja” (low island) is very fertile and, thus, is almost completely divided into banana and other fruit plantations.

Agriculture and the population ended up needing much more water than the gullies had to offer. The slope you have opposite is crossed by various channels, built to bring water from other places.

Before the Isla Baja was cultivated, this plateau was occupied by plant species that were cut away so that the soil could be worked.

Plants that lived in areas settled by man, found refuge between the walls of gullies like the Cuevas Negras.

Beside you, you will notice some spurges that are almost tree size, thanks to the fertile soil and the greater humidity they enjoy here.





Next to them, grow a multitude of grasses and bushes that adorn the path with their flowers in the spring and early summer. They are feverfew, of the daisy family, the milkweed with its strange horns, the purple and white gilly flowers, bugloss...

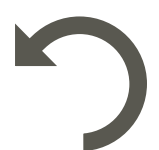
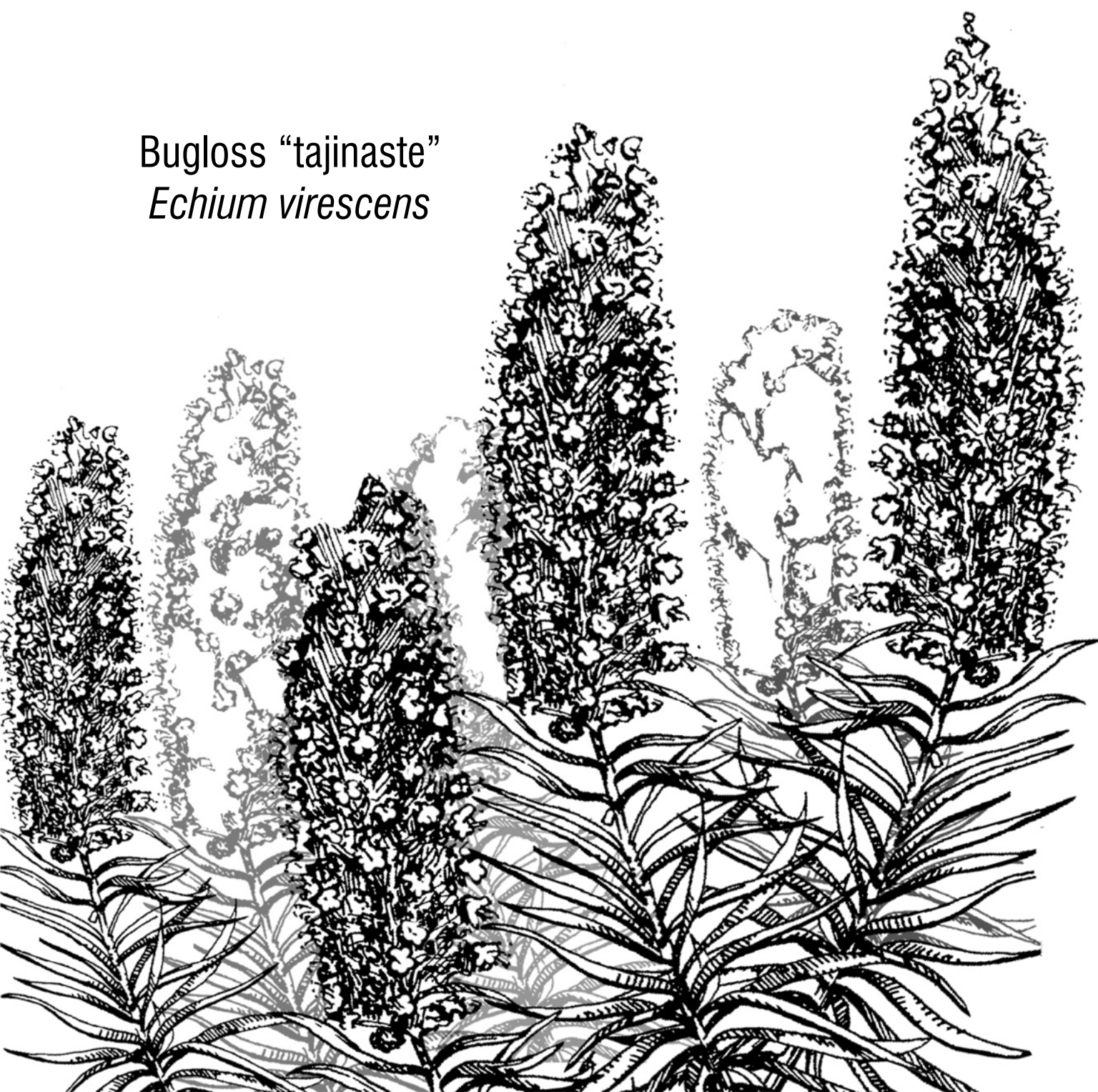
A few discreetly coloured butterflies will probably also make an appearance and dance around you.

