

ANCARES

The Sierra de Ancares (Ancares mountain range) is situated between the provinces of Lugo, Leon and Asturias.

The origin of the word “*Ancares*” is not known: early in the XX century the only reference to *Ancares* was a valley in the borough of Candin, (Leon) which stretched from the Pass of Ancares to the Pass of Lumeiras. For some reason, the term extended first to the mountain range and later to cover the whole of the area or district.

Some say the term *Ancares* was extended to the Gallican side of the range due to a timber company called *Ancares* and which extracted wood from the Cervantes area in the 1930's

It is also difficult to define exactly to what area we refer when we speak of Ancares – the term has given rise to much interest and now covers areas having little to do with the mountain range or the nature area which gives it such a good name.

On the Galician side there is a district called Ancares , east of the province of Lugo, comprising the towns of As Nogais Becerreá, Baralla, Cervantes, Navia de Suarna and Pedrafita do Cebreiro.

On the Leon side, Ancares is known as the territory formed by the Balboa valleys between the rivers Burbia, Ankara, Cua and Fornela (about 50 places distributed between the towns of Balboa, Vega de Espinareda, Villafranca del Bierzo, Fabero , Páramo del Sil, Palacios del Sil, Villablino, Peranzanes and Candín).

The range continues into Asturias and the name is sometimes applied to the Asturian districts of Degaña and Ibias.

The most important peaks of the Sierra are: Cuiña (1978 m.), Mustallar (1924 m), Miravalles, Pena Rubia, Pena Longa, Tres Obispos, OsPenedois.

Ancares is a natural area due to its excellent state of preservation and its rich natural and ethnographic heritage which has received several institutional protection awards (some of which cover the whole territory and others just a part thereof) Protected natural areas: (Zepa, April 2004), Special Protection Area of the brown bear, Site of Community Importance (SCI), National Game Reserve, picturesque landscape (since 1970) Biosphere Reserve ... debate also continues on a declaration of Ancares as a natural park but ... The fact is that all these decrees are not contributing to the preservation and improvement of the environment, and as the years go by, we are witnesses to how the villages are being abandoned, farms are not being worked, there is less livestock and cattle ... something should be done to keep the young people from emigrating. - perhaps set up services (Internet, public transport..) to deter abandoning the villages and the detriment this has on the surroundings..

As for the flora there are important native forests of oak, chestnut, birch, holly, service-tree, yew ... and on higher ground heather, gorse, heath, blueberries ... This flora, varied and abundant, provides shelter and food to a rich and interesting wildlife: the grizzly bear, grouse, wolves, chamois, deer, otters, eagles and partridges.

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The most significant element of architecture is the *palloza*, but there are other unique buildings such as churches, bridges, fountains ... And we cannot fail to talk of our

popular wisdom (folklore) and cultural heritage of great value (our folklore, tales and legends, customs still live on in the mountains ...), but are in danger of disappearing due to the aging population and depopulation of the territory .

The Ancares is an area which deserves to be opened up; it is true it lacks resources and the services necessary to make it an important tourist attraction but, on the other hand, it conserves its charms and authentic magic - here we can see nature in her pure state, together with interesting cultural remains, not to mention the excellent top quality gastronomy.

For those who wish to spend a few days in the Ancares and get to know a little more about the charms of its landscape, we offer some guide-lines which we will personally enlarge upon request. The routes we suggest are just a few of the many options available and there are excursions which can be adapted to suit your needs. It is advisable to make sure you know your way around and enquire at each village you pass through whenever in doubt. Many of the routes are long-distance and very few are sign-posted.