

THE VALLEY OF ARDISANA

ACCESS

From Llanes, AS-263 (Llanes-Ribadesella), AS-115 (Posada-Alto Ortiguero), LLN-14 (Puente Nuevo-Riensena)

ITINERARY

Before beginning this route, it's worth mentioning that some of the villages that you pass through form part of the **Historical Route to Covadonga** or Eastern Way. The Valley of Ardisana could be considered as a typical well-wooded valley of the lower mountain slopes of Asturias. The best preserved of the woods in this area comprise alders and willows and grow on the borders of the river. Even though plenty of copses of birches and chestnuts abound, the depths of the valley are predominantly covered by fields and pastureland. Although in times gone by this area was used to grow cereal crops, nowadays it is primarily used as forage for cattle, one of the main sources of income in the area. Fruit is also grown, mostly pomegranates. As far as the animal life of the area is concerned, this is an exceptionally important area, with a well preserved bird population, including birds of prey. Deer are to be found alongside wild boar and in the rivers there are plenty of trout. There are even a few eels and otters. Wolves, which had disappeared years ago, are now on the increase and can occasionally be seen on the higher slopes of the mountains, having probably come in from the Picos de Europa.

In The Valley of Ardisana the people have maintained a rich and wide variety of traditions, folklore and cuisine. They have preserved the countryside thereabouts in the traditional manner and have kept their distinct identity, giving the area real ethnographic importance.

The route begins in **Rales**, crossing over the river Bedón. This area has always been very involved with the history of the borough since the castle of Aguilar, originally documented in the year 1032, is located on the mountain, Cierru Castiellu. From some 274 metres above the surrounding countryside, it dominates the greater part of the coastal area of Llanes. You can also see in Rales, just as in almost every village you travel through here, numerous examples of traditional architecture.

Carrying on along the AS-115, you arrive at **Vibaño**, which was an area of great importance during the Napoleonic Wars, since the headquarters of the guerrilla forces, which fought against the French, was situated here. In addition to the church of San Pedro (St. Peter,) elements from its original construction in the Romanesque style have been preserved. There is also a collection of various Grand Houses and groups of buildings of considerable age.

In **La Herrería**, next to the road, there is the Grand House of the Moranas as well as the bridge over the river Bedón to be seen. Right inside the village you can see the palace. By crossing the bridge and following the road you can get to **L'Allende**, from where you get really incredible views of the Picos de Europa and Naranjo de Bulnes. Once again on the AS-115, carry on to **Puente Nuevo**, which is the main entrance to the inner part of the Valley of Ardisana.

Almost right next to Puente Nuevo is a small collection of houses, **La Venta'L Pobre** which surround a bar-shop, a very common combination in rural areas. Here you can

see one of the traditional bowling courts of the region as well as the Chapel of San Antonio (St. Anthony). Turning off the road and only just having crossed over the bridge, you find yourself in **Gomezán**, where just as in almost every village hereabouts, the principal activity is animal husbandry. This village too, affords some lovely views of Naranjo de Bulnes. On the way back to Venta'l Pobre, you meet another turning which takes you up to **Los Callejos**, which is the village of the Indianos in this valley. It is located at the foot of the mountain, La Jorcada. In Los Callejos the best views of the Macizc Central of the Picos de Europa and of **Naranjo de Bulnes** are to be found. Returning to the LLN-114, around which the valley runs, you arrive at **San Miguel**. Here there is a Romanesque style church which sadly nowadays has only one window remaining on the side next to the road. Carrying on you arrive at "**the village of Hórreos**" (**grain stores**). **Riocaliente**. The village has a total of 21 grain stores, built in the traditional manner and which represent a real ethnographic treasure house. The oldest of them dates from the seventeenth century and is probably one of the oldest of this type of structure in Asturias. The route takes you towards **Mestas**, where the rivers **Riensen**a and Santa Marina join. This is right next to the crossroads which takes you towards Ardisana and Teyeu. There existed here a hostel which formed part of the route of hostels which used to start in Posada.

Turning towards **Llumedíán and Teyeu**, two villages where special green beans are grown. These are very typical of this valley and are important enough to have their own fiesta. This is celebrated in autumn; the gastronomic celebration of fabada, beans and green beans.

In Roman times this area formed part of a very important commercial route and even today, important stretches of it are preserved around the river Piedra Hita.

Returning once more to the road, LLN-114, another turn takes you to **Socueva**, a little village which, as its name suggests, has an abundance of caves in its vicinity and which is situated at the foot of the Sierra de la Cubeta. In one of the caves, the Inxanas, various types of rocks, can be seen. It is said in local legend that the Virgin Mary of Covadonga, La Santina, once appeared in this cave.

Making your way back to **Puente Nuevo**, and the high point of Mestas, a new turn off will take you to Ardisana. Here some nice buildings, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are amongst the things to be seen. Among these, the Grand House and the Corral of Arnero are notable and are great examples of the grand rural manor house and palace, respectively. Not too far from the village is the Cueva de la Coviella, a cave steeped in local legend and well known as the place where the Xanas lived (Xanas were female water spirits, associated with dark, damp watery abodes). It is said that the Xanas used to come out in the early morning to bathe in the fountain of Jumaria.

Next to Ardisana there is **Palacio**, and here you can find several houses from the eighteenth century as well as the tower, which up until the arrival of Napoleonic troops was The Palace. Sadly today only the ruins remain, since the tower was burnt down by the French.

Following the road you arrive at **Villanueva and Santa Eulalia**, part of Ardisana. The parish church is situated in the Campo de la Prida, which was previously full of centuries old Holm Oaks or Encinas. Nowadays there only remains La Encinona (The

great Encina). The church was built in the Romanesque style. The doorway is preserved and comprises a half pointed arch, vaulted in the Gothic style and which dates from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The single nave is covered by a vault. The old headboard or screen has a triumphal pointed arch, supported by pillars, the capitals of which are decorated with the heads of humans and animals.

Further on down the road you will find **La Malatería**, which was originally a leprosy hospital at the beginning of the seventeenth century, although today none of the original building remains. Carry on through the village and continue through **La Huera de Meré** and you come out on the AS-115, heading towards Posada.

On the way there is a pathway to Ilceu. This little village is reached up a steeply sloping roadway where the access is poor and at the present time, only one family lives there. The other inhabitants have abandoned the village, even though this village is a real outdoor museum of the life and culture of the old Asturias, where neither the buildings nor the environment thereabouts has been touched in a hundred years.

Having taken up the route again, continue in the direction of Posada and on the way you will find Torrevega and Vallines, where in the former there are the remains of a Medieval tower, from which the village took its name. Here the route comes to an end. Apart from all the villages along the route, you can also find **Piedramu, La Vallina, Borbudín, El Pandal, El Llanu, La Xobal and La Llamera.**

