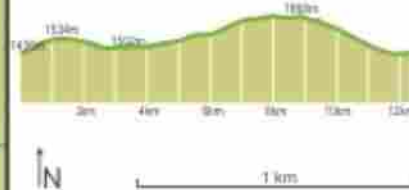


# FOOTPATH FRAGÕES DAS PENHAS DOURADAS

Duration: 5 Hours  
Difficulty: Moderate  
Type of Walk: Circular



Footpath to Fragões das Penhas Douradas, including the following places: Vale das Éguas, Penhas Douradas geodesic mark, Rossim valley and Corgo das Mós.

The route is set out with red marks painted on to rocks, and 'mariolas' (rock 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 Blue and Yellow 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 the figure of Nossa Senhora da Estrela with a star on her hand... If the chapel is open, feel free to go inside. Surely, at this altitude, we are closer to the heaven... and feel the silent presence of God...

Take the Chapel steps down to the road, turn right and walk downhill.

After the first curve there is a sign to the right indicating 'Vale das Éguas' (the Valley of Mares). You'll see a red mark on a nearby electricity pole. Turn here, and continue following the red marks along the route. The paved road soon turns into a dirt road. This is more or less where the Penhas Douradas village ends.

To your right you'll see some houses that still bear the architectural traces of sanatoriums typical of this area, a reminder of a time when this area was widely used to help tuberculosis patients. The covered and windowed verandas are where patients would rest, playing hide and seek with the weather, which isn't always agreeable around here. At the time, doctors such as the famous Dr. Sousa Martins, who has his own statue and many admirers at Campo Santana Medical University in Lisbon, reasoned that the infamous Koch's bacillus that causes tuberculosis doesn't do well at high altitudes, and that the high altitude also strengthens the patients' immune system.

There was a saying at the time, which contained some truth: "One week in the Serra: one year of good health". This is why Penhas Douradas was the first mountain health resort and place of rest and recovery in Portugal.

Let us enter the 'Vale das Éguas'. If you look carefully you may notice rock forms with very interesting shapes: bread slices, a decapitated head, a grouper, a sphinx, etc. A little further ahead, to your right, there is a small forest that we won't visit on this walk. Follow the red marks and Cairns uphill. Don't forget to keep glancing right; soon you'll see the Rossim's Valley beautiful lagoon. This may be a good time to have a break. Later on you'll see the lagoon again from a higher altitude, in a much more interesting setting. As you walk on, you'll see a great black granite pyramid to your right called 'Fraga da Penha'. Later on you'll get much closer to this pyramid, as well as to the magnificent Fragões das Penhas Douradas peaks known as Rasa and Angela, which at the moment can be seen at quite a distance on your right.

Keep following the track uphill until you and you reach the Serra's Superior Plateau. This unique place is hidden in the middle of the mountain, and is home to the juniper bush and cerium, a special type of grass that is eaten by the sheep. This area is visited only by shepherds and their sheep. We'll be passing by some shelters that were used by shepherds who spent long periods on the Serra's central plateau.

You'll also be able to find remnants of the old tungsten industry in patches of disturbed land. From here onwards you'll have a clear view of the 'Torre' in the distance, the highest point of the Serra. Also to your left, and a little closer to you is geodesic mark of "Martin's Stable", named after a small stone stable located nearby. The very smooth 'Vale do Conde' ("Count's Valley"), with a river running across it, will appear on your right soon. Pay attention to the route now, because soon you'll see a wood stick and a rock which has a red "L" mark where you will have to turn to your right. The trail will take you to an enormous rock that you will climb up by taking a path that is practically sculpted. When you reach the top turn around and enjoy the vastness of the Serra's Superior plateau, the 'Torre' (top of the mountain), and the Count's Valley.

You are now behind the Fragões das Penhas Douradas. Keep on following the rock cairns and red markings.

You'll soon realize that the trail takes you to the Penhas Douradas geodesic mark. Here you'll be able to see the Fragões das Penhas Douradas and the lagoon at Rossim Valley... a beautiful and unforgettable sight. Have a break, relax and enjoy the view. The lagoon you can see far away will be your next destination. If it's cold and windy, you can hide in the natural shelters that are craved on those rocks, a result of the big tempests that can happen in such a high place

From here the descent to Rossim Valley will start. Now you have to pay special attention to the red markings, rock cairns and the map, because this area has many different paths that come together.

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As you walk down the gentle slope, you'll have a view of the lagoon to your right. Keep a look out for the red markings, as the trail soon takes a turn away from the lagoon, in order to get around a rockier area. You'll come to a larger path which takes you downhill. Soon you will have the opportunity to get close to the lagoon on a quiet place that looks like a beach without waves. In spring and summer time the water level is high, but in the winter it is kept quite low, to be able to cope with the rainfall of this season. To reach this magnificent beach you will have to turn to your right in a dirt road that goes on the lagoon's direction. In the ground you will see a red "X" marked on a rock showing that's not the main path, but don't worry... Break the rules and go forward. If it happens that you are visiting during the summer, indulge in a swim in the lake! The water can reach a comfortable temperature of 23° Celsius... the envy of any beach in the Algarve.

Return now to the main path that keeps going downhill. You will cross a small bridge and then walk to the lagoon's pier and café-restaurant. From the café-restaurant take the paved road for a few hundred meters, turning right at the crossroads. Following this road you can see all the time the Lagoon on your right. As you walk on the road you will have to turn right and you have a fountain on your left. Have a drink, the water is very pure.

Follow the road 300 meters more until you find a red "L" that will send you to a path on the left, where you have a big rock with yellow markings and rock cairns. Continue up the trail, which now becomes a bit steeper... Follow the rock cairns and the yellow markings.

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 (now far away), 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. 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 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.

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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 again 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 (with its own magnificent walks), the city of Guarda, and, at night... the stars.