



# **Climbing in the Picos de Europa**

**An English Companion for Climbers**

By Millie Evans

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**Climbers Companions**

## Disclaimer

Although this is not a guide or instructional book it is a book about going climbing so it seems worth placing a little disclaimer. I assume by the fact that you are reading this book you are already a climber and therefore you take on the responsibility and dangers that come with the sport. However life is such that I feel better by including an official disclaimer written by the British Mountain Council regarding climbing.

“The author recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.”

[BMC website](#)

**The information in this book does not offer instruction or technique needed for climbing. The reader must accept full responsibility for their actions and not take information in this book as a guide for climbing or as a substitute for instruction.**

Please also note that all information contained within, was true and accurate to the best of my knowledge at the time of writing. If you find any inaccuracies or new information to add please let me know. All costings and prices are based on information during July and August 2008.

NB: All weblinks have been updated October 2010. Prices have been updated where known and this is specified in the text.

If you have any further updates or comments please contact me at:  
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## Introduction

The Picos de Europa is a national park in the north of Spain which makes up part of the Cordillera Cantábrica range. It is a spectacular place which ranges from beautiful alpine meadows to the dry barren landscape found in the central massif. There is endless climbing potential and if you don't mind a bit of a walk-in you can be alone on perfect limestone routes soaking in the views.

It is not my intention to repeat and rewrite information that can be easily obtained. The aim here is to provide the missing links. As you may have already found out the only book written in English about climbing in the Picos was published in 1989. Although it is still very useful for route descriptions, some of the information is outdated and the layout at times is confusing because it combines walks and climbs in each area. There are of course lots of walking guides to the area which give some useful information, but if like me, your sole purpose of heading to the Picos is to find some beautiful unpolished limestone to climb, then walking guides are not much use.

I have called this book a companion for climbers because the idea is that it will go hand in hand with Robin Walker's (1989) Cicerone guide and other Spanish guides. I have to admit my Spanish is limited, well, non-existent really so other than looking at the topo diagrams in the Spanish guidebooks I haven't a clue. This book is not a guide, it is a companion that I hope you will find very useful. I spent months trawling the internet looking for information, finding snippets, compiling it all and then spent six weeks in the Picos seeing what was what. I am not claiming to be the authority on the Picos or the world's best climber, but I have been there, I have climbed there and I will give you as much useful information as I can in this book.

Throughout the ebook you will find links to various websites. They are all hyperlinked so just click the links to be directed to the relevant web page. The links are also all presented on page 27 for your ease.

I wish I could have found something like this when I was searching for information!

I hope this book gives you an extra insight into the Picos de Europa and clarifies some of the information in the Cicerone guide as well as giving you an English explanation or directions to some crags.

Happy planning and have a great trip!

## Getting there

### By Air

Ryan Air fly from Stansted and Dublin to Santander. Easyjet fly from Stansted to Bilbao which is further away but still reasonable. You can often pick up cheap flights with Ryan Air but including taxes and baggage you are looking at anything from £80 to £150 return. You really can nip over to the Picos for a week. Santander to Arenas de Cabrales is about 1hr30 drive, from Bilbao it is 2hr30.

**Car Hire** – best option is to hire a car, although buses do go to the Picos, once you are there getting around and to different crags is probably easier with your own transport.

Try one of the three below for reliable car hire from either Bilbao or Santander airport.

[Auto Europe](#)

[Avis](#)

### By Ferry

There are two ferries that go to the north of Spain from the U.K. Brittany Ferries runs from Plymouth or Portsmouth to Santander it is about £500 return for two in a car depending what time of year you go. You can book directly with [Brittany Ferries](#).

### The Scenic Route

If you have more time on your hands and fancy the scenic tour through France I wholly recommend [LD Lines](#) (Ramsgate – Ostend) and [Norfolk Line](#) (Dover - Dunkirk) where you can get great deals. A return ticket for a car can range from £20 - £80 depending on what time of the day you want to go. This of course means quite a long drive ahead. But even with paying for fuel it can still work out cheaper if you have some time on your hands.

[Formula One Hotels](#) are a useful source of accommodation en-route and the coast from Bordeaux onwards is beautiful and adjacent to the main road, so it is a good place to break the journey.

Check [Mappy](#) for route planning. It is an amazing resource for those without sat nav and it even works out the tolls in France and estimates fuel costs. Having used it on two big trips across Europe I can vouch for its accuracy.

*TIP: Diesel is cheaper than petrol in Europe. Fuel is cheaper overall in France than Britain and cheaper again in Spain.*

## Maps and Guides

The newest map we found was published by the Editorial Alpina and comes in two parts, the east and the west of the national park. The key is in Spanish, English and French which is pretty useful. It seems to be updated regularly because the one we bought was 2007-2008 (well, re-printed regularly at least!)

**Parque Nacional de Picos de Europa 1: 40 000.** Bought for €10 in Arenas de Cabrales

However, if you want a more detailed map, the next best one seems to be by Adrados Ediciones. They come as three different maps, Western, Central and Eastern. The most useful one for the climbing mentioned in this book is the Central.

**Picos de Europa Macizos Central Y Oriental 1:25 000.** Bought for €4 in Potes and is available in most towns.

It is worth noting that the maps are not always accurate. Do not rely on the water sources marked on the maps, they are not always there. There are also many footpaths on the ground that are not marked on the maps and some walking trails are marked with paint, but still may not be on the map. So be careful not to follow any false yellow markers!!

The national park map, as you may imagine, only covers the park area and so to get to the coast or cragging that is to the south of the park you need another map.

The Official Asturias road map can be picked up for free from tourist offices in the area and is an excellent accompaniment. Cantabrica covers the southern half of the Picos and maps can also be found from tourist offices. It always amazes me how useful those places can be! And its all for free!

