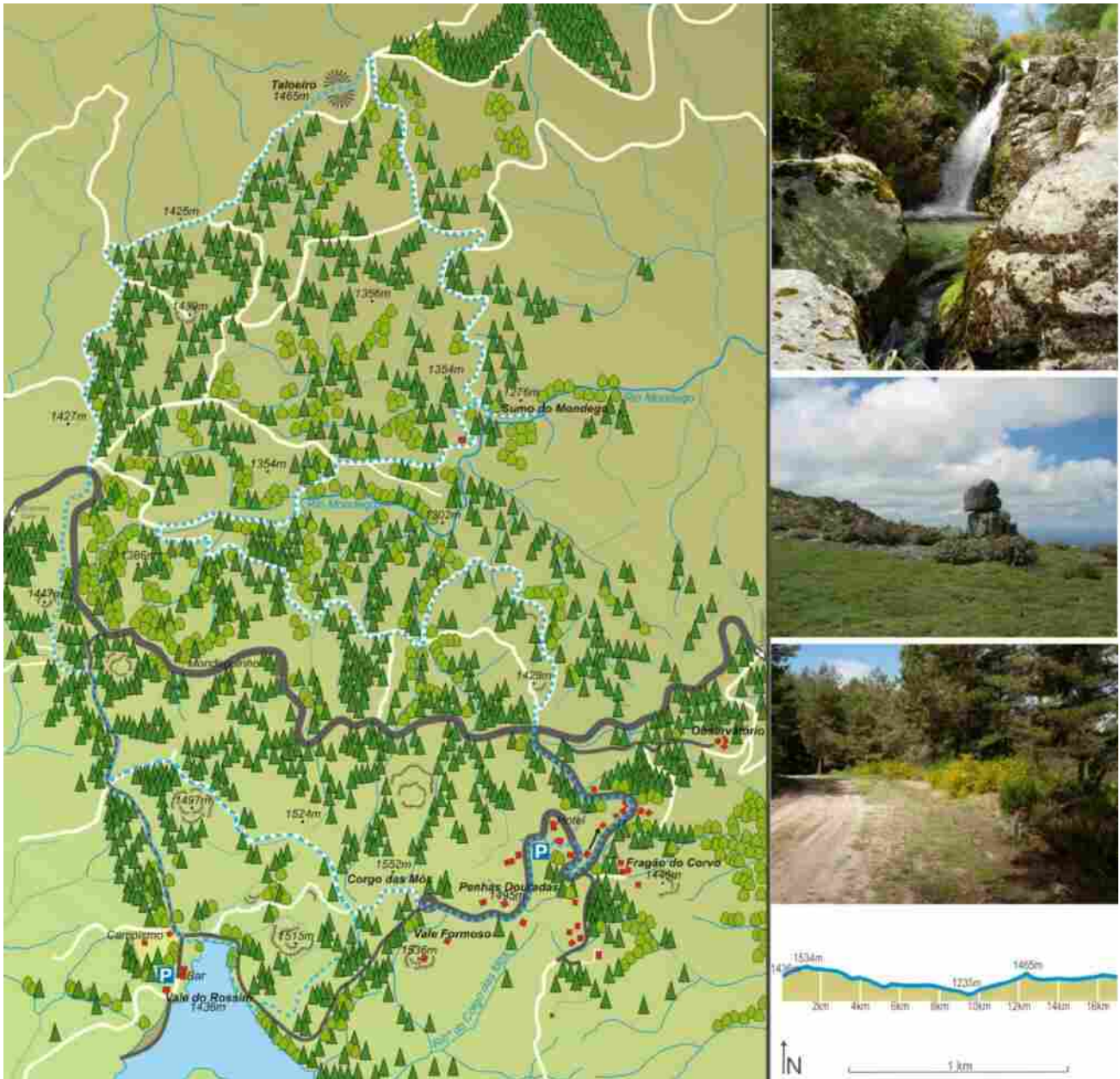


FOOTPATH ALTO E SUMO DO MONDEGO

Duration: 6 Hours
Difficulty: Moderate
Type of Walk: Circular



A walk to Alto e Sumo do Mondego, including Casa da Fraga, Sumo do Mondego, Taloeiro's triangulation station, Lagoa do Vale do Rossim (opcional), and Corgo das Mós.

