# THE "VAQUEROS DE ALZADA" OF Torrestío

THE VAQUEROS DE ALZADA (SEASONAL TRANSHUMANT COWHERDS AND FARMERS) OF TORRESTÍO ARE A SPECIFIC ETHNOGRAPHIC PHENOMENON IN RURAL AREAS OF CENTRAL ASTURIAS, AS THEY ARE FAMILIES WHO HAVE PRACTISED PASTORALISM THROUGHOUT THEIR HISTORY.

Since time immemorial, as they themselves say, the transhumance cowherds of Torrestío have moved seasonally up from the coastal lowlands of Asturias, a province in the north-west of Spain, to the Astur-Leonese mountain passes in the central Cantabrian Range, together with their cattle and household goods. In the cold winter months, they would return to their settlements in the central region of lowland Asturias, called "las Marinas", which, as the name indicates, are areas near the sea. This traditional seasonal movement of household (family, belongings and domestic animals) between lowland and mountain pastures is nowadays termed vertical transhumance.

The renowned neoclassical statesman and writer, Jovellanos (1744-1811) mentioned the Vaqueros de Alzada de Torrestío in the following way: "The whole summer and part of the autumn were spent in Torrestío, a village in the region of Babia (Province of León), in the centre of the Astur-Leonese mountain range, taking advantage of the fertile pastures of its mountain passes". And he described their village of Torrestío as a large place, with a population of more than one hundred; all cattle herders, in winter they migrate with their cattle to the areas on the coast, and in summer, the women take care of the cattle while the men, in addition, earn an extra living by transporting goods between the meseta and the coastal villages and vice-versa".

The Vaqueros de Alzada of Torrestío brought their own central Asturian language to Torrestío with them, making it a sort of linguistic island, since it was surrounded by villages using the western Asturian language, often referred to as Bable or Pachuezo. For this reason, they were always called vaqueros(us)/as(es) ("cowherd" in the Asturian language of central Asturias) but never vaqueiros/as (the same, in the language of Western Asturias). They also left their traits in Torrestio's toponymy and in other cultural areas, as can be seen in the fact that Torrestío possesses the largest ethnographic collection of Astur-Leonese horreos (a traditional wooden granary supported on stone or wood stilts) of Babia.

## LAS MARINAS

THE NAME LAS MARINAS REFERS TO THE CENTRAL ASTURIAN LOWLANDS NEAR THE COAST WHERE THE VAQUEROS DE ALZADA HAD THEIR WINTER SETTLEMENTS.

However, many vaqueros from the Las Marinas municipalities of Castrillón, Corvera, Gijón, Gozón, Grado, Quirós, Salas and Teverga opted to make their winter dwellings a permanent residence, no doubt due to the economic push of central Asturias which offered better living and working conditions, and abandoned the transhumance way of life. A large number of families who wintered in various villages in the municipality of Llanera also gave up transhumance at the beginning of the last century. However, many of these still have houses and farms in Torrestío as well as feelings of personal identity towards the village.

Today only a few families from the municipalities of Las Regueras, Llanera, Siero, Oviedo and Santo Adriano continue to practise transhumance, although very differently from their ancestors.

#### SOCIETY

In some municipalities, such as in the parish of Villardeveyo in Llanera (Ref: J.A. Vaquero), the vaqueros suffered social marginalization. However, this was not widespread and it might have been due to economic and tax-paying issues, considering that 91% of those on the census in Torrestío in 1816 were registered as hidalgos, who were lower-ranking gentry either by lineage (Notorio) or by royal privilege (Privilexo).

# LIFE IN THE MOUNTAINS



THE CONCENTRATED POPULATION IN THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF TORRESTÍO PROVIDED A CLOSER COEXISTENCE BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS THAN THAT IN THE DISPERSED ASTURIAN VILLAGES.

Village rules were agreed on in Open Council, for example, obligatory communal work for repairing the tracks and paths; voluntary work to bring in the harvest or to clear a sudden snowfall. Since all of this required mutual help in their precarious existence, it prevented individualism to a certain extent.

Festivals also brought people together. At the Sacramento festival, on August 17th, there was

dancing, with an accordion and bagpipes playing music from both Asturias and Babia. This would also happen when newlyweds held a dance and gave wine and wedding bread.