Check out [Asturias Tourist Office website](#)

And [Cantabria Tourist Office website](#)

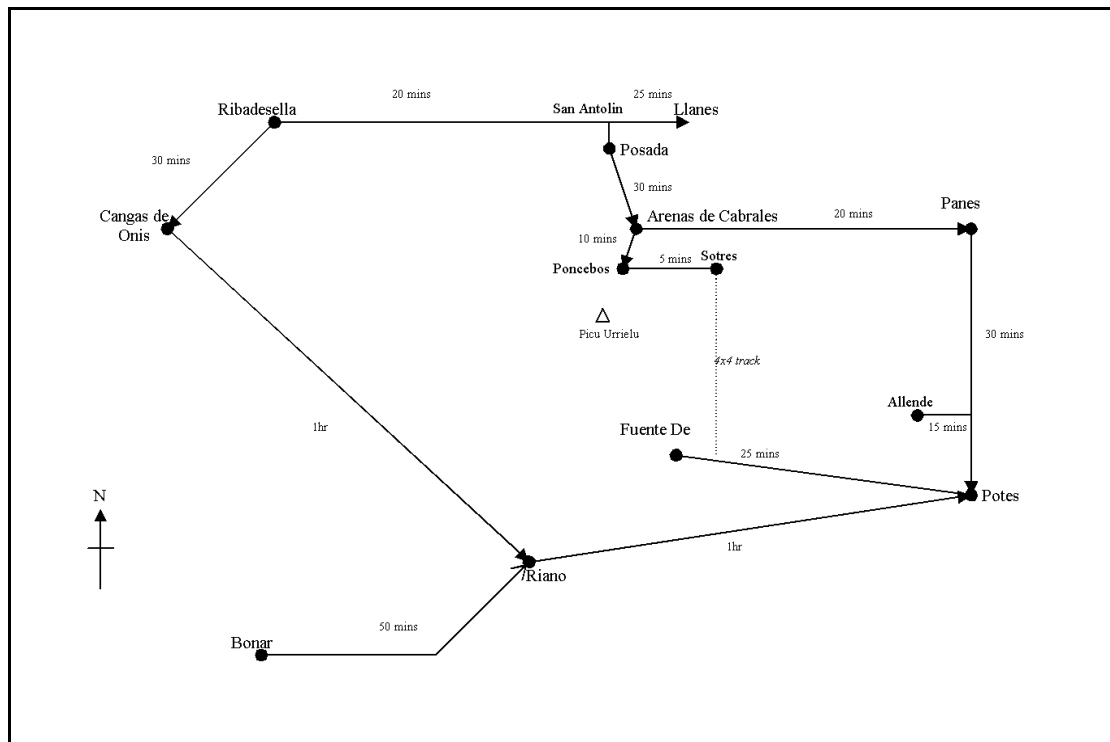
The Cicerone guide has a map of the area, but on first impressions is not clear and the one in Adrados' guide, although very useful does not give a feeling for distances. Therefore I have included a very rudimentary map based on the road maps and the Adrados map. The idea is to give you some concept of where each place mentioned in this book is located and approximate travel times between each area.

It is not attempting to win any awards for looks, but hopefully it will give you an outline and be a useful addition to the Adrados map in your planning.

See map on next page.

*N.B: In this area of Spain, many names of villages and towns end with 'u' but are also written with an 'o'. They are one in the same place but the spellings seem to be inconsistent between maps, road signs and guidebooks. For example Picu vs. Pico.*

## Map of areas covered in this book with approximate travel times



*Please note: this map is for planning purposes not to scale. Timings are based on personal experience.*

## English Climbing Guide

### **Picos de Europa Walks and Climbs. A Cicerone Guide by Robin Walker**

First published 1989. Reprinted....but not amended?!.... 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007. And a new digital version was published in 2010

I am not here to pass judgement on this guide. The fact of the matter is, it is the only one in English that has been written to date; therefore I think it is worth getting. The trouble is, it was written in 1989, so quite simply some things have changed. One of the reasons for this book is to add information that is not included in the Cicerone Guide, to update some information and provide a more concise overview of the Picos de Europa National Park for climbers and mountaineers.

The section on valley based routes is hard to decipher because it mixes climbing routes with walking routes and does not always make it clear where it is best to start from. I will also cover more valley cragging that will appeal to those not wanting another two hour walk-in! There is some, it may just be that the sport routes have sprung up more recently.

Once you get your head around the layout of the Cicerone guide there are some excellent route descriptions and some useful topos, although the topos tend to be more detailed in the Spanish guides.

To buy, check out [Amazon](#)

## Spanish Climbing Guides

There are many. Depending on your objectives and how far you wish to explore into the Picos de Europa will depend on which one you purchase if any. I can only recommend what we used but check out [Libreria Desnivel](#) for a list of all guides. Just don't buy it online. Postage is about €15 and many of the books are €26.

- **Cordillera Cantabrica Escaladas selectas en roca.** 1200 vias de Los Picos de Europa a la Babia. Miguel Angel Adrados. (2005) *Adrados Ediciones*

This guide is completely in Spanish and if you speak the language then probably contains loads of useful information. If not, it is beautifully colour coded so that all routes up to grade V are in green, next blue, then orange etc. So you can see at a glance which areas hold something for your level. It also has a pretty useful map at the beginning. Maps of different areas would help though. The topos are good and it contains a real variety of big routes on the Naranjo de Bulnes, smaller peaks around the park and some sport crags to the south and west of the park. It also gives a list of campsites, auberges and refuges for each area.

It costs €26, but we were glad to have it.

- **Picos de Europa. 100 vías de escalada.** Miguel Ángel García Crespo. (2005) *Ediciones Desnivel*

This guide selects 100 routes that are classics in the area. Most are traditional routes, but it includes some winter routes too. It is in Spanish but could be useful if you only want to climb in the Central area of the Picos National Park.

- **Los Picos de Europa. Guía del Macizo Central.** M.A. Adrados y Jerónimo López (1988). *Adrados Ediciones*

Miguel Adrados and Jerónimo López were seen as the experts of the area and this is the most comprehensive guide for the Central Massive. It covers details of all the routes and many climbers still own this guide. Remember it was published in 1988 though. The Cordillera Cantabrica Escaladas selectas en roca, mentioned above is also written by Adrados and is seen as an updated version, but not as comprehensive.

