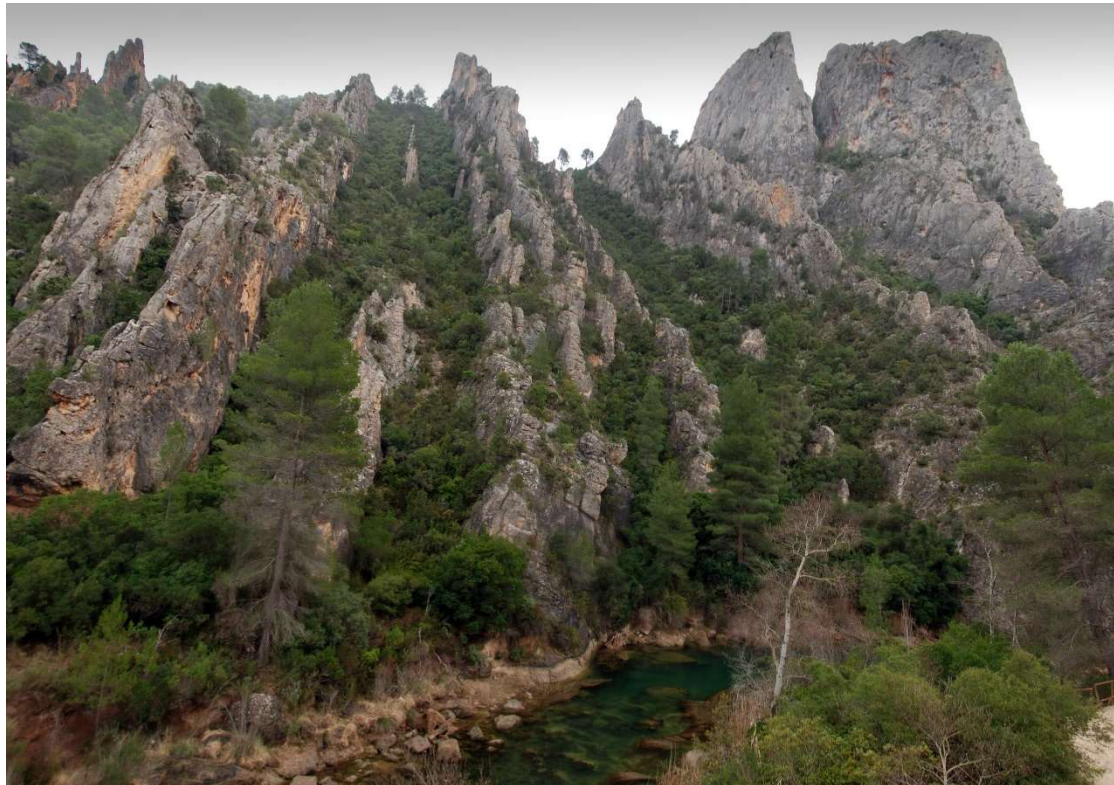


INFORMATION ABOUT THE HOCES DEL CABRIEL NATURAL RESERVE

The Hoces del Cabriel Natural Reserve is a protected area of 16.62 km² in the municipalities of Minglanilla and Iniesta. An area of over 5 km² is included under a stricter protection regime. This natural reserve, the oldest and largest in the province of Cuenca, extends south of the Contreras dam for 12 km alongside the right bank of river Cabriel, the main tributary of river Júcar, as well as the natural boundary between the provinces of Cuenca, Valencia and Albacete.

Surrounded by extensive plains, on arrival we are surprised by its contrast with the impressive shapes carved by erosion at the “Cuchillos de Contreras”, the “Hoces del Cabriel” and the Fonseca valley areas. “Cuchillos” is the Spanish word for “knives” and while “Hoces” stands for “sickles”, it is also used to design the deep and narrow cuts (as made by a sickle) that rivers, after thousands of years open in hard rock -such as limestones- layers.



“Cuchillos de Contreras” viewed from the Natural Reserve itinerary
Photo: Luis Carcavilla

Geology and Geomorphology

The materials that appear in the “Hoces” are the same as those in the “Cuchillos”, but their different structural disposition has allowed the erosive agents (water, wind) to generate two very different types of relief: at the “Hoces” we find cliffs and escarpments up to 100 meters high, while the “Cuchillos” are formed by sets of parallel sharp ridges. These two elements, together with the broader gullies opened on the soft Tertiary bedrocks at the Fonseca valley have set up an exceptionally valuable landscape of geomorphological elements.



