LA TINENÇA DE BENIFASSÀ



Excursions in the Tinença de Benifassà

La Tinença de Benifassà and the surrounding areas deserve leisurely exploration. You might like to leave your car at some moment and discover the area at the calm pace of the hiker or the silent pedalling of the cyclist.

The magnificent opportunities provided by this area for nature excursions are fully covered by the long-distance and short-distance hiker's routes known in Spain as the "Senderos de Gran Recorrido" (GRs) and "Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido" (PRs). These are traditional trails signposted by hiking groups and shown in a number of auidebooks.

A) Long-Distance Routes

The GR-7 crosses the district from NE to SW, linking up various towns such as Fredes, Boixar, Vallibona and Morella. The sections of this route between Boixar, Fredes and Pinar Pla are fairly easy to cover and relatively short. They are signposted with red and white painted marks. For further details, see the following publications:Topoguía del sector Paüls-Fredes (Federació d'Entitats Excursionistes de Catalunya, Barcelona, 1973) and Topoguía del sector Fredes-Sant

Joan de Penyagolosa

(Diputació de Castelló,

Castelló, 1991).

B) Short-Distance Routes (PRs):

The GR-7 branches off into a series of shorter routes indicated with white and yellow painted marks known as PRs.

PR-V-75: With 13 variants that join the towns in the Tinença de Benifassà, providing spectacular views of places such as Portell de l'Infern ("hell's port"), or the Salt de Robert. This route is documented in the Topoguía guidebook from the Centro Excursionista de Castellón.

PR-C-16-1: This route connects the "Barranc de la Tenalla" (a gorge) to the mountain shelter at Font Ferrera. Recommended for relatively experienced hikers. PR-C-82: Running from Casetes Velles, in the

heart of the

massif of Ports

de Beseit, this

long and

itinerary

before

route follows a

complicated

reaching the

town of Sènia. From here, it follows the river course to the Ulldecona dam.

In addition to the signposted GR and PR routes. La Tinença de Benifassà has a wide range of hiking routes various days, one-day excursions or shorter walks. For further information, consult the guidebook Els Ports de Morella y Benifassar. Port de Beceite by R. Muñoz Badía

Along the many local roads with very little traffic and on quiet forest trails, cyclists have many opportunities for enjoyment. For well-trained cyclists, the route from Pobla de Benifassà-Boixar-Morella-Vallibona-La Sènia has tough mountain passes with magnificent views which are well worth the effort. Mountain-bikers can follow a

forest trail running from

Fredes to Els Ports de

Beseit.

(Castellón, 1989).

Useful tips

advised to consult the guidebooks mentioned above and use detailed maps. The district of La Tinença de Benifassà is covered by the following 1:50,000 scale maps: Peñarroya de Tastavins 30-20 (520); Beceite 31-20 (521); Morella 30-21 (545); and Ulldecona 31-21 (546).

All hikers or bikers are

You can reach the Tinença de Benifassà from the A-7 motorway taking exit 42 towards Vinaròs (N-238) and turning off almost immediately on the CV-11 to San Rafael del Río. From here, take the road to La Sènia (entering via La Sènia Nord) and then the CV-105 to La Pobla de Benifassà.

- Along the N-238 to

There are two other access routes from the N-340 on its way through Vinaròs:

- Along the N-232 from Vinaròs-Morella-Zaragoza, drive up to Torre Miró and from here take the road to Castell de Cabres.

Ulldecona, just before exit 42 on the A-7 motorway, take the CV-11 to San Rafael del Río. From here, drive to La Sènia (entering via La Sènia Nord) and then take the CV-105 to La Pobla de Benifassà.



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LAND OF VALENCIA

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t is surrounded and closed in on all sides by tall calcareous mountains, snow-covered in winter, which penetrate to the midst of it, alternating with deep gorges... On the northern heights grow beeches and pines; dense, deep forests of these can often be seen, as can abundant holm oaks... There is an immense boxwood forest near the village, which for this reason is called Boixar." This is how the 18th-century botanist and naturalist Cavanilles

described the Tinença de Benifassà, located in the northernmost corner of the Land of Valencia.