## Valley Bases

### Arenas de Cabrales

I start with Arenas de Cabrales because it is at the north end of the national park and is one of the main starting points for heading up to the Naranjo de Bulnes. It is also where the only campsite in this area is situated. You could camp in Potes or Panes but Arenas is much better positioned if you want to head into the mountains from the north end.

#### What to do here:

- Climb Naranjo de Bulnes
- Climb Pena de Fresnidiello
- Cares Gorge walk
- Sport cragging

#### Where to stay:

- [Naranjo de Bulnes Camping](#).

Pleasant and clean, caters for campers, caravans and has bungalows to rent. It has a bar, restaurant, internet and t.v room plus washing machines. It does cash in on being a useful spot for accessing the Picos' major attraction and therefore charges accordingly! But it is the only campsite in the area, they have the market.

Two people, one tent, one car = € 25.80 per night. (2010 prices)

- [Albergue de Cabrales](#).

Hostel/hotel accommodation. Situated in the centre of Arenas

#### Local amenities:

- Supermarket called Dia. Small but sells most things you might need. 10 -15 mins walk from the campsite
- Cash point and Pharmacy
- Free carpark in town just over bridge as though you were heading towards Pte Poncebos.
- Climbing shop – well, of kinds. It has a few bits of gear, guides and maps. But you can buy guides and maps in most of the tourist shops in town.
- There are several bars and restaurants in town; some of which have Wi-Fi.

#### N.B

It seems to be true what the guidebooks say about cloud in the Picos. Its hard to believe it until you see it. Quite often Arenas de Cabrales is cloudy but by 900m you drive through it and find yourself with perfect blue skies ahead in disbelief that it could be a cloudy day down below. So don't be put off if its cloudy, go for whatever you were going to do. In July and August it seems that this is the norm. The cloud layer seems to be about 300m thick and varies at what height it starts. We did, however, have some beautiful blue sky days even in Arenas. So don't believe all the rubbish about it always raining in the Picos. This is from the people that have never bothered venturing further than Arenas de Cabrales!

## Naranjo de Bulnes / Pico Urriellu (2519m)

### Overview

The Naranjo de Bulnes or Pico Urriellu as it is also known, is the most famous mountain in the area and some might say Spain. It is not the highest, but it is a dramatic shape and of substantial height. The only way to the top is to climb it, there are no walking routes up the peak. It is a much sort after peak for Spanish climbers and non-climbers alike who are guided up the peak.

### Mountain Accommodation

**Refugio Julian Delgado Ubeda (also known as [Refugio de Urriellu](#))** is situated directly below the famous west face. It is a big hut with nearly 100 places. It has a spring next to the hut so there is water on tap. During the day the place is very busy with walkers who head up to get their view of the famous peak and a spot of lunch before returning to the valley. The guardians are friendly and helpful and one of them spoke good English. There are four dormitories with the usual alpine bunks and four toilets that flush! So all in all a very nice hut. It is worth having a reciprocal rights card with you for discounts. Tel. 985 92 52 00 E-mail: [info@picuurriellu.com](mailto:info@picuurriellu.com)

**Camping.** It is possible to camp outside the hut. There are several bivvy spots that have been cleared with little walls built around them. The normal rule in the National park is that you can camp anywhere as long as your tent goes up at sunset and is down again before sunrise. This does not seem to be the case outside this hut, it is a lot more relaxed. Tents seem to be left all day and there is almost a community of climbers gathering there. Camping is of course free and there is a tap outside the hut that you can get water from.

### Getting there

There are two options. You can start from the Fuente De cable car or from Sotres.

There is not much in it time wise but we chose to walk in from Sotres because then the way back is all downhill. So, from the road to Sotres you take the turn to Aliva which is the 4x4 track that goes all the way to the hotel. This track is a little bumpy and it depends on your vehicle and confidence how far you go. Basically, it is fine to drive and park along this road, but after 1km there is a right turn towards the hut. At this point it becomes ambiguous about whether you should be driving along here. The Cicerone guide suggests you shouldn't, however when you see over 100 cars at the top of this road you start to wonder whether the rules have changed! If you drive to the top it will save an hour of walking uphill. We left our car at the bottom, because we didn't fancy the track, but there were all sorts of cars that seemed to have made it to the top just fine. There were also camper vans well established up there. It was suggested to us that it would be better not to leave the car up there but perhaps do a drop off instead. Its your call...!

The walk-in is straight forward. It is a well frequented path and well marked. Just make sure you take the left fork towards the hut, not the right one to Bulnes. It took us 3hr15 from the bottom of the track in thick mist! A map and compass of course could be beneficial in the mist, but it is a good path.

*NB: Keep the faith, we walked up in the cloud and were still immersed in it at the hut but climbed the route in the sun the next day having walked up out of the cloud from the hut that morning. It's worth the gamble!*

### Route length and quality

The shortest route up the Naranjo is on the south face and it also hosts the easiest route up the peak. The rock is excellent quality on all faces. Some say the rock is polished on the south face direct

route but compared to easy access sport crags or classic “Diff’s” in Wales it is virtually untouched! Routes on the south face are about 250m long, east 420m, north 650m and on the classic west face, 750m.

*TIP: Two 50m ropes are needed due to the abseil descent, but if you had two 60m ropes you could reduce the descent to three abseils instead of four.*

### **Grades**

Routes vary in difficulty, the easiest route is the South Face direct which has only one pitch at 5- and then the rest are 4/3, easing to grade 2 scrambling to the top. There are numerous mid grade climbs and also some very long hard and committing routes to be found. The Pico Urriellu is covered in detail in the Adrados guide and of course the most comprehensive guide to this area is ‘Los Picos de Europa. Guía del Macizo Central’. The Cicerone guide also covers some classic routes.

### **Aspect**

There are routes on all sides of the Urriellu. North, East, South and West. The sun hits the south face at about 8am. The crowds seem to hit it at about 10am. An early start is definitely worth it for the popular south face direct route and some of the other routes require it because of their length. However, many routes can be tackled after a leisurely breakfast at the hut.