Men from Babia courted Asturian maids, reputed to be modern, good-looking girls. As the traditional rhyme goes: "You're wearing a red skirt, vaquera from Torrestío, you look Asturian". But marriages were always made between vaqueros. Vaquero families sought to maintain and expand their patrimony, and often exercised their power with marriage contracts regulating the management and transfer of assets.



Front page photograpy: E. Martínez

Cartography: Servicios de Gestión Medioambiental SIGMA, www. sigma-sl.com



09 18 97 886

www.quiros.es

100194986

sa.bzbo1q.www

88 4 08 38 00

64 18 04 79

www.llanera.es

AYTQ. LLANERA

sə.obəivo.www

AYTO. OVIEDO

AYTO. PROAZA

AYTO. QUIRÓS





www.aytosanemiliano.es AYTO. SAN EMILIANO



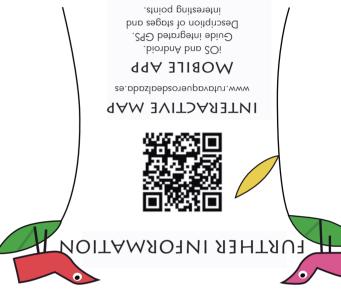
190194986 www.santoadriano.org ONAIRO ADRIANO

94 06 67 889 www.lasregueras.es AYTO. LAS REGUERAS











### CATTLE

Since the main source of income was livestock, this required good pasture management. The so-called derrota system allowed animals to graze on private, unfenced farms once the harvest had been taken

CATTLE WERE SOLD AT FAIRS. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE, AND WHICH ARE STILL CELEBRATED TODAY, WERE THOSE of San Emiliano (Babia, León) on 10TH AUGUST AND 20TH SEPTEMBER AND THAT OF LA MAGDALENA (TEVERGA, ASTURIAS) IN MID-AUGUST.

in. Rules were made for this purpose in Open Council, and a guard was hired to this compliance.

In the past, as is still the case today, the mastiff dog was the

indispensable companion to the herds, accompanying them and protecting them from wolves. The vaqueros would take food up to them daily and, from time to time, also salt for the cattle.

#### **COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES**

Cattle-farming was complemented with vegetable crops, cereals and legumes, intended for own consumption, or for sale if there were enough.

The women made butter or knitted merino wool socks, while the men carried out animal-related trades such as farriers, castrators or healers. In addition, a large number of vaquero families also worked as muleteers, transporting goods with pack animals between Asturias and Castile and vice-versa (in 1752, of the 125 families in Torrestío, there were 61 muleteers with 253 pack horses and 3 mules).

# THE ASTURIAN TERM "ALZADA" REFERS TO THE PRACTICE OF ALPINE

THE "ALZADA"

© Arnaud Späni. Cesión Ayto. Las Regueras

TRANSHUMANCE, TO THE SEASONAL TRANSFER OF THE VAQUERO HOUSEHOLDS WITH THEIR BELONGINGS FROM THE LOWLANDS TO THE HIGH MOUNTAIN PASSES. THE VAQUEROS WERE HUMBLE PEOPLE WHO CARRIED THEIR BELONGINGS FROM THEIR WINTER TO THEIR SUMMER DWELLINGS ON THE BACK OF A DONKEY OR A HORSE, OR EVEN PACKED BETWEEN THE HORNS OF A COW AS, WITHOUT ANY GOOD CART TRACKS, THEY WOULD CUT ACROSS COUNTRY ALONG SIMPLE PATHS AND TRAILS.

They moved with all their assets: cows, horses, sheep, pigs, chickens (for eggs) and implements. In time, a family would have household goods in both places, making it no longer necessary to transport

The moment of departure was a moment of insecurity, as for three days they would be dogged by danger and weariness. If any animals

AS TRAVELLERS, THEY SOAKED UP THE POPULAR WISDOM OF THE PLACES THEY PASSED THROUGH AND THE PEOPLE THEY KNEW, FORGING AN INTERESTING CULTURE OF OPEN-MINDEDNESS WHICH HAS BEEN PASSED DOWN THROUGH THE GENERATIONS FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN.

died during the journey, the year's earnings were lost. For this reason, both men and women turned for protection to Saint Antonio and also to the supernatural of any kind.

