



PENEDA-GERÊS NATIONAL PARK

The PNPG (Parque Nacional da Peneda-Gerês - Peneda-Gerês National Park) occupies an area of approximately 70.000 hectares, comprising territory of 22 parishes distributed by the communes of Arcos de Valdevez, Melgaço, Montalegre, Ponte da Barca and Terras de Bouro. This Protected Area and the contiguous Spanish natural park of the Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés constitute, since 1997, the Transboundary Park Gerês-Xurés, with an approximate area of 100.000 hectares.

why was it classified as a national park?

"By creating the first national park in the continent, one seeks to enable a long term scientific planning within the Peneda-Gerês environment, thus valuing man and the existing natural resources, having in mind educational, tourist and scientific purposes. Following a protection ethics, it is aimed at enabling the conservation of the soil, water, flora, fauna and landscape within a vast mountain region of about 60.000 hectares - nearly all already submitted to the forest regime. This will open the area to the vast possibilities of tourism, while maintaining a net of ecological reservoirs of high scientific level, both national and international."

These are the words from the Preamble to the Decree-Law nº 187 of 8th May 1971, which justified the creation of PNPG.

▪ the legislation

The PNPG was created by the Decree-Law n. 187/71 of 8th May, thus being the most ancient Protected Area in Portugal; its management plan and respective regulation were approved in 1995, by the Council of Ministers Resolution n. 134/95 of 11th November.

This protected area is also a Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) according to the "Birds Directive" (79/409/EEC of 2nd April), which became the national Decree n.



75/91 of 14th February. It is also a Site, created according to the "Habitats Directive" (92/43/EEC of 21st May), which became the Decree-Law n. 226/97 of 27th August.

The Palheiros-Albergaria forest constitutes a Biogenetic Reserve included in the network created by the European Council.

the "Habitats Directive"

There are several natural priority habitats, particularly peat-bogs, humid atlantic and temperate moors of *Erica ciliaris* and *Erica tetralix*, herbaceous formations of *Nardus*, abundant in species, siliceous strata of the mountain areas and alluvial forests of *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*. As far as the flora is concerned, it is the only place where it is known to exist the Gerês-fern *Woodwardia radicans* and other endemic (Portuguese or Iberian), rare or endangered species of our flora.

As far as the fauna is concerned there are in this Site priority species such as the wolf *Canis lupus* and rare and/or limited distributed species such as *Aquila chrysaetos*.

physical features

The PNPG is situated in a rough mountain region usually above 700 metres high, going over 1500 metres high in Nevosa (Serra do Gerês). The predominance of granite rocks accounts for both the rough relief and the bare character of the hills, as seen in the cliffs, troughs, blocks and ball shaped granite rocks... In the extreme Northwest of the Castro Laboreiro plateau and between Lindoso and São Bento do Cando there are schist, metagraywacke and quartzite. Another important geological aspect are the existent glacial forms – steep-sided U-shaped valleys, morays, trough valleys, polished rocks by glaciers – that account for important climate changes in the past.

Valleys and gullies house a vast hydrographic network (part of the basins of the rivers Minho, Lima, Cávado) sustained by abundant and regular rainfalls. The chemical richness of the mineral water allows it to be used both for drinking and medical purposes.



The climate is subject to Atlantic, Continental and Mediterranean influences, showing variations according to the height and to the distance to the sea.

- **contrast between the sharp and bare relief of the granite of Gerês, in the foreground, and other types of granite**

The granite rocks were formed during the Orogenesis in the Primary Era. The oldest ones, dating from circa 300 million years, can be found in the Serra do Soajo and Serra Amarela, on the plateau of Castro Laboreiro and in the extreme East of the Serra do Gerês. The most recent granites (29 million years) can be found in the Serra da Peneda and Serra do Gerês, accounting for their rough relief.

- **the Gerês fracture seen from the Caniçada shallow lake**

The geological Gerês-Lovios fracture (Spain) is related to late tensions in the Primary Era, which gave origin to a late flaw that has cut and dislocated the granites of the region. The fracture is NNE and SSW oriented, being responsible for the dislocation of the valleys of the rivers Cávado and Homem and by the thermal springs of the Vila do Gerês and the Caldo river (Spain).

- **typical steep-sided U-shaped valley and boulder clay revealing the action of the ancient glaciers**

Important climate changes took place during the Quaternary. The glaciation registered during that period reached the middle latitudes and is made evident by the remains in the Serra do Gerês and Serra da Peneda.

habitats, flora and fauna

Due to the fact that the PNPG is situated near the border of the Eurosiberian and Mediterranean biogeographic regions, many plants of both origins occur. Some existent species are of a great floristic value, such as the Gerês fern *Woodwardia radicans* and the daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* subsp. *nobilis* associated with bushes; the Gerês lily *Iris boissieri* and the thrifts, such as the *Armeria humilis* subsp. *humilis*, associated



with dry bushes; of the round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and the cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, associated with humid areas.