The route is set out with blue marks painted on to posts, rocks, and 'mariolas' (Cairns; several rocks piled on top of each other – these were used by shepherds to mark out their trails).



Note that along your route you might find other marks from other routes that belong to Casa das Penhas Douradas like Yellow and Red or marks of S.R. (Small Route) or B.R. (Big Route). Parts of your route may coincide with other marks so you should follow the directions given along this text.

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The path begins at Casa das Penhas Douradas.

From the Hotel's parking lot walk towards the Capela da Nossa Senhora da Estrela, which is right next door. Have a look inside at figure of Nossa Senhora da Estrela with a star in her hand... If the chapel is open, feel free to go inside. Surely, at this altitude, we are closer to the heavens... and feel the silent presence of God...

Take the Chapel steps down to the road, turn right and walk downhill. On your right you'll see signs to 'Fragão do Corvo' and 'Vale das Éguas', but don't turn right, keep following the road. A little further you'll see some typical Penhas Douradas houses. If you look between the houses you will see a big rock ('penedo') with the shape of a dog's head... To the right of the road you can see the 'Casa da Fraga' in ruins, which was built between huge granite rocks (called 'poios' in this region of Portugal) that provide the walls and roof. This house was home to César Henriques, the first inhabitant of Penhas Douradas who came here at the end of the 19th century. The famous Dr. Sousa Martins advised him to live up in the mountains in order to recover from a tuberculosis infection that had plagued him for years.

Continue down the road until you reach the EN232 main road. Cross the road and about 50m ahead you'll find blue markings indicating the footpath. Follow the forest trail to your right which takes you down the Mondego Valley. Here you will be able to see many different botanic species: the famous birch trees that line the interior of the hotel can be found near the water courses; other species such as Douglas-Fir, Platanus species (known as plane trees or sycamore), chestnut trees, several pine tree species, and oaks can also be found in this area.

On this section of the walk you'll come across very few blue markers as it is a straightforward path. The markings will be present whenever you arrive at a crossing of paths, so that you don't get lost. You'll pass by some abandoned houses which belong to the Forestry Services. They used to be the homes of forestry guards and their families, who looked after and monitored the forest.

After the houses, the path turns right and starts climbing upwards. Some 200 meters ahead, you'll see a sign to 'Sumo do Mondego'. Take the trail, following the rock cairns. About 100 meters ahead you'll find two wells in front of you, filled with crystal clear water. The first well is filled by water from a small waterfall, spilling out its water into the second well. To get to the well it is a steep climb, so be careful. If it's summer don't hesitate, have a swim! The water here is very refreshing. After all, this is the Mondego River, and you are very close to its springs.

If you look closely, you'll notice the water disappears after the second well. It goes back into the ground, as if wanting to return to its origins... This is what we call the 'Sumo' (disappearing) of the River Mondego.

Getting back to the uphill trail, walk towards 'Cumeada da Santinha' (Santinha's ridge). While on the ridge, you'll be able to admire the plateaus of the Beira Provinces on your right, the Serra do Caramulo and Serra do Marão on the horizon, to your left the whole of the Mondego Valley which you just climbed up, and in front of you the Superior plateau of the Serra da Estrela and the 'Torre' (the highest point of the Serra da Estrela). As you start on the large trail that contours the ridge you'll see the Taloeiro's geodesic mark ahead of you, which is set at an altitude of 1465m. Once there, climb up and have a look around you.

Continue a soft descent down the hillside road. You'll soon cross the EN232 again. Cross the road and find the small pillars with blue markings. From here, take the trail that runs alongside the EN main road (the trail goes on the right of the main road and a little higher up). Follow the trail and the marked pillars and rock cairns. The trail climbs a little, and then begins descending again. Further ahead the trail will lead you to a dirt road where you have to turn left, leading to a paved forest road that takes you to Rossim Valley. Take that road, which is on your right, following the tarmac for a few hundred meters. You'll come across a wide uphill path to your left. Here you have to make a decision: going directly to Penhas Douradas, or visiting first the Rossim Valley before heading to Penhas Douradas.