Imagine their journeys, even in the mid-20th century: no phone, no compass, no clock, wearing only rudimentary clothes and footwear and with no more help than their knowledge of the natural

world, the bonds of friendship they made on the way and the courage that characterized them.





# THE ROUTES

SO THAT THE DIFFERENT TRANSHUMANCE ROUTES USED BY THE VAQUEROS WHEN THEY MOVED SEASONALLY WILL NOT BE LOST AND THAT WE CAN STILL ENJOY THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL RICHNESS OF THE PLACES THROUGH WHICH THE VAQUEROS OF TORRESTÍO PASSED, THIS LEAFLET OFFERS YOU THE MOST FREQUENT ROUTES TAKEN, DESCRIBED

IN EIGHT STAGES.

Depending on the parish of origin and the weather conditions, the vaqueros would use different routes to get up to or down from Torrestío.

They had to stop overnight on the way, sometimes in the open air, others in chapels, in houses of people they knew or in places where they were offered lodgings, for example, in exchange for butter or peas or for their services as animal castrators or healers.

# THE "RUVAT" TRANSHUMANCE **ASSOCIATION**

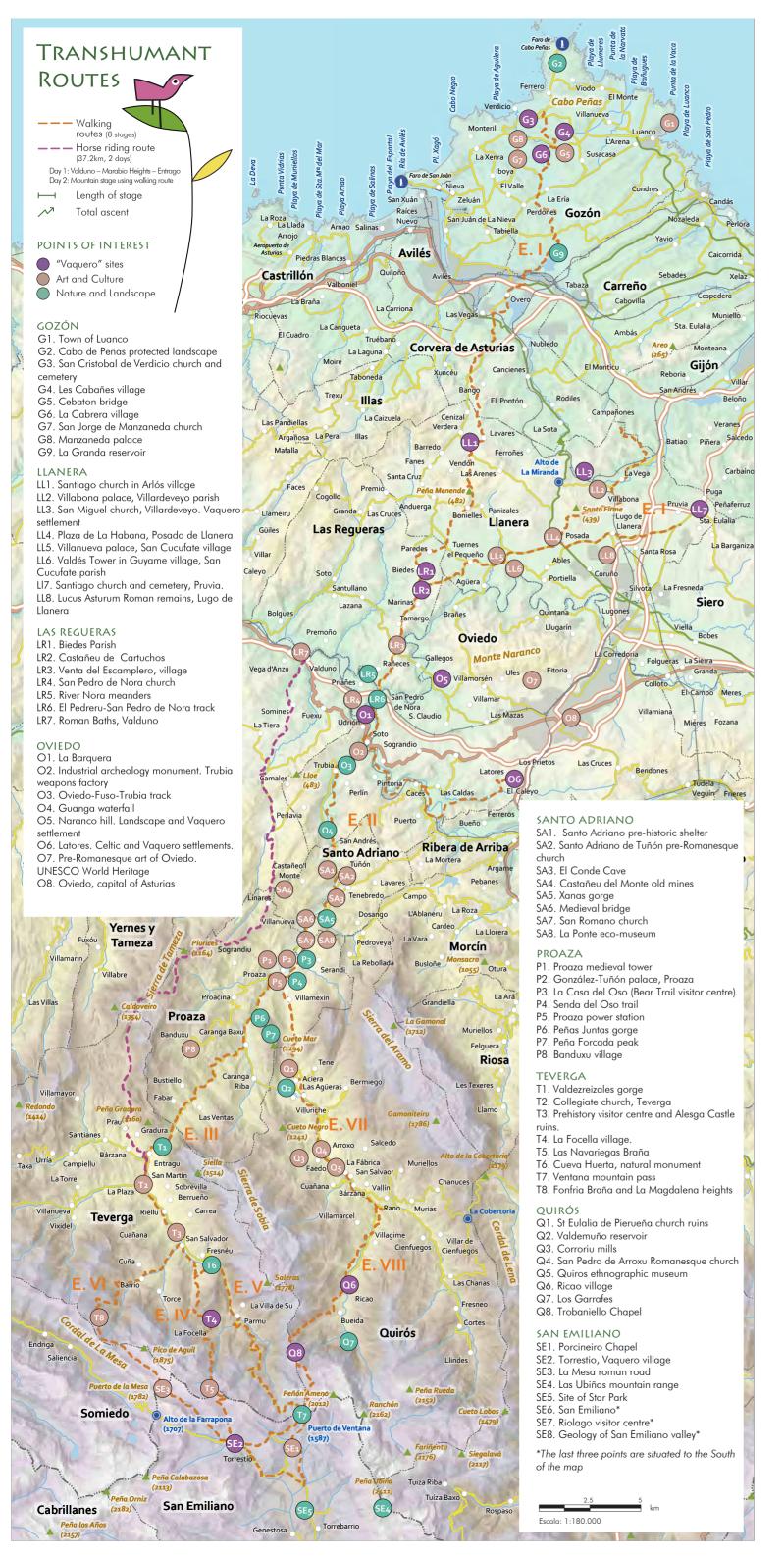
The project to dynamize the transhumance route from Las Marinas (the central Asturian coastal lowlands) to the high mountain passes between Asturias and León initially arose from the nostalgia of a handful of descendants of vaqueros de alzada, who worked to set up RUVAT, a cultural association devoted, as its initials indicate, to the Ruta (route) Vaqueros de Alzada (transhumance cowherds) of Torrestío together with the municipalities of Las Regueras (Asturias) and San Emiliano (León), and supported by the other municipalities through which the various routes pass, all of which appear in this