*N.B: The South Face Direct Route is also the descent route for many other climbs so be aware of other parties abseiling down on you.*

## **Pena de Fresnidiello (1477m)**

### **Overview**

Routes are covered in the Cicerone guide and in Adrados. Both guides give only a selection but there is plenty to be getting on with. It is a beautiful crag, a big sweeping slab that will be spotted well before you start walking to it.

### **Getting there**

From Arenas de Cabrales drive towards Sotres. About 1km before Sotres there is a sharp left bend and on it a right hand turn to Aliva. At this point the road becomes a dirt track. Don't be put off, it is a through road and there are plenty of lay-bys for parking all the way along. There are a couple of bad patches and you may decide that the extra walk is worth it to preserve your hire car, but if you are game, then head along the track for 1.5km (passing but not taking the right hand fork that leads towards the Urriellu hut) and you can park in a lay-by right below Fresnidiello.

Cross the stream (mostly dry – not a reliable water source) and take the zigzag path that heads up to the crag. About 45 minute walk.

### **Route length and quality**

All the routes are seven pitches long and each pitch is about 40 meters. The rock is great, unpolished limestone, all good quality. The belays seem to be well equipped with ring lower-offs on the popular routes. Two 50 metre ropes allow an abseil descent option. It is however possible to walk off the top and down the gully to the right.

I can vouch for Garrido Zapata 5+ and Elixir Para Calvos 5+, both of which are described pretty accurately in the Cicerone guide. It is sparsely bolted though, you will need friends and a selection of nuts. On some pitches you will be blessed with only one bolt, a little airy!

### **Grades**

There are several routes here, only some covered in the guides I had. In the Cicerone and Adrados guide there are a couple of routes that are between 5+ and 6a+. No doubt there will be some that are harder too.

### **Aspect**

This crag is east facing so the sun hits the face at about 7am and doesn't leave again until about 2-3pm. If it is clear skies it is too hot to climb over midday in midsummer – unless you are Spanish – maybe..?! But an early start could see you at the top by midday, or a late start will easily see you at the top before dark (approx. 10pm). We did a dawn, walked up as the moon was setting and saw the sun rise as we racked up. A beautiful setting. It seems a pretty chilled area for a van bivvy in the lay-bys as long as you are discreet.

## **Cares Gorge Walk**

### **Overview**

This is definitely advertised as being a classic walk of the area and even if you are not that psyched for walking, it is worth it. There is minimal ascent and it is all very leisurely really. It goes from Puente Poncebos all the way to Cains. It is a well made track and obviously sees a lot of traffic but this does not detract from the spectacular nature of the gorge and surrounding landscape.

### **Getting there**

From Arenas de Cabrales head up towards Puente Poncebos (15mins by car) and park along the road. Often there will be parking attendants showing you where to park, they are quite efficient at fitting everyone in and it is free to park. Then follow the signs and you can't go wrong. It is a one way track all the way to Cains.

### **Route length and quality**

The walk takes about 3hrs to get to Cains, and slightly less to come back. This is at a leisurely pace, taking photos, stopping for a bite to eat etc. The Cicerone guide suggests starting in Cains, however, it does not mention that unless you make the return journey on foot it would take you about half a day to retrieve your car. Best to be prepared to walk both ways and by starting in Puente Poncebos means you get to have lunch and chill by the river in Cains. There is not much in Puente Poncebos so going the other way would seem like a bit of a disappointment when you reached your destination.

### **Grades**

An easy walk with only a couple 100 metres of ascent. Can't go wrong, just take a camera and enjoy the stroll.

### **Aspect**

It gets the sun most the way. So nothing wrong with doing it in a little cloud. It probably keeps some of the crowds away and definitely makes it cooler. It was drizzling a little when we set out but turned out to be the best temperature to walk in.

## Sport Cragging

### Overview

There are some crags close to Arenas de Cabrales. Some of these are mentioned in a [Planet Fear article](#) about Arenas. However, after doing a little investigating I only found out about two crags, Poo de Cabrales and Las Cabrales (described in the article as Las Cavadas – I think). Both have bolted single pitch routes of good quality and if you are in the area and want a day off from big walk-ins, they are a pretty good option. Neither of these crags are included in any guides that I have found. They seem to be small developments that are only known about locally. The campsite in Arenas has a photocopy of a hand drawn topo for Las Cabrales and Café Cares in town, allegedly has a copy of the Poo topo downstairs near the toilets. Ocenó is also mentioned in the Planet Fear Article and is not far from Arenas.

### Las Cabrales

#### Getting there

From the campsite head in the direction of town, over the bridge and take the first right up a footpath marked with yellow paint markers. Follow these paint markers to the left of a big house and then back round right and upwards towards the crag. Some of the markers are a little hidden so have faith, keep looking for them and head towards the most obvious looking crag. It is a 25 minute walk from the campsite.

#### Route length and quality

The routes are about 15 metres long and on good rock. Most are slabby, some with steeper starts. Well bolted with insitu lower-offs.

#### Grades

This is a great warm-up crag with 18 routes between 4 and 6b+

#### Aspect

The crag is south facing, so some typical Arenas cloud cover is a welcome relief from the midday sun.

### Poo de Cabrales

#### Getting there

Drive west through Arenas and you shortly arrive in Poo. Go through the village and there is a carpark/viewing area for the Naranjo on the left. Park here and the crag can be seen on the right. There are some vague footpaths that can be followed.

#### Route length and quality

The routes are about 20m long on steep limestone with interesting tufa formations. It is fully bolted with lower-offs.

#### Grades/ Aspect

The routes start at 6b and go upwards to the 8 region. The crag faces south east, so again can get pretty hot, although the trees at the bottom can provide some shade.

## Valley Bases

### Potes/Fuente De

This is the heart of the Picos de Europa National Park. Potes is a big town which is easily accessed from Santander. It is a bustling place with a friendly and lively scene. A lovely place for a rest day, strolling the historic streets and lazing in cafés watching the world go by.

