

NATURAL MONUMENT OF PUENTE DE FONSECA. THE FONSECA ROCK BRIDGE.

The Maestrazgo region straddles the Iberian mountain range and the Depresión del Ebro (Ebro river Valley). Due to its wild relief and picturesque scenery, it was worthy of the declaration of four Natural Monuments which are located within the Parque Cultural del Maestrazgo (Cultural Park of Maestrazgo) and Geoparque del Maestrazgo (Geopark of Maestrazgo).

The purpose of the declaration of these four natural monuments in the Maestrazgo region is to conserve some of the most singular and precious places of its territory and contribute to a sustainable development subject to its natural resources.

The Puente de Fonseca was declared a Natural Monument in 2006 and has a surface of 248.54 hectares in the township of Castellote.

The river Guadalope runs through the rock forming a natural bridge, which is highly uncommon in the Aragonese rivers.

THE RIVER GUADALOPE AND THE NATURAL MONUMENT

The main river of the Maestrazgo region is the river Guadalope. It is a Mediterranean regime river, having the highest flow in the springtime and another peak in the autumn. The river is characterized by an irregular flow and presenting a minimum one in the summer.

The river is highly set along this area, generating an extremely wild landscape. The setting of the river was boosted by the existence of a wide and numerous range of underground channels originated by the dilution of limestone rocks, which were used by the river when the erosion dismantled the ceiling.

The Natural Monument is formed by the Guadalope riverbed and riverside as well as by the reliefs and the calcareous cliffs of Umbría de la Perona and Minarete places, defining a picturesque landscape of deep ravines shaped among limestone rocks. The natural bridge was formed in the proximity of the Masía de la Fonseca and it is one of the few places which allows to cross over the river.

In the surrounding area there is the archaeological site of cave paintings called El Arenal.



ORIGIN

The rivers which run along the limestone rocks dilute part of these rocks and calcium carbonate concentrates in water. When water gets saturated, or due to environmental changes, water is unable to carry so much calcium carbonate, this chemical component precipitates over the riverbed, the vegetation and animal remains covering them. This carbonate petrifies the banks and the vegetation of the river which, when it dies, becomes the base of a new vegetation growth. In this way, a tufa buildup starts to originate (this is the name for this type of rock formation), growing upward. There is a time where this rock cannot grow any more thus the river circulates through its way cutting the rock and leaving the remains of the tufa along the riverside.

As an exception, if the tufa has grown originating a waterfall and leaving a cavity, the river finds its way through it, forming a tunnel.

This is the case of the Puente de Fonseca, where the river is divided into two branches and runs through both tunnels.

VEGETATION

The vegetation on the slopes is typical of the Mediterranean climate and partially it is the result of the area regeneration after a great fire which took place in 1994. The unusual presence of some thermophilic species, like pomegranate trees or arbutus stands out.

There are optimum humidity conditions around the natural bridge, allowing the development of a riverside woodland, which gathers black poplars and willows.

As a curiosity, we may mention the presence of Southern maidenhair (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*) on the leaking walls of the bridge.



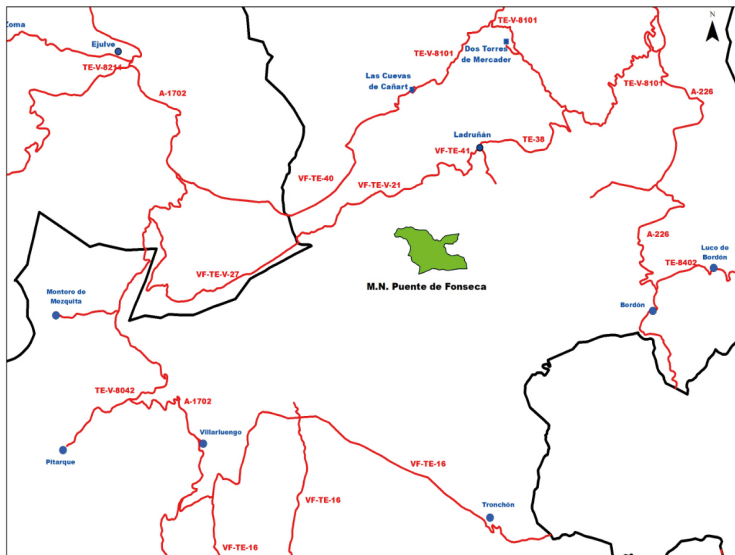
WILDLIFE

The reliefs and calcareous cliffs give shelter to bird colonies like griffon vultures, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, and Bonelli's eagles. The presence of otters, European dippers, kingfishers and crayfish show the good health of the river.

Among the mammals, the wild boar and the Spanish wild goat are the principal fauna.



Photos: Gobierno de Aragón y Comarca del Maestrazgo.



INFORMATION OF INTEREST:

The El Higueral- Puente Fonseca trail (SL-TE 31) starts at the location of El Higueral (Ladruián neighbourhood of Castellote village) and goes down the river Guadalupe until it reaches the natural bridge. The roundtrip is 4 kilometers.

The Ladruián- Puente de Fonseca trail (SL-TE 32) starts at the Ladruián neighbourhood, goes through the La Algecira district and continues towards the river until it reaches a crossing, then it becomes a path going along the left bank of the river Guadalupe up to the natural bridge. The roundtrip is 13 kilometers.

By car, access to this trail is possible via a path which continues from the crossing to the El Arenal parking area.

ADDRESSES OF INTEREST:

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