“Hoces del Cabriel” viewed from a restricted access area. *Photo: Luis Carcavilla*

Along the path we walk through the “Cuchillos”, but the “Hoces”, located further downstream, are forbidden to hiking on conservation purposes, although from the opposite bank there are several watchpoints to this area. For further information, please visit <http://www.parquesnaturales.gva.es/web/pn-hoces-del-cabriel>.



River Cabriel viewed from Valencia's province river margin. *Photo: JCCM*

Fauna

Due to the variety of habitats found in the natural reserve, the wildlife stands out for its diversity. The abundance of ridges and cliffs favours the settlement of several species of cliff-nesting birds such as the Bonelli's Eagle, the Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon.

But surely the species which is best adapted to this rugged landscape is the Iberian Ibex, which holds a large population in the area. In river Cabriel waters thrives Eurasian Otters and freshwater blenny, a small Mediterranean fish. Other mammals species frequently found are Common Genet, Beech Marten, Red Squirrel,

Eurasian Badger and Garden Dormouse.



Iberian Ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*)
Photo: JCCM

Flora and vegetation

The vegetation landscape of the natural reserve is made up from three types of habitats: Mediterranean forest, crags and ledge vegetation and riparian forest. The well-preserved Mediterranean forest includes a rich thermophilous evergreen scrub or "garriga", composed of Kermes oak, black hawthorn, strawberry tree, wild jasmine, mastic tree or "cornicabra" (called so because of its typical horn-shaped galls). In the rocky ridges, windy and with little humidity available, the chasmophytic vegetation, adapted to those extreme conditions, clings to the bare rock. It includes even some small trees, such as the Juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*), and globe daisies. On the banks of the river the riparian forest includes white poplars, tamarisks, different willow species and reed beds.



Globe daisy (*Globularia alypum*). Photo: JCCM

Natural Reserve Itineraries

The most popular way to visit the natural reserve (the only one until May 2019), is the path between the houses of Mirasol and the tunnels by the "Cuchillos de Contreras". Previously, the number of visitors was limited, but now you can freely access.

Mirasol – Cuchillos de Contreras:

- *Difficulty:* Low
- *Type of Path:* Linear
- *Distance:* 3 km one way, 6 km in total.
- *Time:* 3 hours
- *Height gain:* 35 m

In addition, two new trails are currently being enabled for the visitors: the "Camino de la Fonseca" and the rout to the "Puntal de las Palomas". Please note that parking and signals are not yet built. For further information please contact us by email (rnhocescabriel@jccm.es) or phone (+34 969 17 77 21).

Access:

If you are travelling from Cuenca or from Madrid, you must head to Minglanilla (exit 242) and then take the road N-III towards Valencia. You should follow the brown signs to the "Reserva Natural Hoces del Cabriel". Just after km 234, before crossing over the Contreras dam, you should take a small and winding road to the right (CV-4661 road), signposted "Reserva Natural Hoces del Cabriel" and "Puerto de Contreras". If you come from Valencia you should leave the highway at Villargordo del Cabriel (exit 255) to the N-III road, and cross Contreras dam to arrive at the same junction.

The road passes beside the old inn "Venta de Contreras" and, just below it, there is located our information point, and a car park where buses must stop. You can either walk from here to the start of the Natural Reserve itinerary, or –if by private car- drive on. About 250 meters after the information point, there is a sharp detour to the right, signposted "Reserva Natural" and "Sendero Interpretativo". The very narrow paved road leads you downstream the banks of river Cabriel for 1.3 km to yet another car park on your right. Although you will find signs claiming that you enter a private property, the road is public and you are allowed to drive and walk through it.

From the car park you should walk another 220 m along the road to get to "Casas de Mirasol". The itinerary starts here, and you should not leave the track until you reach the tunnels excavated in rock under the "Cuchillos". You can see too an iron bridge near to the tunnels, this is the end of the route and you must retrace your steps.

Observations and Recommendations:

Currently there is no signposting along the path, so it is recommended to download NatuCuenca mobile application to obtain field information. You can walk the trail at any time of the year, but it is recommended to avoid the central hours of the day during the summer, since it can be very hot. There are no water sources, so you should carry your own water.



Iron bridge over river Cabriel, at the end of the itinerary. *Photo: JCCM*