Among the most characteristic habitats of the PNPG one can point out: the oak forest, the mixed forest of deciduous and evergreen trees; the riparian vegetation, with the yew, alder and ash-trees; the peat-bogs and humid bushes, rare and vulnerable habitats which are developed in wet soils; and moorlands, furze-fields and several kinds of broom fields, which occupy ancient areas of oak forest.

- **flora and vegetation**

- **the oak forest**

The oak forest is a mixed one, stratified and dominated both by the English oak *Quercus robur* and by the Pyrenean oak *Quercus pyrenaica*, varying the species of the different strata according to the ecology of the region. The regions influenced by the Atlantic, where the climate is milder and rainier, are dominated by the English oak, along with the birch-tree *Betula alba*, the sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and gean *Prunus avium*.

As one moves towards the interior of the country and to higher areas, the climate shows continental characteristics, with more severe Winters and hotter and drier Summers, and the English oak is substituted by the Pyrenean oak.

The cork oak *Quercus suber* exists only in sun-drenched, less exposed areas, being therefore less frequent.

- **the Gerês lily *Iris boissieri***

The Gerês lily, an Iberian endemism, is a bulbous plant, which appears in rocky and poor soils, and in rock cracks being more common in the high bushes of Serra do Gerês. Its attractive violaceae flowers, which contrast with the wilderness of the habitat, lead to the random picking of the plant, thus threatening the survival of the species.

- **the holly *Ilex aquifolium***

It is a dioecious species, of a very slow growth, which appears in the oak forests, occupying the bush stratum. In the PNPG, at the Ramiscal wood, the holly constitutes a



wooded area, which is unique at a national level. In winter, the holly serves as shelter to some birds, to the roe deer and to the wild boar and its fruits, which are toxic to man, feed the animals. The holly is decreasing in number since its habitat is being reduced due to deforestation, fire and its use as Christmas decoration.

- **fauna**

As far as the fauna is concerned, the PNPG is greatly diversified due to the combination of flora richness with a unique physiography.

Among the invertebrates one can point out two species of butterflies – *Euphydryas aurinia* and *Callimorpha quadripunctata* – due to its conservation status – a beetle *Lucanus cervus* and a slug *Geomalacus maculosus*.

From the 235 species of vertebrates, 204 are both nationally and internationally protected and 71 belong to the endangered species list of the Red Book of the Vertebrates of Portugal.

There are four fish species in the watercourses of the PNPG, from which one can point out the salmon trout *Salmo trutta* as the most characteristic one, and the common eel *Anguilla anguilla*, due to its conservation status. Among other species associated with water courses, one can stress the importance of the Pyrenean desman *Galemys pyrenaicus*, the otter *Lutra lutra*, the dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, the lizard *Lacerta schreiberi*, the Iberian frog *Rana iberica* and the golden-striped salamander *Chioglossa lusitanica*.

There are 147 identified bird species, being a great part of them migrant. The golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, the chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, the eagle owl *Bubo bubo*, the honey buzzard *Pernis apivorus* and the whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* can be pointed out due to their conservation status or for their limited distribution area in Portugal.

From the 15 known bat species in the PNPG, 10 have an endangered status.

In this area we can also find other particularly important species, such as the pine marten *Martes martes*, the stoat *Mustela erminea*, the vipers *Vipera latastei* and *Vipera seoanei* and the wolf *Canis lupus*, a strictly protected species by various legislation. The red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* population is in great geographic expansion.



- **the Iberian wolf *Canis lupus***

The PNPG constitutes one of the last shelters of this predator and its distribution has remained unaltered during the last years. This species is classified as "in danger of extinction" and one of the main threats to its conservation is direct persecution (poisons and traps)

- **the Golden-striped salamander *Chioglossa lusitanica***

An Iberian endemism, strictly associated with extreme humid environments, it has abundant populations within the PNPG territory.

- **the golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos***

This is a species with an "in danger of extinction" conservation status, to be found mainly in the crags (where it usually builds its nests) and in steep valleys. Being scarce in its distribution area, it is at the moment subject of a conservation project held in the PNPG.

the human occupation

- **a humanised landscape**

At the bottom of the valleys, the shredded agricultural space, either greening or brownish, shows the culture rhythm during the year; climbing the hillsides, one can find the pastures and the bushes which guarantee the firewood, as well as the grass and herbage and bush for the bedding of the cattle; in the higher areas one can find vast extensions used for extensive pasturing. The population spots are associated with more levelled areas, which are sun-drenched and next to water streams. Apart from that, the constructions are built on the rocky areas, in order to make the more fertile soils available to the field cropping. The landscape became richer with constructive shapes, such as walls, watercourses, causeways, piers, granaries, pitfalls, mills, shepherd shelters or religious icons... Nowadays, the big water plans of the shallow lakes as well as linear elements, such as new roads, are also parts of this millenary landscape.



