

Cíes archipelago



There are currently 4 signposted paths, located between the isles of Faro and Monteagudo, since the isle of San Martiño has no facilities for Public Use. Due to the physical characteristics of the land and the existing zoning, all tours are of linear type, aspect to take into account in planning the visit. Everyone starts at the information booth of the National Park, where we can answer questions or get more specifics on them. Below is a brief description of each, along with the most important technical data and any variants or combinations allowed.

■ 1.- Monte Faro route

- Distance: 3.5km.
- Duration of the route: 1 hour 30 minutes (outward bound).
- Maximum-Slope: 175m.
- Signalling colour: yellow.
- Main points of interest: Rodas beach and dunes, the lake, Information Centre, Pedra da Campá, birdwatching, Cíes lighthouse.
- Description of the route: the following route is the most emblematic and popular of all made on the archipelago, ending at the highest point that you can visit out of the entire National Park, where one of the most spectacular views can be seen. In turn, it is also the longest, steepest and most exposed route to weather factors, which are important aspects to bear in mind before starting the route.

From the information booth, we take the cement path south that starts by heading south, to the left of the same, and we continue as far as the main crossing with the isle of Faro (25-30 minutes), leading into the clearly signposted forest path that goes up. In these first meters, we enjoy the spectacular Rodas beach, whose almost one and a half kilometres length joins the isles of Monteagudo and Faro, sho-

wing the dynamic action of the winds and currents in the peculiar formation of this barrier beach.



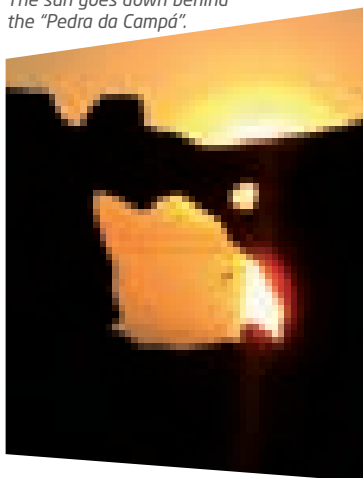
View of the spectacular complex beach-barrier-lagoon of Rodas from the path

Shortly after, we reach the “Lagoa dos nenos” (Children’s Lake), one of the areas of greatest interest and fragility in the National Park. Surrounded by a dam wall, an artificial structure built in the late 19th century to facilitate communication between the two islands, necessary after the installation of several salting factories and a seafood beds. The dam, with a natural breakwater, faces the beating Atlantic Ocean and regulates the seawater coming into the lake. The shallow, calm, warmer water in the lake makes it an ideal refuge and breeding place for many species, which we can see if the water is clear enough. White bream, mullet, bream, gilthead bream, sea bass and wrasse are some of the most common species, as well as octopus, eels and crabs, if we have a little patience and a stroke of luck. Once on the island of Faro, we arrive at the campsite entrance, the only place where visitors can stay overnight on the island, which we leave to our left, continuing along the main footpath. We will also pass by the public toilets, which has an accessible toilet. In 6-7 minutes, we come to the most sheltered and humanized area on the island, where we find the information centre, most of the facilities and park staff quarters, besides a few privately owned houses, occu-

pied only in the summer. 300m after going past the centre is the main crossings on this island, where we take the path that goes to our right. At the first curve, can enjoy the views of the isle of Saint Martin and Nosa Señora beach, one of the most beautiful on the archipelago, below our feet. Halfway up, where trees can no longer grow and give way to gorse and brushwood, we can have a brief stop and approach the Pedra da Campá, a peculiar rock pierced by the erosive force of the Atlantic's salt-laden winds and go up to the bird observatory, from where we can see the breeding sites of yellow-legged gull and shag, two of the most representative species of seabirds in the National Park. The height and location of the site will allow us also to enjoy some excellent views over the lake and Rodas beach, noting the tremendous difference between the east side of the islands, with its much smoother profile and the west face, marked by the force of the ocean.

Back on the main path, we continue uphill, after a series of final bends at the top of the hill, until we reach the lighthouse. From there, surrounded by seagulls playing with the wind and 175 meters steep cliffs at our feet, we can contemplate the whole of the Cíes archipelago which, like a giant dike, protects the Ria from Vigo from the onslaught of the powerful Atlantic Ocean.

The sun goes down behind the "Pedra da Campá".





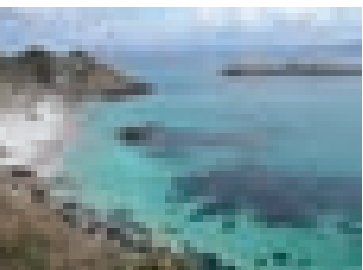
The protection that the islands gives the ria is evident in the steep cliffs on the west face.