Fuente De on the other hand is really the access point to the mountains. It is about a 25 minute drive uphill from Potes. There is not much there other than the cable car. There is a campsite but there are no shops or real amenities so we opted to stay in Potes on rest days and then drive to Fuente De leaving our car there (free carpark) while in the mountains. The first four peaks/pinnacles mentioned below are best accessed from the cable car.

#### What to do here:

- Climb Pico de Santa Ana
- Climb Aguja de la Canalona
- Climb Aguja Bustamante
- Climb Torre de los Horcados Rojos
- Climb Pena la Regaliz
- Climb Torre de Penalba
- Climb Cuerto Agero and El Resquilon
- Climb Naranjo de Bulnes – it is possible to walk to the Urriello hut from here, rather than Sotres. There is not much in it, but it is slightly longer from here.

#### Where to stay:

- [Camping La Isla](#). This campsite is situated just outside of Potes on the way to Fuente De. There is one slightly closer to Potes but it is 1<sup>st</sup> category and therefore more expensive. La Isla is a big site with friendly and accommodating owners. It is €20.50 for two people, car and tent (2010 prices). They have a swimming pool and there is Wi-Fi in reception with space to sit and charge a laptop. There is a bar/ restaurant which is by the river and has plenty of shade.
- There are various [hostel/hotel](#) options in Potes and other campsites on the way to Fuente De. There is a British owned guest house that is well positioned and worth a look. It's called [Casa Gustavo](#).

#### Local amenities:

- Two small supermarkets in the centre of town but there is a big one on the road towards Santander called Lupa
- Plenty of bars, cafés and restaurants
- Cyber café located on the main street in a big building with a massive wooden door, go upstairs to DVD rental/ cyber café store. It is next door but one to Santander bank.
- Banks, Post office, Tourist Office, Pharmacy etc. Potes pretty much has everything you need.
- Tourist and souvenir shops are not in short supply.

## **Pico de Santa Ana, Aguja de la Canalona, Aguja Bustamante and Torre de los Horcados Rojos**

### **Overview**

I have grouped these four peaks together because they are in the same area and therefore are accessed in the same way. They are all multi pitch trad routes in a mountain setting. Some feel quite remote despite having set out from the cable car. They are all classic peaks in the area and are mentioned in both the Cicerone and Adrados guide.

### **Mountain Accommodation**

**Cabana Veronica** is a very useful and unique base if you wish to spend a couple of days in the area doing these routes. Cabana Veronica is part of an old American aircraft carrier which is perched on the mountain side. It is in an impressive position and is tiny! But in the summer it is guarded and it is possible to sleep there as well as buy meals. The only problem is that there is no water source. The guardian carries everything up from the cable car (a 1hr30 walk) in a backpack and they collect snow from remaining patches to cool the drinks they sell and to cook. We stayed there for one night and it is a brilliant experience. The younger of the two guardians was a climber and spoke enough English to be a useful source of information for the routes we did.

Costs: €5 per night for members (BMC/reciprocal rights card) € 8 for non members. €10 for dinner and €5 for breakfast. The expensive part is drinks. Carry up as much water as you can. It is €3 for a can of drink or a 200ml bottle of water and €2 for a tea or coffee. As you can imagine this can add up quickly but remember they carry it all up there! We saw them do it! Make a reservation if you want to stay, especially if you want food.

Tel.: 689027994. The tourist office in Potes made the call for us.

N.B: This information was accurate in July 2008. The website makes no mention of food or accommodation other than emergency shelter but that is not to say it has definitely changed.

**Camping** is also possible 100m or so from the hut on some level ground. Please abide by the sunset and sunrise rule. Tents can go up one hour before and must be down one hour after. Camping here means you can still buy food or drink if you need to. However, we found carrying enough water plus climbing kit didn't leave much space for camping kit. It's your call.

### **Getting there**

From Fuente De take the cable car: €14 non member return, €8 one way

Or €12 mountain member return, €7 one way. My BMC membership card worked for the discount.

From the top station there is a massive track heading north west which leads to Cabana Veronica.

The south face of Torre de los Horcados Rojos is ten minutes from Cabana Veronica and is right in front of you as you walk along the track from the cable car (1hr20).

Pico de Santa Ana, Aguja de la Canalona and Aguja Bustamante are all accessed from the cable car by following the track north west for about 3km (1hr) until there is a path leading back north east up a zigzag path. Aguja Bustamante comes into view on your left (accessed by scrambling across the scree (1hr30 from cable car) while Aguja de la Canalona is the impressive spike of rock that is directly in front of you.

The Santa Ana west face is accessed from the same path but you continue up the zigzag path to the col (Collado de la Canalona) and then across to the Collado de Santa Ana (2hrs from the cable car).

These last three peaks can also be accessed from Cabana Veronica, it took us 1hr15 to get to Collado de Santa Ana from the hut. Using the hut was a useful way of combining several routes without having to go up and down on the cable car and do the same walk-in.

We did two routes on the Bustamante, stayed at Cabana Veronica and then got up early (left at 8am, that is Spanish early!) to do Santa Ana in the shade and then back down the cable car that afternoon. The Aguja de la Canalona could easily be combined in a day with a route on the Bustamante.

### **Route length, quality and grades**

- Pico de Santa Ana

We did the Espolon Rojo or West face (AD sup) which is on excellent rock in a beautiful position. It is six pitches (180 meters) and almost all the belays either had insitu threads or newish (still shiny) pitons. Neither were really necessary but they almost acted as a guide on the route. There are other routes up Santa Ana, an easy scramble is mentioned in the Cicerone guide while Adrados mentions two harder routes.

- Aguja de la Canalona

A striking spire of rock. There are several routes up this mentioned in both Cicerone and Adrados. It is a classic of the area. It is 170 meters long. There are several routes on this spire from 4- to 6b+.

- Aguja Bustamante

Slightly smaller than its neighbour but equally worth climbing. The rock in the most part is good, but there are some loose bits which are easy to spot and avoid. The routes are two pitches (60 meters total) with an abseil lower off (2x50 meter ropes) to a col.

Cicerone describes two routes, a 4+ and a 5. There are others though in the comprehensive guide.

