

FOOTPATH

VISIT TO CASA DAS PENHAS DOURADAS

Duration: 4 Hours

Difficulty: Easy

Type of Walk: Linear



Footpath connecting Casa de São Lourenço and Casa das Penhas, passing by points of interest like the Meteorological Observatory of Penhas Douradas, Casa da Fraga and Fragão do Corvo.

This footpath doesn't have markings so you should follow the indications given along this text and the map.

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The path begins at Casa de São Lourenço.

Starting from the parking lot of the Hotel, cross the road and walk into the dirt road that goes to your left after passing by the Hotel's adjacent building. Follow this dirt road that will take you to the antennas. There is a big chance that you will find a shepherd, his sheep and the Serra da Estrela dog in the fields that alongside with this road. Keep going forward and you will find a geodesic mark. Stop, observe the shale landscape and the amazing valleys that surround you.

Follow the dirt road for one kilometer and you will find the national road. You should now cross the road with precaution and on the opposite side you will find a beautiful forest that will take you to a place called Covão do Jorge. You will be overwhelmed with the beauty around you while walking on the fallen pines, hearing the many animals that live in this place.

The path takes you through the forest until you find a dirt road where you will have to turn right, walking up to a tarmac road.

You are now in the road that leads to the famous Meteorological Observatory of Penhas Douradas, which you can find on your right side. This building was built in this place more than a 100 years ago and on it we can find the instruments of yesterday that give us the weather of tomorrow...

Following the road on the opposite direction of the Observatory, after 250 meters you will find on your left a small trail, marked with mariolas (rock cairns that were the guidance system of the shepherds). As you walk you can start to see the beauty of this Douglas-fir forest. You should follow the mariolas until you find a crossroad, where you will have to turn right, climbing up to the famous Casa da Fraga near the Penhas Douradas tarmac road.

This now ruined house was built on 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 in 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.

Follow now the Penhas Douradas tarmac road that slightly climbs up until you find a road to your left. This road takes you to the Fragão do Corvo sightseeing. To go there you will have to turn again to your left, there is a sign showing the way.

Further ahead the road takes you into a small square where you'll see a house that belongs to the State; at the moment it has a rather dull tenant, the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture.

At your front, after a soft descent, you will find the Dr. Afonso Costa's house. Dr. Afonso Costa was a conspiring republican in the days of the monarchy, rumored to have sought refuge in these parts for his highly conspiratorial Carbonari meetings (at 1448 meters, the same altitude as the Fragão do Corvo rock formation).

Stand back and admire this house for a moment, as it is an interesting exemplar of some of the purest 19th century Swiss architecture. The house's unusual shapes are an indicator of its consecutive expansions. In the long run, Swiss architecture did have some influence on a few of Penhas Douradas' main chalets. However, most chalets were primarily influenced by Lusitanian mountain architecture, which easily rivals with the Swiss style. It's a shame that a lot of these chalets have been abandoned. As we say in Portugal: where there are many heirs, there are no owners...

Fragão do Corvo is a huge rock formation with a geodesic mark on the top, which offers a fantastic view over the town of Manteigas. Keep following the path that goes down on a steep descent and you'll see the Fragão right in front of you. As the path gets narrower, you will get closer to the Fragão. You can see it on the top. Don't worry, the path is easier than it looks and quite safe! To get to the viewpoint, walk up the stairs that have been carved into the rock and follow a narrow path between the rocks. As you

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climb up, the magnificent view shows up... it was worth the effort! To your left is the Meteorological Observatory of Penhas Douradas that you have passed by moments ago. Further away, also to your left, you can see the São Romão plateau, where rye is cultivated, and the Valley of the Mondego River.

At your feet is the town of Manteigas, which in the past looked quite dark from this point because of all the granite houses. Today it's a town full of white. From here you can see the Zêzere River, a brave and hearty river which begins in top of the Cântaros, crosses the glacial valley, the town of Manteigas and continues on through the Beira's Provinces. When it reaches Constância, the Zêzere gets barred by the larger River Tejo (Tagus), which cuts short its journey to the sea... The Mondego, also a mountain river and "colleague" of the Zêzere, is a slower river, home to damsels and flowery poets. This river is a bit luckier and does reach the sea, showing us that it isn't always the bravest that are is luckiest...

Coming back down from the viewpoint, go back on the same trail until you find the main tarmac road in which you have to keep climbing up. On your left you will now see a chapel named Capela da Nossa Senhora da Estrela. Climb up the stairs and on your right, you will now be able to see Casa das Penhas Douradas. Come in, go down the stairs and meet us, we will be glad to welcome you at the Hotel for the deserved break.

When you feel that it's time to go back, do it following the same path that took you to Casa das Penhas Douradas, getting now a different perspective on the landscape... We will be waiting to assist you on a much-deserved rest.