■ 2.- Faro da Porta route

- Distance: 2.6Km
- Duration of the route: 1 hour (outward bound).
- Maximum Elevation: 55m.
- Signposting-Colour: Green.
- Main points of interest: Beach and dunes in Rodas, The Lake, Information Centre, Nosa Señora beach, Faro da Porta.
- Description of the route: this route starts from the same place as the previous route, sharing the first part of the way. Once at the main crossing on the isle of Faro, we continue along the rutted path, leaving warm, sheltered Nosa Señora beach, Punta das Vellas and Viños islet on our left, a favourite spot for shags to dry their feathers in the sun. Here we can get a beautiful view from a bend in the path, about 100 m from the crossing. About 45 minutes into the walk, we come to Carracido Pier, now used as a service pier, but originally built to give access to the lighthouses.

From here the path ascends slightly bordering the south coast of the island, until reaching the small Faro da Porta lighthouse, 53m above sea level, located at the northern end of the so-called Freu da Porta. The 500m of this narrow channel and its strong currents separate the rest of the archipelago from the isle of Saint Martin, the wildest of the three. Set on the rocks at the foot of the lighthouse, the Porta da Furna shows us the result of the tireless work of the sea in the form of dark, deep caves, the ideal place of shelter for shag hatchlings. Sea pink, sea fennel, angelica ... are just some examples of the characteristic plants to be found around the lighthouse. We can also enjoy

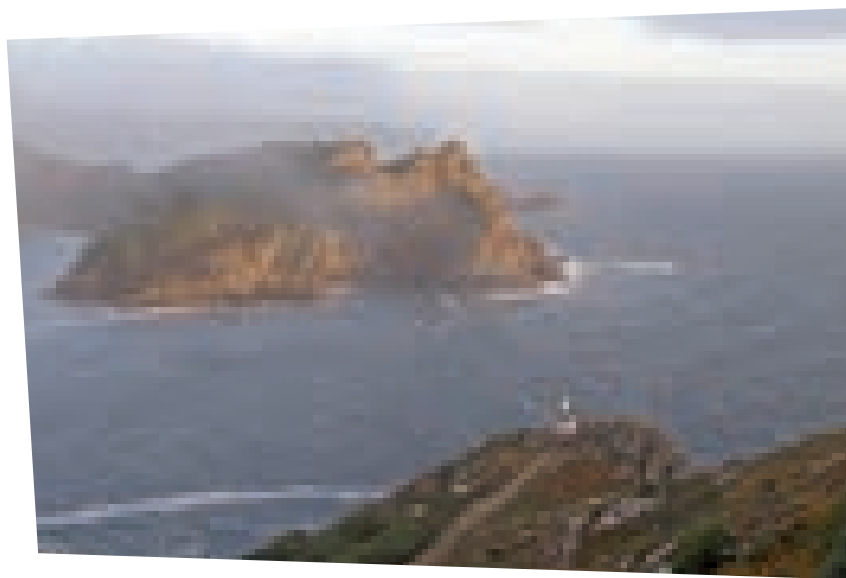
Nosa Señora beach and Viños islet



an excellent view over the South Island, highlighting here being the Punta and Furna da Galeira, an impressive cliff crowned by a stone cross set up in memory of the 26 fishermen who perished in the Moana wreck of the "Ave do Mar", in 1956.

Finally, if we look to the side of Monte Faro, among the vegetation, we will see the remains of the prehistoric settlement known as Castro das Hortas an ancient Iron Age settlement that is the most important archaeological site found to date in the Cíes Isles.

If you wish, you can combine the two itineraries explained above by following a path that joins them together and is marked both on the maps and on the land, allowing for a practically circular trip.



Da Porta lighthouse, the watchtower of the called "Freu da Porta", a narrow channel separating San Martiño from the isle of Faro

■ 3.- Alto do Principe Route

- Distance: 1.7Km
- Duration of the route: 45 minutes (outward bound).
- Maximum slope: 122m.
- Signposting colour: Blue.
- Main points of interest: Figueiras-Muxieiro dune complex, Figueiras Beach, the Queen's Seat.
- Description of the route: once at the information booth, we take the path that leads out to the right and begins gently ascending the east of the North Island or the isle of Monteagudo. The dune complex of Figueiras-Muxieiro, on our right, is the first item of interest on this route. This is an important dune system, both for its length and its conservation status. From the first mobile dune fronts to the more stable, there is an excellent representation of animal and plant species specifically adapted to the harsh conditions of this environmental habitat. Such species include marine thyme (*Helichrysum picardii* var. *virescens*), camarina (*Corema album*), typical of transdunal scrub, or the extremely rare sea thrift (*Armeria pungens*), this being the northernmost location for this species, with no observed presence until as far away as the southern Portuguese coast.

Detail of the fruits of camarina, one of the botanical jewels of the National Park



This first stretch takes us up to the access path leading into Figueiras beach, with a nudist tradition, where we can enjoy a splendid panoramic view of the nearby Costa da Vela. Returning to the forest path, we continue walking up to the crossing with the isle of Monteagudo, some 20 minutes from our starting point. The area colonized by acacias and eucalyptus, planted in the '50s, dominates this part of the island, and the result of more recent reforestation with native tree species and others characteristic of some of the valley and Atlantic se-

aboard areas, such as alder, laurel, willow or oak trees.