- Torre de los Horcados Rojos

There are several climbs on this face. It is massive and looks impressive as you approach it. Routes are up to 450 meters long. There is also an easy walk to the top (via the north west slopes) which takes 30 mins from Cabana Veronica if you don't fancy any of the climbs. It's worth it for the views and you can see the south face of the Naranjo from here.

### **Aspect**

Almost all these routes are south facing, except for Santa Ana which as the route name suggests, faces west. It is cooler at this height but the late afternoon sun can still be too much in midsummer. The worst hours are definitely 16 – 19.00hrs. Early-ish starts can be beneficial.

## **Pena la Regaliz (2196m)**

### **Overview**

This peak is mentioned in both the Cicerone and Adrados guide. There are several routes up it mostly up to grade 5. It's attraction is really the quality of rock. A piece of rock this vast to offer such an amenable grade up it, on excellent rock seems too good to be true. So although it is a decent walk-in, it is worth an outing which will provide the satisfaction of topping out as well as some spectacular views in an area of the Picos that really is lush and green (Vega de Liordes). It is a traditional route with only a couple of pegs on it. You need a full rack.

### **Getting there**

Cicerone gives an adequate description. You really can't go wrong. From the Fuente De carpark follow the zigzag up to Vega de Liordes, which is signposted and then head due west until you see the Pena la Regaliz above you on your left. Allow 2hrs for the zigzag and another 30mins to get to the bottom of the route. You could camp in Liordes if you wanted to break the day up but it is definitely possible in one. We headed off at 7.30am after a bivvy in the carpark (seems to be totally legit...we weren't the only ones!) to get up the steep stuff before the sun hit and weren't in the sun until we summited at 15.00.

### **Route length and quality**

The route is 280m long and we did it in 10 pitches. There is a good diagram in both guides and Cicerone gives a useful description. The rock really is excellent, it is a lovely slab with a couple of hard moves that are well protected. Lots of friends definitely helped.

### **Grades**

Divertimento is the classic one described in Cicerone and Adrados, the hardest moves are grade 5. Really equivalent to British HVS 5a (but most of the difficulties could be avoided, if desired, with a less direct line).

### **Aspect**

This route faces north east so starts off with a little sun but is then in the shade till the afternoon. We climbed from 10 am until 3 pm and were in the shade the whole way, it was chasing us up the crag though.

## Torre de Penalba

### Overview

The Cicerone guide describes this as a classic route of the Picos. We did not climb it but I wanted to include it because it is actually very accessible from a hut that also has a water source. Therefore it makes it a very agreeable proposition. It is an impressive peak that looks a lot harder than the main route up its face suggests.

### Mountain Accommodation

The Torre de Penalba is right next to the [Jermoso Refuge](#). This refuge has drinking water on tap and provides meals and cold drinks. There is no toilet though, which may in time pose environmental issues, if not already!

€3.50 per night for members (BMC worked) €7 if not (2010 prices).

€14 for dinner and €5 for breakfast.

### Getting there

You can either slog up the switch backs from Fuente De to Vega de Liordes and then head across to the hut or take the cable car and then head east to the hut. The Cicerone guide describes the latter walk-in. It took us 4 leisurely hours on this route and it is mostly marked by cairns. The footpath is not marked on the 1:25000 map but is on the 1:40000.

### Route length and quality

The main route up the south face is 300m with a 6b move half way up. The Cicerone guide suggests this can be aided, Adrados makes no mention on the topo. A local climber said many people have to back off at this point. It is impressive because of the final corner, but the rock of the lower section does not look so good, this was also confirmed by a local climber.

### Grades

The main route up this face is a mixture of III, IV and V with a 6b move.

### Aspect

It is south facing, but if you stay at the hut it is easy to get an early start and you could be off it before the sun becomes a problem.

## **Cuerto Agero and El Resquilon**

### **Overview**

Cuerto Agero is a massive peak just 15 minutes drive from Potes which is accessible with only a 40 minute walk-in. For round these parts it is virtually roadside! The main face offers several multi pitch routes (350 – 540m) as well as a bolted crag on the south side offering slab routes between 2 - 4 pitches. It is definitely worth the walk.

### **Getting there**

From Potes head out of town towards Santander, about 10mins down the road there will be a junction, right to Lebenal, left to Allende. Turn left to Allende and follow the road to the end. There is space for 6 – 7 cars. The track leads up from here towards the crag which can be seen from the carpark. The walkers sign mentions a Cabana and it is a 4x4 road. Follow the road, taking a right where the yellow paint instructs and then either stay on the road all the way to the climbers hut (a shack with sleeping areas – not sure on the etiquette for using it) or on a big left hand bend take the path that leads right, it is a bit of a short cut if you are heading to El Resquilon.

### **Route length and quality**

Most of the routes on Cuerto Agero are 7-10 pitches long. They are serious outings up an impressive peak. The routes are traditional so a full rack should be taken. Routes at El Resquilon are however mostly bolted. Adrados describes the area as ‘semi-deportivas’ and suggests taking slings and nuts as extra protection. We were very pleased to be able to throw the odd friend in too. But all the belays were equipped for ab-ing off.

### **Grades**

Cuerto Agero offers routes from 6a upwards and El Resquilon has routes from grade IV+ upwards.

### **Aspect**

Cuerto Agero and El Resquilon are both south facing and fairly low down so can get pretty hot in midsummer. We went there on a cloudy day and it was perfect. In the full sun it would be hard work. Cicerone describes it as a good bad weather option...not sure it would be much fun in the rain, but definitely better when there is some cloud cover.

## Valley Bases

### Bonar

Bonar is located to the south west of the Picos de Europa National Park and can be reached by either travelling down the west of the park or heading south from Potes towards Riano and on to Bonar. The town itself is nothing to shout about but there is some great cragging and it's really rather a tranquil spot. It is not strictly the Picos de Europa but it is close and offers some great sport routes with no walk-in, so combined with a trip to the central massive it offers a relaxing contrast.