Above, on the cliffs, you can make out the emblematic silhouettes of phoenician junipers and dragon trees.

A frequent spectacle is a kestrel on the wing, this little eagle being capable of holding itself completely still in the air, as if it were painted on the canvass of the sky. This is how it eyes its prey (a lizard or small bird) before darting straight down upon it.

We are nearing the end of the trail, but you are in for a pleasant surprise.

Bugloss “tajinaste”  
*Echium virescens*





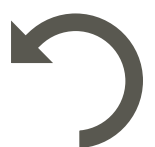
## 8 THE LOWER GULLY BOTTOM IS AN OASIS OF LIFE

Here live different plants and animals to those you have seen along the path

Willows grow with their roots buried into the mud. These trees have long leaves, on which points or “spots” often appear, produced by moth bites.



Willow  
*Salix canariensis*





Reeds and rushes also abound, whose young, flexible shoots, along with those of the willow, were traditionally used to make baskets and other utensils. Further down is a section of “yams”, grown for their “roots”, enormous sweet potatoes used in delicious recipes.

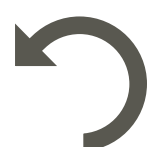
In the pools, little green frogs keep the mosquito larvae under control, while brilliant dragonflies fly over the water.

But plants and animals are not alone in needing freshwater close by.



Little green frog  
*Hyla meridionalis*

The houses, fields, the profusion of channels and pipes that start to surround you, several disused washing places, which you will see very shortly, show that humans also depends on it.



## **9 CUEVAS NEGRAS HAS SHARED ITS LEGACY WITH YOU**

### **FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP TO THE COAST, THIS STONE SERPENT TELLS ITS STORY**

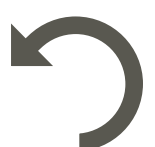
The old Camino Real has guided your steps to the village of Los Silos. This place prospers now as it has done since the days of the conquest, favoured by its good climate, its flat relief and the abundance of water here.

Here they used to grow sugar cane, cereals, vines... Nowadays, they mainly grow bananas, although other fruits are grown like oranges, avocados, medlars, papaw...

The Gully of Cuevas Negras provides part of the water Los Silos consumes, and shelter to many species of animals and plants. The trees of the “evergreen laurel forest” hide the timid Laurel pigeon and Bolle’s pigeon, and the impressive walls of the gully are the home to strange plants that are able to cling on to them.

Cuevas Negras also showed you the successive changes to the landscape. Forest gave way to vegetable plots, to recover when agriculture disappeared.

Today you have witnessed a moment in this history, which has yet to end. Before you leave, look back and commit to memory all that the path has revealed to you.





On your visit, you can take an active part in the conservation of this area, by following a few of our recommendations:



Use the paths indicated and respect the way of life and the privacy of its inhabitants.



The less noise you make, the more life you will discover around you.



Take away all your rubbish, including biodegradable waste. That way, you will contribute to conserving the beauty of the countryside and keeping rodents under control.



Collecting plants, animals and other objects from the area could cause the loss of irreplaceable items.





Red Canaria de Espacios  
Naturales Protegidos



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