

5 FÓIA ROAD • MADRINHA • PÉ DO FRIO • CHILRÃO • FÓIA ROAD

See also photograph page 49

Distance: 11.0km/6.9mi; 2h50min

Grade: moderate-strenuous. There is a descent of 375m/1230ft in the first part which has to be regained on the return. The footpaths and tracks used are generally good underfoot.

Equipment: See pages 44-45.

How to get there and return: 🚗 only accessible by car. From Monchique follow the signs for Fóia. Some 6km from Monchique (200m past the *miradouro*, at the point where the road bends right), park down the second of two tracks close together on the left, in an open area with some ruined buildings.

Shorter walks

1 Fóia road — Madrinha — Fóia road (1.8km/1.1mi; 22min). Easy grade, but rough underfoot in places. Follow the main walk to enjoy the views from the summit of Madrinha. Then return the same way.

2 Fóia road — Pé do Frio — Chilrão — Fóia road (10.3km/6.4mi; 2h42min). Grade and notes as for main walk, but omit the climb to Madrinha.

The *serras* which make up the most northerly part of Algarve are generally dull and monotonous. Their schistose composition generates an acid soil which supports a uniform *matos* consisting mainly of gum cistus, *Cistus ladanifer*. But the Serra de Monchique is altogether different. Its greater height gives it an imposing presence, and its granite composition favours a more varied and interesting flora. This area provides the most demanding walking in Algarve.

After first climbing the nearby summit of Madrinha (803m/2634ft) to enjoy the views, this walk then descends its western slopes, to visit two small villages before circling back by a different route. It starts 200m/yds past the viewpoint near the top of Fóia signposted 'Fonte/Miradouro'. It's not unusual to find one or two locals here, offering to sell home-made produce to passers-by, including honey and *medronho*, a spirit made from the fruit of the strawberry tree (see panel opposite).

Start out at the PARKING PLACE: with your back to the road, go down the track to the right of the small hill. Stay left on the rising track at the fork (under **3min**), and ignore a track off left soon afterwards. Meet a track fork at the top of the rise (**7min**). Now go left uphill to the SUMMIT of **Madrinha (11min)**, marked by a trig point and a fire-watch station. (*Stay right downhill for Shorter walk 2*). This is one of the finest viewpoints in the region and, given a clear day, it is possible to pick out a whole host of landmarks stretching the full breadth of Algarve.

STRAWBERRY TREE

Retrace your steps to the junction of tracks (**15min**). (*Shorter walk 1 retraces the outgoing route from here.*) Turn left and continue down the hill. Pass a red and white mast on the right. Ignore the woodland track joining from the left in **30min**. Two minutes later, take either fork in the track; they rejoin shortly (both are rough and steep). Keep descending, ignoring all side tracks, with the summit of Picos close by on the left and views to Pé do Frio on the right.

A junction with a ROAD is reached in **50min**. This is the new route to Pé do Frio, but the old route is more scenic, so cross the road and take the track to the right, descending parallel with the road. Stay right at the fork reached two minutes later, to enjoy good views across the valley to Pé do Frio. Where the track swings down left (**54min**), keep ahead on a path, passing a small house up to the right. The field track/path descends,



Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*)

AS ITS NAME indicates, you eat only one! The fruits of the strawberry tree are unpalatable, but they make a splendid *aguardente*, a firewater called *medronho*.