#### What to do here:

- Climb at Valdehuesa
- Climb in La Cuenca del Esla
- Swim in the local outdoor pool – it's an Olympic size pool and a great place to chill out and cool off after a hard days cragging.

#### Where to stay:

- Camping Municipal El Soto – a great campsite! At only €8 a night for two people, a car and a tent you can't go far wrong. It is also big, spacious and there is plenty of shade to be found. The facilities are clean but you have to buy tokens from reception for hot showers (€0.60). There is a bar where you can also buy bread and milk for the day. The public swimming pool is a 2 minute walk away and only costs €1.80 per person. You will need a swimming hat!! But these can be bought there for a mere €1.50 – bargain!
- There is a hotel/hostel in town. Not sure on logistics, but if you don't want to camp, there are options.

#### Local amenities:

- Two mini markets on the high street but a bigger one called Dia can be found just up a side street. An easy walk from the campsite (10 mins).
- Banks with cash points
- Petrol station and garage
- Plenty of cafés and bars which are open till late

#### **TIP**

*Spanish timings seem to be 9-14.00 then 17-20.00. So don't plan to go to the supermarket between 2 and 5pm.*

Bonar is about 2hr30 from Potes and about 3hrs from Cangas de Onis but it is well worth the drive if you have the time. You could easily spend a week in the area.

## Valdehuesa 1280m

### Overview

Valdehuesa is a limestone outcrop that stretches along the hillside minutes from the road and has nearly 200 routes. It is a beautiful crag that is relatively quiet especially if you walk along a little further which is well worth the effort. It becomes less polished and the routes get longer. A great crag, worth a visit if you have time to drive this far south. This crag is covered in Adrados' guide.

### Getting there

You can either drive down the west side of the Picos National Park from Cangas de Onis to Riano or come from Potes to Riano then on to Bonar. We came down the west side and I have to say it is a beautiful drive. It follows the Rio Sella which is an impressive gorge and then the countryside just opens up to provide sweeping landscapes that seem endless.

Bonar is the best base for Valdehuesa, it takes just 10 minutes by car to get to the crag and the campsite is super cheap.

From Bonar the turn to Valdehuesa is signposted and it is a couple of km up a steep road until you can see the crag on your right. There are several lay-bys, one right next to the path and one before and after. The crag is 100m from the lay-by, proper roadside cragging!

### Route length and quality

The routes are between 10 and 25 meters long. The longest being at the far end. The crag is divided into different sectors but they basically all run into one another. The far end is called Sector La Collada and is well worth the extra walk. The routes are longer and less polished with some really good lines. A 50m rope will only just make it back to the ground though.

### Grades

The routes range from grade 4 – 8c and are all well bolted. Most of the routes are also equipped with a chain and clip to lower off so you don't even have to thread the lower-off, meaning maximum climbing time. The rock is excellent quality.

### Aspect

The crag is south facing so can get pretty hot on a clear sky day. However there tends to be a good breeze that blows up through the valley and there is plenty of shade to be found around the base of the crag. Failing that, heading to Bonar swimming pool to cool off is a good option.

## **La Cuenca del Esla**

### **Overview**

This area is also covered in Adrados' guide. There are two crags which have multi pitch routes on them and then some single pitch stuff. Adrados suggests camping in Cistierna which is south east of Bonar but it's really not far to any of the crags in this area from Bonar and if you are feeling settled in the cheapest campsite in Spain (well... its not bad!!) then you could easily have a day in this direction. Otherwise it is a good option if you are on your way to Potes.

### **Getting there**

On route from Bonar to Potes, Gilbo can be seen from the road and you take the turning on the left to Horcadas. I didn't go to any of the other areas but they are covered in the guide and they are certainly accessible from this area.

### **Route length and quality**

Gilbo is 200 meters long but there is single pitch stuff in the area which are 15 – 25 meters.

### **Grades**

The grades range from 5- to 7c.

### **Aspect**

Gilbo is east facing so starts to get some shade in the late afternoon. Not sure about the rest.

# The Coast

## Overview

The north coast of Spain is beautiful and has an almost Devon like quality with cliff top walks, small secluded bays as well as big open sandy beaches. The Picos National Park is so close to the coast that a short visit is inevitable even if it's a one night stop off before heading to the ferry/plane etc.

## Getting there

From Arenas de Cabrales you can be on the coast in 30 minutes. Head west and then north to Posada, then west to Ribadesella and you hit the coast and a pretty nice beach (considering it is right next to the road!) called San Antolin. It is also a good surf spot and has a couple of cafés. It is very easy to forget the road is there and it is possible to park down on the edge of the beach.

From San Antolin it is another 20 minutes to Ribadesella heading west and 25 minutes heading east to Llanes.

## Ribadesella

This town is a fishing port and the harbour is lined with cafés and bars. The beach is west of the harbour and is long and sandy, great for surfing, swimming or sunbathing, plenty of room for all! The town itself is fairly limited, there is a small supermarket and a couple of restaurants. If you head out west there is a bigger supermarket and petrol station.

The beach, Playa de Santa Marina has showers on the front and toilets plus at the far west end there is a big free carpark.

Camping – there are two campsites both at the west end of the town. [Camping Ribadesella](#) is 1<sup>st</sup> Category (€22 2ppl) and Camping Los Sauces is 2<sup>nd</sup> (€19 2ppl). Camping Ribadesella has much nicer facilities but is more of a camping village.

## Llanes

This is a lovely town and worth a visit. It is a historic town with winding cobbled streets and a lively scene. It is also a fishing port and the breakwater has been turned into an artistic opportunity, called the Cubes of Memory – worth a look.

The town is full of cafés lining each side of the harbour and you should definitely treat yourself to something from one of the cake shops! There is a big internet café (called 'Travelling'), a useful tourist office and free parking around town.

There are two beaches, one on either side of the harbour.

Camping – there is a campsite in town, just east of the harbour on the cliff top or there are various campsites a couple of miles outside of Llanes both ways. We stayed in one in Poo de Llanes (€17 2ppl).

All along this coastline there are several small coves with beaches. Some you can drive down to, others are only accessible via coastal paths. It is a lovely area.