- **the history**

The PNPG territory has been subject to occupation since protohistoric times, fact that is proved by the dolmens – Castro Laboreiro's plateau, Mezio's gate, Serra Amarela's plains or Mourela's elevations – by the Gião's stone sanctuary or by the Ermida's menhir-statue, among other remains. The old castles from Outeiro, Parada, Ermida or Tourém are the most important remains dating from the Iron Age. We can recall the Roman influence, which took place from 138 BC on, based on various remains, being the roman way certainly the most important of all. The Middle Ages are revealed through monasteries such as the one of Santa Maria de Pitões das Júnias, castles such as the ones of Castro Laboreiro, Lindoso or Montalegre and through abandoned medieval villages such as Pomba, the one in Gaveira, and S. Vicente do Gerês, in the Beredo wood.

- **the roman way**

The roman way or "geira", name given to the road n. 18 of the *Itinerarum Antonini*, is a military road supposedly built in the last third of the 1st century AC, connecting *Bracara Augusta* (Braga) to *Asturica Augyta* (Astorga). One of its best-preserved parts is situated in the interior of PNPG, between Campo do Gerês and Portela do Homem. Along this circuit there are archaeological remains, such as milestones (a great part of them being engraved), bridges' ruins, *mutatios* (changing stations) and *mansions* (resting places, unfortunately covered by the water of the Vilarinho das Furnas shallow lake during a great part of the year).

- **the traditional economic activities**

Cattle breeding and farming are the dominant activities in the most part of the PNPG territory: an agriculture characterised by the ownership of small pieces of land combined with the flock tending, being the autochthonous races an important source of income. The most important bovine races are the “barrosã”, and the one known as



“cachena”, a race of small bovines; in the caprine animals the “bravia”, wild breed, and in the ovine animals the “bordaleira” (portuguese sheep with curly fleece). The bee keeping and the smoked meat production are further examples of important traditional activities. Nevertheless, considering the growth experienced by the tertiary and secondary economy sectors, agriculture is no longer, for many families, the main source of income.

circuits

• itinerary by car

- Type of itinerary: historical / panoramic
- Departure and arrival place: Ponte da Barca
- Approximate extension: 170 km
- Approximate duration: 1 day
- Facilities: restaurants and lodging in the main places of the itinerary, namely in Lindoso, Soajo and Castro Laboreiro

1. Lindoso - Castle:

Related to the defence of the gates of Serra Amarela and Vale de Cabril, the Lindoso castle, founded in the early 13th century, was restored under D. Dinis's orders. From the 14th century on, its history mingles with the one of the Araújo de Lóbios family, since this was the family, which took care of the castle for many years. The castle was occupied by the Spaniards as a result of the Restoration wars and was recovered by the Portuguese in 1664. The fortress remained occupied by military troops during the 18th century, until 1895, when it stopped being used for military purposes.

2. Soajo - Pelourinho:

The “pelourinho” (a stone column in a public place, where criminals were punished) means that Soajo once was the chief-town of the commune. It is original due to its high relief anthropomorphic stone figure and a triangular stone at the top, which is apparently



representing a piece of bread at the tip of a dart. This detail is related to the fact that, during the 13th century, the population of Soajo had to defend the Galo gate, due to their bordering geographic condition. D. Dinis had supposedly granted the population local privileges, establishing that no nobleman could stay in Soajo more than the required time to chill a hot piece of bread at the tip of a dart.

3. Tibo - Belvedere:

From the Tibo belvedere one has a panoramic view of the valley of the Peneda river, and one can notice not only its steep-sided U-shaped feature, characteristic of the glacial troughs, but also the rectilinear shape in the flawed valleys. One can also distinguish, in the Peneda, some farming areas and, heading north, the Sanctuary of Senhora da Peneda and the Portela do Lagarto.

4. Senhora da Peneda - Sanctuary:

The patron saint of the Senhora da Peneda Sanctuary is Senhora das Neves, referring to the severe local climate (with frequent snowfalls – "neves"). The well-known sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte (Braga) inspired this sanctuary's architecture, but its originality derives from the fact that its constructed structures had to be adapted to the territory and to its morphology. The most curious detail of this fitting to the surrounding landscape is probably the occupation of the recesses of the granite area, known as the Penedo da Meadinha, by the outbuildings of the church.