From this spot, facing the river and under a front line of eucalyptus trees, we can see a small oak grove (*Quercus pyrenaica*), the last stronghold of the native woody vegetation of Cíes and the object of a specific recovery programme. The landscape begins to change as we go up the path that leads into the left side of the crossing; the trees begin to lose ground to scrub vegetation, due to the lack of protection from the strong Atlantic winds loaded with salt and to the increasingly scarce land. Now heading south, the path continues until, after a short descent, it opens up to reveal part of the spectacular scenery that we can enjoy in a few minutes. These final 100 m of ascent follow a path through the rocks shaped by the wind and water, to reach the Queen's Seat, a whimsical rock formation carved by tremendous erosive action, offering one of the most beautiful viewpoints on the islands.

In addition to the vision of Cíes Lighthouse, impressive cliff 175m on their feet, their situation can observe the contrast between the two sides of the more rugged islands on the west side, given their continuous exposure to the ravages of the Atlantic Ocean. The beach of Rodas, the tranquility of the sea in its secluded bay, lake or the lush vegetation of the tree this side, compared to the nearly bare and steep slopes west, give us an idea of the natural protection offered by islands the Ria of Vigo.



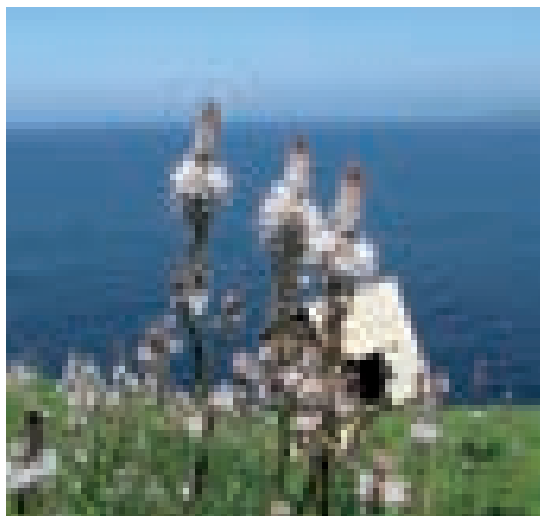
The spectacular "Queen's Seat" profiled between the horizon and the deep blue Atlantic Ocean

■ 4.- Monteagudo Route

- Distance: 2.5km
- Duration of the route: 1 hour (outward bound).
- Maximum Elevation: 60m.
- Signposting colour: Red.
- Main points of interest: Figueiras-Muxieiro dune complex, Figueiras Beach, bird observatory, Faro do Peito or Monteagudo, Furna de Monteagudo.
- Description of the route: the route, which coincides with the first part of Alto del Príncipe route, starts at the information booth, where we take the path leading from the right of it. Once at the main crossing on the island, we follow the path continuing north, leaving another reforestation areas of common oak and Pyrenean oak, with its first few meters, to our left. At about 400m from the crossing, the eucalyptus and acacias begin to lose ground as we approach Chancelos trough. The flag shaped trees at one end of the eucalyptus grove and the few pine trees scattered over the small hill are the result of the action of strong ocean winds, sculpted asymmetrically, "combing", taking on this curious appearance, which gives us an idea of the harsh living conditions imposed by the environment.

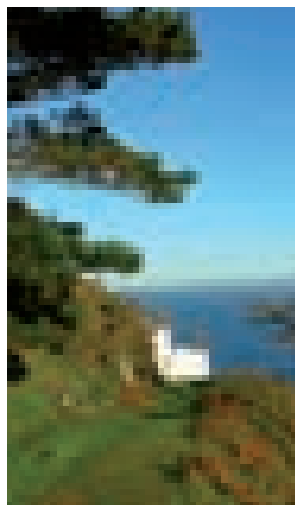
Also here is the incinerator, a small building where, years ago all waste generated in the islands was incinerated. Continuing along the path we gradually approach the foot of Alto de Monteagudo, which characteristically gives name to this island and it is not possible to walk up as it lies within the reserve zone. At the fork, we take the path on the left, and through a small wooded area, we find the ruins of an ancient insular settlement, leading us to the bird observatory.

From this vantage point we can observe, without interfering, the hundreds of cormorants and gulls that flock on these steep slopes in the breeding season, filling



Monteaugudo Bird Observatory "hanging" on the cliffs of Monteaugudo.

them with a relentless, bustling activity. Even from here we can see the lighthouse a few meters away, we need to walk back a little and down a path on the left that leads to it. The silhouette of Costa da Vela, just 2.5 km away, makes this the closest point to the mainland where, since 1904, the small automated lighthouse guides ships entering the Ria of Vigo. To the north, we can make out the isles of Ons and Onza, sheltering the Ria of Pontevedra. If we follow the stone pathway leading from the lighthouse, we come to a small representation of large sea caves on the west side that are the result of the constant beating of the waves and the peculiar structure of granite, which makes it fracture vertically. Returning to the fork at the foot of Monteaugudo along the path that runs along the coast, at various points it lets us enjoy the view on the south, over Cantareira coast, Muxieiro head and even the coast of Baiona. Once there, we only have to retrace our steps to the Information Booth, where we will return to after a pleasant two-hour walk.



The small Monteaugudo lighthouse, guarding the northern entrance of the Ria of Vigo.