## Other important information

### Weather

The best time of the year to go is July and August. But right through November you will be able to climb somewhere, you might just have to be luckier with the weather. Earlier in the year the weather will not be as consistent and in some areas there will still be snow. Although this is Spain there does seem to be a different climate in the Picos de Europa National Park.

It is a common misconception that it is always cloudy and rains in the Picos. Having spent six weeks there and also spoken to people who have spent even more time in the area I can assure you the weather in July and August is pretty good. You can of course be unlucky, like anywhere in Europe, it can still rain and mountainous areas are more prone to storms than other places. However, unlike the U.K the weather seems to be more stable and therefore the long range forecasts were fairly reliable. With cheap flights available from Ryan Air, check the forecast and head out.

*TIP: Do not be put off if you arrive in Arenas de Cabrales and it is cloudy, this is a definite trait of the area, but the real climbing is not in the valley, head into the mountains above the cloud and you will be bathed in sunshine and blue skies. The other option is to head round to Potes which seems to get a slightly better deal with the sunshine.*

### Environmental Issues

As climbers we all respect the need to leave as little impact as possible so that we can return and others can visit beautiful unspoilt areas. There is always the debate that tourism can destroy the natural beauty of an area but tourism is inevitable and it certainly makes an area like the Picos more accessible to us climbers. The concept of 'Leave No Trace' does not seem to be a strong principle in this area of Spain and one of my main concerns having been there is the lack of awareness about sanitary procedures. There is the danger that unless something changes, the Picos will be taken over by toilet paper and human waste. This might sound extreme but when you stay in huts that cater for 20 plus people and there are no sanitary facilities, not even a drop hole, then you can see how a problem might occur. Please help keep this area a beautiful place to visit, whether to climb, walk or just sightsee. Take your rubbish home, burn your toilet paper and bury your waste. An informative book to read on this topic is [How to Shit in the Woods: An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art](#) by Kathleen Meyer.

### Grades

Spanish climbing grades today are pretty much in line with the French sport grading system. However in the Picos de Europa there are many routes which are traditional routes, therefore the grading system is slightly different. The Cicerone guide attempts to give a comparison chart, which is fairly useful. The important thing to remember is that it is much closer to the French grading system than the UIAA system which is more commonly in Roman numerals. Spanish grades are written in Roman numerals up to V+ and then become Indo-Arabic numerals from grade 6 onwards. Since much of the climbing in the Picos is traditional, bear in mind that grade V+ placing gear will probably feel a lot harder than F5 on bolts.

## Useful Phrases

The Cicerone guide has a few useful climbing terms at the back and of course a Spanish dictionary can come in very useful. But I thought I would include a couple of key phrases to save you the trouble.

Hello - *Hola*

Goodbye - *Adios*

Good Morning / Good Day - *Buenas Dia*

Good Evening / Good Night - *Buenas Noches*

Please - *Por Favor*

Thank you - *Gracias*

Thank you very much – *Muchas gracias*

Yes - *Si*

No - *no*

Excuse me - *Excúseme*

I am sorry - *Lo siento*

My name is ... - *Mi nombre es...*

I am English / Welsh / Scottish / Irish / American / Australian –

*Soy Inglés/Galés/Escocés/Irlandés/Americano/Australiano*

Sorry, I do not speak Spanish - *Apesadumbrado, no hablo español*

Do you speak English? - *¿Usted habla inglés?*

I do not understand - *No entiendo.*

Is it possible to camp here tonight? - *¿Es posible acampar aquí esta noche ?*

I have one tent and a car - *Tengo una tienda y un coche*

How much is it? - *¿Cuánto es él?*

### Numbers 1-10

One            *Un*

Two            *Dos*

Three          *Tres*

Four           *Cuatro*

Five           *Cinco*

Six            *Seis*

Seven          *Siete*

Eight          *Ocho*

Nine           *Nueve*

Ten            *Diez*

## Quick reference links

### Refuge telephone numbers

It is not easy to find the correct telephone numbers for all the refuges, especially the smaller ones like Cabana Veronica. Even the tourist offices don't seem to have them and some of the ones on the maps are wrong. So here is a list that was updated and being handed out in 2008.

Refugio de Urriellu – 985 925 200

Refugio de Collao Jermoso – 636 998 727

Cabana Veronica – 689 027 994

To save you the time and effort that I went through gathering this information here are some hyper links to all the useful websites that I found, many of which have been mentioned and linked throughout the book.

### Online articles on the Picos

[Planet Fear Article](#) – this was the article that inspired me to go in the first place.

[Desnivel](#) – Spanish website with English version. Details crags all over Spain.

[Summit Post](#) – gives information about Naranjo de Bulnes.

### Accommodation websites

[Refugio de Urriellu](#) - the refuge at the base of the Naranjo de Bulnes – website offline (Oct 2010)!

[Jermoso Refuge](#) - the refuge at the base of Torre de Penabla

[Cabana Veronica](#) - the refuge above Fuente De cable car

[Naranjo de Bulnes Camping](#) – the only campsite in Arenas de Cabrales

[Albergue de Cabrales](#) – hotel/hostel in Arenas de Cabrales

[Camping La Isla](#) – campsite near Potes

[Casa Gustavo](#) – guest house run by a British couple just outside of Potes

[General accommodation Potes and around](#) – useful tourist information site

[Camping Ribadesella](#) - campsite on the coast

[Formula One hotels](#) – cheap roadside hotels throughout France

### Other useful online links

[LD Lines](#) - cheap crossings from Ramsgate to Ostend

[Norfolk Line](#) - cheap crossings from Dover to Dunkirk

[Brittany Ferries](#) – Plymouth or Portsmouth to Santander

[Auto Europe](#) – car hire site which supplies both Santander airport and Bilbao airport

[Avis](#) - car hire site which supplies both Santander airport and Bilbao airport

[Currency Converter](#) – useful online converter when planning your budget

[Mappy](#) – an excellent route planner site which estimates timings and fuel costs

[Asturias Tourist Office website](#) – useful for local information

[Cantabria Tourist Office website](#) – useful for local information