FINALLY, WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU BECAUSE, BY WALKING THE TRANSHUMANCE ROUTES FROM LAS MARINAS TO TORRESTÍO, YOU ARE CONTRIBUTING TO ENSURING THAT OUR VAQUERO HISTORY AND CULTURE WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.



# TRANSHUMANCE TRAILS **BETWEEN THE ASTURIAN COAST AND THE MOUNTAINS**

**TORRESTIO COWHERDS** 





→ 25.4 KM
(VARIANTS) STAGE 423 M (ELEVATION GAIN) VERDICIO - LAS CABAÑAS - LA CABRERA VIOÑO - LA GRANDA - TRASONA -

FRESNO - CARBAJAL - BIEDES

ROZONA - FUENCALIENTE - LAVARES - EL

### **VERDICIO-BIEDES**

MUNICIPALITIES: GOZÓN, CORVERA, LLANERA AND LAS REGUERAS

The route starts in Verdicio, in the municipality of Gozón. It passes through the old vaquero brañas (settlements) of Las Cabañas and La Cabrera to La Granda reservoir and enters Corvera via Trasona. Continuing on to Llanera, through the vaguero parishes of Arlós and Bonielles, it finishes in Las Regueras, in Biedes.

VARIANTS: Two trails join the main one in the village of Posada de Llanera, one 'from the parish of Villardeveyo and the other from Pruvia, which was also joined 'by vaquero trails coming from other neighbouring municipalities, such as Gijón or Siero.

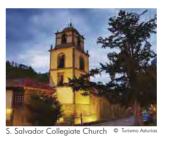


PROAZA - PEÑAS JUNTAS GORGE -CARANGA - VALDEZREIZALES GORGE -ENTRAGO - SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA

#### PROAZA-SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA

MUNICIPALITIES: PROAZA AND TEVERGA

The route joins the capital of the municipality of Proaza with San Martín, the capital of the neighboring council of Teverga. It continues entirely along the Bear Trail (an old railway line), making it an easy walking stage through beautiful gorges. From San Martín, the vaqueros would go up to Torrestío, or return, depending on the time of year and the weather conditions, through La Mesa Pass or Ventana Pass, using one of the following three alternatives, Stages IV, V and VI, of this long distance route.



√ 1,133 M

SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA - SAN SALVADOR - CUEVA HUERTA - PÁRAMO -VENTANA MOUNTAIN PASS - TORRESTÍO

#### SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA-TORRESTIO VIA VENTANA MOUNTAIN PASS

MUNICIPALITIES: TEVERGA AND SAN EMILIANO

This route began to be used as an alternative to the climb across Las Navariegas when the road to Ventana Pass was opened. The herders who make the journey nowadays usually transport their cattle from the central area of Asturias by truck using the road on practically the same route. As it is a very long and steep route, a good option is to go by car, bicycle or on horseback, effortlessly enjoying the landscapes that the vaqueros used to travel on foot with their cattle. As a short alternative, Torrestío is accessible on foot from Ventana Pass.



