

9 FROM ANTIGUA TO BETANCURIA

Distances: 5.5km/3.5mi; 1h50min

Grade: fairly strenuous, with an ascent of 340m/1120ft, much of it up a stony path

Equipment: walking boots, sunhat, light jacket, suncream, picnic, plenty of water; raingear in winter

How to get there: 🚗 to Antigua (Line 01)

To return: 🚗 from Betancuria (Line 02)

Alternative walk: Betancuria — Degollada de la Villa — Betancuria (3.5km/2.2mi; 1h20min). Grade and equipment as main walk; ascent/descent of 200m/650ft. 🚗 (Line 02) or 🚗 to/from Betancuria. This straightforward climb is very rewarding. It makes a good, if demanding, leg-stretcher on a car tour. From Betancuria, walk south on the FV30 and take either of two turnings branching off left — the first 50m south of the Valtarajal Restaurant, the second one 150m south of it. Then just head straight uphill (see map).

This is the pilgrim's walk. Every year on the third Saturday in September hundreds of pilgrims make their way across these hills to pay homage to the Virgen de la Peña in Vega de Río Palma. The contrast you'll see in vegetation is reason enough to do the hike. In winter there's a rare lushness on the hilltops rarely seen on this island, and grass abounds. Crossing the pass (Degollada de la Villa), sheep and goats will keep you company.

The walk begins at the leafy SQUARE in **Antigua**. With the belfry behind you and the square on your left, head along the street. After a minute, at the junction, turn right. Go through another junction and soon cross the valley floor. Palms border the right-hand side of the road. Ignore a road to the left and, shortly after, a road to the right. Within **10min** you'll see a WATER TANK on the right, and two roads forking off to the left. Take the second road to the left, which goes straight ahead towards the barrier of hills cutting across in front of you. You can see your ongoing route from this point — a wide path ascending a lateral crest not far ahead, offset slightly to the right.

Around 10 minutes later ignore a road to the left. Some 50m/yds further on, when the road forks right, continue straight ahead on a track. Garden plots lie fallow on the left. Just below a CONCRETE SHED with a TANK, the way forks. Head right here, up a wide path. Small piles of stones splashed with white paint lie at intervals on either side of this path. The ascent now becomes noticeable. A lush little cultivated valley unravels to our left and, looking back down over the scattering of Antigua, we have a sweeping view. Low volcanic humps and razor-backed ridges stretch across the horizon.

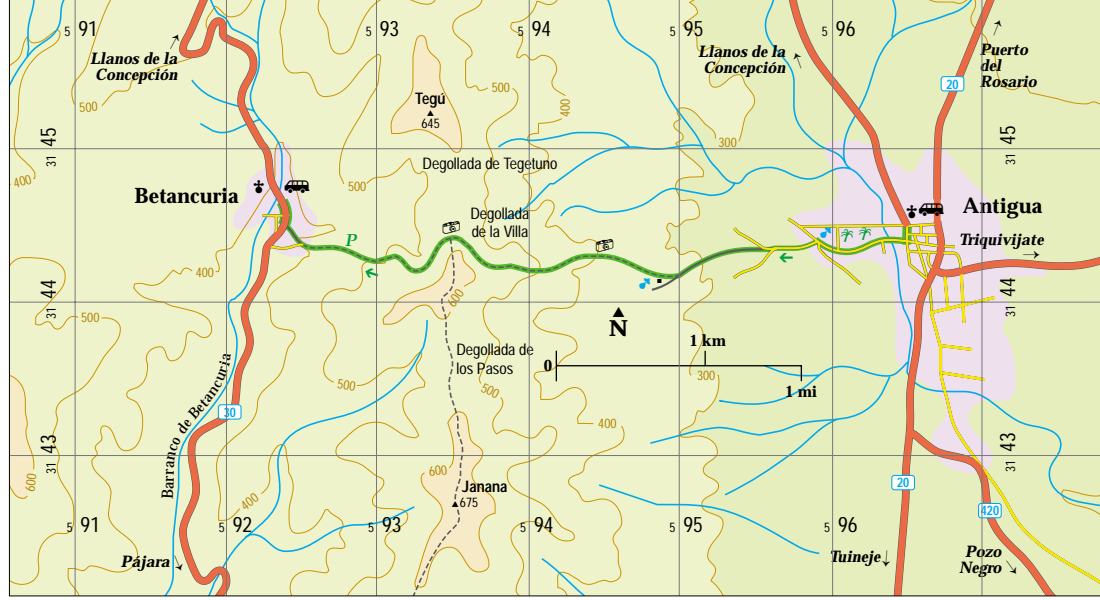
A SIGN designating the area '*parque rural*' comes up

just over **30min** en route. We zigzag our way uphill towards the crest. Nearer the top, the spiny *aulaga* bushes give way to bright green *tabaiba*. The path fades briefly, but traces of stone walls come to the rescue. In winter low cloud may brush the ridges. The terrain gets rockier, and the greens of the *verode*, *tabaiba* and *asphodelus* bring life to these otherwise insipid slopes. Then the grass becomes noticeable; the landscape softens. Quite a treat! Soon goats and sheep will keep us company.

At the **1h20min** mark we're crossing the **Degollada de la Villa**. On windy days brace yourself for a blasting! A brilliant sight awaits us now, as the vegetation changes completely. The inclines are dotted with wind-battered pines, and grass carpets the ground. Straight below us lies Betancuria, ensconced in these hills. Keeping straight over the crest, we descend on a very wide path. Thick leathery-leafed aloes border the path and nearby fields.

Betancuria, with the 17th-century cathedral church of Santa María





Church at Antigua (top), climbing from Antigua to the Degollada de la Villa (middle), grassy slopes and wind-battered pines on the descent from the pass to Betancuria. Right: landscape near Antigua. The wind-pump at the right is used for drawing water from sunken wells (see notes on page 18).

70

Baying dogs welcome us into **Betancuria** 25 minutes below the pass, and we turn right on reaching the FV30. The bus stops about 200m/yds beyond the Valtarajal Restaurant, just before the BRIDGE (1h50min).

71