5. Castro Laboreiro - Castle:

Apparently built on the ruins of a former old castle's area, the original founding date of the castle of Castro Laboreiro is unknown. It is supposed to have been built during Count Hermenegildo's life, whom Afonso III of Leão would have granted lands in the Lima river area. Being once dominated by the Moors, it was conquered by D. Afonso Henriques in 1140, who restored and walled it in. Nowadays, following a short pedestrian circuit, we can visit these walls.



- **pedestrian circuit 1**

Path of Preguiça: Oak Forest ecology

- Type of itinerary: natural / geological / panoramic
- Departure and arrival place: Casa da Preguiça
- Approximate extension: 5 km (several signalled exits to the national road n. 308)
- Approximate duration: 3 hours
- Level of difficulty: medium
- Facilities: various lodging possibilities and restaurants in the parish of Vilar da Veiga. Lodging also possible in the Nature Houses (Casas da Natureza) of the PNPG (further information at the end); in the camping sites of Videeiro and Cerdeira and in the youth hostel of Vilarinho das Furnas.

The circuit presents flora items, which include diversified species and a structure relatively similar to the primitive flora of the area. Apart from this, there are also flora items that suffered the impact of human activities, namely agriculture, flock tending, forest production, fire and the introduction of exotic species.

- **pedestrian circuit 2**

Path of Mezio

- Type of itinerary: historical / natural
- Departure and arrival place: Interpretation centre of PNPG in Mezio
- Approximate extension: 2 km
- Approximate duration: 1h30m
- Level of difficulty: low
- Facilities: meals in Soajo and Lindoso. Farm and village tourism houses in both parishes; Nature Houses (Casas da Natureza) of the PNPG (further information at



the end); Camping sites of S. Miguel de Entre Ambos-os-Rios, Travanca and Lamas de Mouro.

During the circuit one may find evidence related to the territory's occupation, namely the existence of megalithic remains (dolmens) and signs of a more recent human presence, being the ruins of a *branda*, a village occupied in milder seasons, a good example of it.

This is an area which was subject to the action of the forestry commission at the end of the first half of the 20th century and which has a great diversity of flora species, allowing a good approach to this subject.

Lodging

Lamas de Mouro Camping Site

Lamas de Mouro

4960-170 Melgaço

Tel. (+351) 251 465129

Telem: (+351) 934 837 445

E-mail: info@versana.pt

Site: <http://www.versana.pt>

Entre Ambos-os-Rios Camping Site

S. Miguel – Entre Ambos-os-Rios

4980 Ponte da Barca

Tel. (+351) 258 588 361

Vidoeiro Camping Site

Vilar da Veiga

4845 Gerês

Tel. (+351) 253 391 289

Travanca Camping Site (Bouças-Donas)

Cabana Maior



4970 Arcos de Valdevez
Tel.: (+351) 258 526 105

Cerdeira Camping Site
Campo do Gerês
4840-030 Terras de Bouro
Tel. (+351) 253 351 005
Fax (+351) 253 353 315

Trote-Gerês Camping Site
Eiredo – Cabril
5470 Cabril
Tel. / Fax (+351) 253 659 860

Vilarinho das Furnas Youth Hostel
Campo do Gerês
4840-030 Terras de Bouro
Tel. (+351) 253 351 339
Fax (+351) 253 352 864

Headquarters:

Avenida António Macedo
4704-538 Braga
Tel. (+351) 253 203 480
Fax (+351) 253 613 169
E-mail: pnpg@icnb.pt
<http://www.icnb.pt>

Environmental Education Centre of Vidoeiro
Vidoeiro – Vilar da Veiga
4845-067 Gerês
Tel. (+351) 253 390 110



Fax (+351) 253 391 496

Nature houses: Shelter house

Barreiro – Castro Laboreiro – Melgaço

Nature houses: Resort

Bico de Pássaro – Lamas de Mouro – Melgaço

Information and reservations:

Camping Sites (Entre Ambos-os-Rios, Vidoeiro and Travanca) and Nature houses, in the Reservation Centre of the PNPG regions:

Largo da Misericórdia, 10

4980-613 Ponte da Barca

Tel. (+351) 258 452 250

Fax (+351) 258 452 450

E-mail: geral@adere-pg.com

www.adere-pg.pt

National Park

One understands the designation of national park as referring to an area that contains one or more ecosystems, which are either unchanged or little changed by human action, and which encompasses representative samples of typical natural regions, of natural and humanised landscapes, of animal and vegetal species, of geomorphologic areas or of species habitats with ecological, scientific and educational interest.

Hence, a national park classification enables the adoption of measures, which allow the protection of the ecosystems ecological integrity and avoid the exploitation and over-occupation of the natural resources.