If you want to go directly to Penhas Douradas, turn to your left and follow the dirt road to a higher place called Corgo das Mós that will take you to Penhas Douradas. If you want to visit Rossim Valley, follow the road until you have a camping park on your right. In that moment you will have to turn left and you can descend to the lagoon margin, walking on its side. In this part of the walk you will have to follow the map. Keep walking along the lagoon banks until you find two big rocks on your left side, each one marked with two parallel yellow marks. In that place you can stop and relax. In spring and summer time the water level is high but in the winter it is kept quite low, so as to be able to cope with the rainfall in this season. . If you happen to be visiting during summer, indulge in a swim in the lake! The water can reach a gorgeous 23° Celsius... the envy of any beach in the Algarve.

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The trail continues between the two marked rocks and takes you uphill until you reach a paved road (which contours the lagoon). Cross the road and continue up the trail, which now becomes a bit steeper.

If you're having negative thoughts about the intense steepness of this trail, surely these thoughts will be swept away as you turn around and notice the magnificent view over the lagoon. Across from the lagoon you'll see two large peaks. These are the Fragões das Penhas Douradas that lend their name to this very special region of the Serra da Estrela. Why the name Penhas Douradas (which means Golden Peaks)? Because at sunset on a long summer day, the warm light at dusk gives a golden color to the dark hues of these rocks...

Enough poetry for now, let's keep climbing uphill, from rock cairn to rock cairn, until you reach the mother of all rock cairns, which has a height of 3 meters! It is said that shepherds built this rock cairn so they could have a guidance point over very long distances. It was also a place of gathering for shepherds to organize the seasonal migrations of their sheep from the villages to the mountain and vice-versa.

At this point, take one last look at the lake, as it will disappear from view as you continue on the trail. As you walk on, you'll soon enter a small forest.

Follow the yellow marks up the gentle slope that turns slightly to your right into a small forest. All this area where you're walking now was devastated on the 15th September of 2017 by a terrible fire. Plants and bushes are now growing up and pine trees struggle to survive... This is nature showing its power in our Mountain!

Keep climbing and continue following the marks which will take you to a large road where you have to turn right (finally, an easier road after such a steep climb...!).

Forward you will find rock outcrops in a place called 'Corgo das Mós'. This place is known as 'Corgo das Mós' perhaps because of the large rocks you can find around here, that look flat and round like mills ('mós'), which give this place its name. This road takes you back to the Casa das Penhas Douradas.

When you reach a roundabout, known as the "racket", take the paved road ahead, and follow the marks that are now on electricity poles. To the right of the "racket" roundabout is the famous Eagle House ('Casa da Águia'). If you still have the energy, you can visit it and climb up the large 'poio' that overtakes and protects the house. From here you'll get one last view of the lagoon. You'll also be able to see a rock that looks like a torpedo from here, as well as a rocky formation to its right which looks like an American Indian, including the curved nose... All that's missing is a feather!

Make your way to the tarmac road that will take you back to the start of your walk.

On your way back, you'll be able to see some more interesting houses that are typical of this region. As you go down the road, it will slightly turn to the left. Stop there and look to your right. Between rocks, on the top, you will be able to see the highest point in Serra da Estrela, Torre!

A little further down, to the left of the road, you'll see an archaic-looking construction, which is in better shape than the house that belonged to César Henriques. Next to this house is a giant stone in the shape of a mummy... A little further ahead on the road, to your left, is a big rock known as the "the black man's head". The ancient construction that you can see just below the "black man's head" used to be a very famous hotel of the Penhas Douradas, called Hotel Pensão Montanha. It was built in 1903 to offer a follow-up for tuberculosis patients, with treatments based on Davo-Platz's Schatzalp Sanatorium in Switzerland. In this old hotel's brochure you can read: "[the hotel] offers the best commodities and hygienic conditions, has a varied and abundant food menu, superior to all other establishments of this type, magnificent curing galleries, and acetylene lighting..."

Many people were cured at this establishment, including the famous Portuguese politician and writer Álvaro Cunhal, who went on to live a long life, being a living proof of the efficacy of these Swiss practices, allied to the Penhas Douradas' purifying air. If you still have the strength, climb up to the heliport which is located before the Casa das Penhas Douradas, on the opposite side of the Parking lot where you have a path. From the heliport you can see the plateaus, the Mondego Valley, the city of Guarda, and, at night... the stars.