

12 FABRICA DE LA LUZ AND CUEVA DE MELERO

Distance: 6km/3.7mi; 1h39min

Grade: Moderate, with ascent and corresponding descent of 350m/1150ft

Equipment: see page 51; trekking pole(s) useful

How to get there and return: 🚗 to Santa Ana in Canillas de Albaida (the 42km-point of Car tour 3), then continue driving to the right (signposted to 'La Fábrica'). Pass a quarry and, 2km further on, park at the *fábrica*.

This walk combines the charm of a rural river valley with the delights of a herb-clad hillside. The *fábrica*, an old hydroelectric plant and now an attractive *zona recreativa*, is a particularly popular spot on Sundays and *fiestas*. On a weekday, when it is likely to be deserted, its peace and tranquillity are almost tangible. The enormous Cueva de Melero stirs the imagination. Who, or even what, might have lived in it? Is it still used today?

Start at the *fábrica* (P12) by crossing the LOG BRIDGE just below the toilet block and head upstream on a charming little path alongside the **Arroyo de la Cueva de Melero**. Cross the stream on STEPPING STONES (6min), the first of three such crossings. After rain be prepared to get your feet wet. Always accompanied by the sound of flowing water you climb gradually, the path now quite rocky. The white **Cortijo del Chato** comes into view (15min), its fruit groves stretched out either side of your path. You'll see the **Cueva de Melero** up to the left and a ruined *cortijo* ahead (23min) shortly before a steep section of path.

At the top, the barking of dogs greets you — but the fierce ones are safely behind El Chato's fence. Turn left on a track, probably passing some loose dogs in the *cortijo*'s driveway. At a junction (29min) turn sharp right on an

Typical in all Andalusian pueblos blancos in the autumn is the wrought-iron balcony hung with pimientos (red peppers) set out to dry. Below: the Cortijo de Buena Vista



unsurfaced road and pause to look across the valley for a clear view of the interior of the huge cave. This road, surprisingly sandy, climbs steadily along the slopes of Cerro Verde (Green Hill). At a CHAIN BARRIER (56min) you join another dirt road coming down from the left; then, within just a few metres/yards, two large cairns on the right mark the start of your downward path.

But first it's worth continuing along the road on a short out and back detour to the Cortijo de Buena Vista. You can just



see its roof poking out above the trees, but a helipad is out in the open to its right. Just before the entrance to **Buena Vista** (1h03min) look for the deep cylindrical pit, probably an old lime kiln, on the right. Panoramic views have been with you for the past half hour or so, and you will appreciate how appropriate the name Buena Vista is.

Return to the cairns (1h09min) and begin your zigzag descent, stopping often to admire the views. Take care — this is where trekking poles come in handy. Cross the substantial walls of a disused *acequia* and water reservoir (1h30min) and continue down to the *fábrica* (1h39min).