Two centuries after the Valencian botanist's description, the landscape

of the area impresses the spectator with the selfsame intensity of old, as befits a habitat unaltered by the human hand. With its varying relief of spectacular mountain summits, hillocks, ravines and gorges, this massif harbours wet forest plant species such as yew, beech, holly and black pines. The northern slopes are cloaked in rich, verdant forests where boxwood, ferns and junipers grow. The botanical wealth of the Tinença

de Benifassà is completed by an abundance of plants that are entirely unique to

The Tinença de Benifassà once belonged to the fief of the abbot of the local monastery, with seven villages under its vassalage: La Pobla de Benifassà, Bellestar, Castell de Cabres, Fredes, Boixar,

Coratxà and Bel.

This is why the area has also been known as the

"Seven Settlements of Benifassà".

Situated in the centre of the area is La Pobla de Benifassà, which serves as the seat of the township.

The town has a handsome collection of stone houses whose

wooden balconies are conceived as suntraps, set along streets that ascend to the bell tower of the church of the Assumption built in the 13th century. On the way up the main street there is a hotel – a warm, inviting refuge in which visitors will find comfort and peace, and serving as the local headquarters from which to visit the surrounding

The marvellous countryside in the environs provides shelter for forest songbirds such as nightingales, robins and coal tits, and animals such as the mountain cat and the wild boar; the tall mountain peaks are home to untamed mountain goats and nesting areas for eagles and falcons.

During the Moorish domination of the area, life in the township was centred around the Arab castle of Beni-Hassan. Later, following the reconquest, King James I had another building constructed next to the castle, which became the first Cistercian foundation in the Land of Valencia, the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Benifassà.

Today, the monastery is still used by Carthusian nuns of the Order of St Bruno.
The church is open to visitors on
Thursdays from 1 to 3 pm.

To the north of **Fredes**, a spring feeds the river **Sènia**, whose riverbed borders the northern limits of the Land of

Valencia, running into the Ulldecona dam, where trout fishers gather before its green-hued waters

reflecting the pines growing around its banks.

At the foot of the dam, in the rock shelter known as the A

dels Rossegadors, some remains of the first human settlements in this rugged region have been found. The cave, which is now protected with an iron

grille, contains interesting prehistoric paintings depicting hunting and fishing scenes.

Bellestar is the closest village to La Pobla de Benifassà.

The houses here, like those of Fredes and Coratxà, remain closed during the winter season, opening again in spring till the end of autumn to accommodate neighbours and visitors who enjoy the peace and beauty of villages such as these which have been left unchanged by the passage of time.

In the Romanesque-style church of the village there is a clock under which the stone representation of a Cistercian nobleman can be seen.

To the north lies **Fredes**, surrounded by extraordinary countryside, with dense, verdant forests.

Heading towards *Morella*, we arrive at *Boixar*, a village lying 1,000 metres above sea level and named after the boxwood forests in the environs which once provided wood for craft industries making ploughing equipment and tableware. The popular architecture

of the village, its scenic views and the walk through the tunnel of trees on the way to nearby **Coratxà** are truly gratifying memories that all visitors are sure to retain.

Further along the way is the village of **Coratxà**, with its church of St James exhibiting porticoes and a broad bell tower next to a cemetery that conserves ancient Christian monograms sculpted in stone.

Set amidst a chain of mountains towering above 1,000 metres in height lies Castell de Cabres, surrounded by dense pine forests that cover practically the entire municipality.

Of Moorish origin, this village located

in the westernmost part of the Tinença, was once a mining centre. Coal merchants left from here to sell their wares in nearby

Morella, using the same road that still joins this village to

Torre Miró.

To the south of La Pobla de Benifassà we find the little village of **Bel**, whose whitewashed stone houses with wrought iron balconies run along two straight streets opening onto a small plaza containing a Romanesque church.

Last but not least, we should pay tribute to the noble inhabitants of these lands, whose friendly, hospitable character will certainly make the visitor feel that he or she is truly welcome in the Tinença de Benifassà.