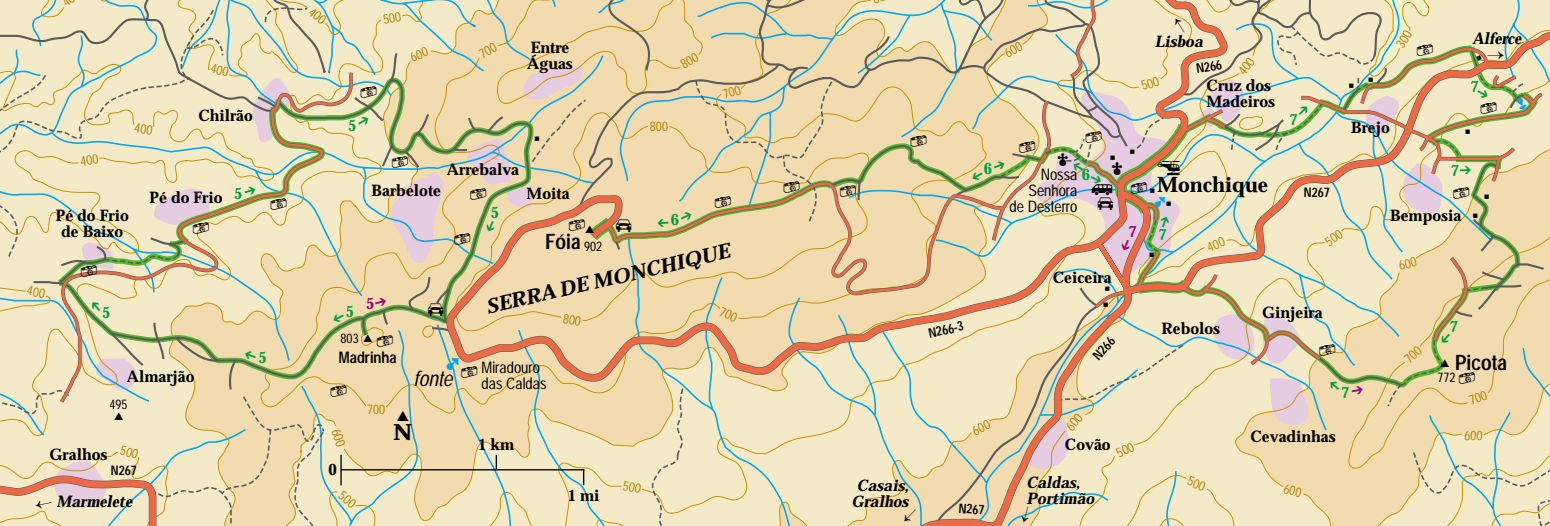
The tree flowers in September and October, and it is at this time that the previous year's fruit starts to ripen and really resembles a strawberry. Only then is it ready for collection.

The fruit is fermented in wooden barrels to produce alcohol with only enough water to cover the mass. The natural yeasts already present on the fruit start the fermentation. Mud is used to seal the barrels, with a tube for escaping gases, to protect the alcohol from further oxidation.

By January the fermentation is usually complete, and it is ready for distillation. This process uses a specially-designed copper kettle, which is heated over a wood fire. A medium-sized kettle will handle about 100 kilos of the fermented brew, but the mass needs to be stirred by hand to prevent burning, until it is necessary to fit the tubes ready for distillation. A slow and steady distillation rate gives the best results and produces *medronho* which is about 90% proof. Your visit to Algarve will not be complete without sampling some *medronho* at one of the bars in Caldas...

Rhododendron ponticum, with the Monchique hills in the background





crosses a gully, and bends left. Step round any animal barriers that may be across the field track/path. At **1h06min** turn right at the junction, to enter the main part of **Pé do Frio**, the hamlet shown on page 49. Turn left on meeting the road less than a minute later.

Chirão soon comes into sight. It too is just a scattering of farm houses and has no shops. Keep on the road to pass **Chirão (1h25min)**, and stay ahead at the junction two minutes later. Ignore the track joining from the left in **1h32min**, but look for a track ascending to the right less than a minute later (at a point where the road is itself starting to bend away to the right).

Slip into low gear as the uphill section now gets underway, with good views on the left. Stay ahead at the diagonal crossing track (**1h45min**). Seven minutes later, fork right, where a track continues ahead. Stay with the track as the route describes almost a U-turn to the right, back towards Fóia, with a valley on the right. Be sure to keep left in **2h04min**, where a track descends ahead; then, two minutes later, go sharp left, staying with the track. From this sharp bend there are some spectacular views, especially towards the steep terraces just below Madrinha. You can also see a zigzag of tracks below Fóia; this is where our route will eventually take us. Take another sharp turn (**2h09min**), this time to the right, where a track continues ahead. Swing left two minutes later, then keep ahead (**2h21min**).

Terracing brings a neat order and grace to the steep hillsides, as you continue steadily uphill along the main track. As you leave the shade of a **EUCALYPTUS WOOD (2h 23min)**, fork right on a woodland track. It becomes clear



Caldas de Monchique; the village has recently undergone restoration.

that you are walking a horseshoe circuit around the valley down to your right. Pé do Frio and Chirão can both be seen below. Soon there is a fork in the track (**2h41min**), where you keep up to the left. All along this section there are fine views down over old terraces and farm clusters. The track rises to join the **ROAD (2h49min)**. The **PARKING PLACE** where the walk began is just to the right (**2h50min**).