√ 491 M

PROAZA - VILLAMEJÍN - ACIERA - LAS AGÜERAS - VEGA DE ARROJO/VEIGA -Bárzana

# Proaza-Bárzana

MUNICIPALITIES: PROAZA AND OUIRÓS

This is one of the oldest roads of ascent to Torrestío and is completed with stage VIII (Bárzana to Torrestío via the chapel of Trobaniello/ Trobaniel.lo and Ventana Mountain Pass). It starts in the capital of Proaza and crosses the municipality of Quirós via the Collada (col) of Aciera, descending to the bottom of the valley via Las Agüeras, to the end of Valdemurio reservoir, where it joins the Bear Trail (Senda del Oso) to Bárzana.



→ 14.2 KM (VARIANTS) ✓ 276 M (ELEVATION GAIN

BIEDES - EL ESCAMPLERO - SAN PEDRO DE NORA - TRUBIA - SAN ANDRÉS - TUÑÓN VILLANUEVA - PROAZA

#### **BIEDES-PROAZA**

MUNICIPALITIES: Llanera - Las Regueras, Oviedo, Santo Adriano

The official starting point of the Alzada starts in Biedes, (Las Regueras) where the Vaqueros coming from Llanera join the rest of the group to walk along the regional road. After passing El Escamplero and San Pedro de Nora, it crosses the municipality of Oviedo, in the area of the reservoir of El Furacón and, then in Trubia, it links up with the Senda del Oso (the Bear Trail), an old railway track converted into a walking trail, which takes us comfortably through the municipality of Santo Adriano until it reaches Proaza.

VARIANTS: In Trubia, the route converges with the path used by the vaqueros from Latores. Nowadays, this coincides with the" green ways" (old railway tracks) from Oviedo to Fuso de la Reina and from Fuso de la Reina to Tuñón.



→ 18.4 KM 1,298 M

SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA - SAN SALVADOR - LA FOCELLA - COLLADO LAS

#### SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA-TORRESTÍO VIA LA FOCELLA

MUNICIPALITIES: TEVERGA AND SAN EMILIANO

This is one of the oldest drove roads of the transhumance route to Torrestío via Teverga: the ascent to Las Navariegas from San Martín via La Focella and subsequent descent to Torrestío through the Valley of the Matamala stream. The ascent to Las Navariegas Coll is quite hard, so it is advisable to walk the route back (down) rather than up if you



√ 1,334 M

SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA - SAN

SALVADOR - BARRIO - BRAÑA (SMALL MOUNTAIN HERDING SETTLEMENT) OF FONFRÍA AND ALTO DE LA MADALENA -LA MESA MOUNTAIN PASS - TORRESTÍO

### SAN MARTÍN DE TEVERGA-SOMIEDO-TORRESTÍO VIA LA MESA

MOUNTAIN PASS

MUNICIPALITIES: TEVERGA, SOMIEDO AND SAN EMILIANO

This long stage starts in San Martín de Teverga and crosses the Cantabrian Range via the trail which is today called the Route of the Teverga Brañas (mountain vaquero settlements). It ascends through Barrio, Braña de Fonfría, La Madalena and La Mesa, where it joins the Camino Real, an ancient Roman road and historic route to the Spanish Meseta (plateau). The stage is quite hard with a considerable gain in elevation, so, again, before setting out, we should consider our physical condition or reverse the route and walk from Torrestío back down to San Martín.



→ 22.1 KM √ 1,216 M STAGE

BÁRZANA - RICABO - CHAPEL OF TROBANIELLO/TROBANIEL.LO -VENTANA MOUNTAIN PASS -CHAPEL OF PORCINEIRO - LA COLLADA -TORRESTÍO

# BÁRZANA-TORRESTÍO

MUNICIPALITIES: QUIRÓS AND SAN EMILIANO

This is one of the oldest approaches to Torrestío, which crosses the Cantabrian Range through Ventana Mountain Pass and visits two revered chapels: Trobaniello/Trobaniel.lo chapel, before leaving the Principality of Asturias, and Porcineiro chapel, welcoming the traveler into Babia. The whole route runs through beautiful landscapes shaped by the traditional uses of its inhabitants, an area which is designated as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Alternative approaches on foot to Torrestío can be found in the mobile app.