

Benchijigua and Playa De Santiago

Walk 8

Distance: 8 miles (13 km) **Rise and fall:** Negligible rise 2360ft (716m) fall **Shorter Version: Distance:** 4 miles (6½ km)

Longer than the other walks in this pack, this very fine linear route is 99% downhill, exploring the great barrancos of Benchijigua and Santiago and visiting the hamlets of Benchijigua and Pastrana. The rock scenery, dominated by the Roque de Agando, is arguably the finest on the island, whilst the flora is rich and varied. Underfoot, there is a length of unsurfaced road, winding down the valley side as far as Benchijigua and a longer section of traffic-free tarmac road from Pastrana to Playa de Santiago. Connecting the two is a footpath, often narrow and largely rough stone underfoot. Although a little exposed in two places, the path is safe overall and is easy to follow.

Benchijigua hamlet consists of just a few buildings, attractively scattered over a shelf of land high in the barranco of the same name. Within the last few years some of the dwellings have been renovated and are now surrounded by luxuriant gardens. The little chapel (ermita) of San Juan stands apart, nestling at the foot of its own modest volcanic crag. Further down the valley the houses of Pastrana cling to the valley side at the head of a little cul de sac road.

Start:

Space for a few vehicles by the bus stop just above the hamlet of Las Toscas, at the junction of the unsurfaced road to Benchijigua with the main road to San Sebastian or take the San Sebastian bus either from Playa de Santiago or from the stop at Las Trincheras road junction. Less than 15 minutes journey to the stop above Las Toscas.

Refreshments:

None until Playa de Santiago is reached. An alleged former bar at Benchijigua seems to be non-operational.

Shorter Version:

If the length and/or linear nature of this walk are a deterrent, an out and back stroll from La Toscas to Benchijigua is recommended:

Distance: 4 miles (6½ km) **Rise and fall :** 700ft (213m)

WALK

Set off along the unsurfaced roadway heading into the valley, following this remarkable route all the way to Benchijigua, for part of the way accompanied by a substantial concrete water channel, a vital support of the cultivation which formerly took place in parts of this valley. An amazing little viaduct carrying this channel, plastered to the cliff face, is soon passed. The hamlet of Lo del Gato, in view for a high proportion of this walk, is soon seen far below. The road winds its tortuous way below the cliffs of the valley side, through areas of cacti, rosette shaped succulents clinging to the bare rock, Canarian pines and abundant wild flowers. Eventually, Benchijigua hamlet comes into view with some distance still to go, as the Roque de Agando looms ever nearer. Cross a ravine on a stone bridge before reaching a junction, where a surfaced road goes to the left towards Lo del Gato.

1. For Benchijigua go straight ahead, cross another stone bridge over a ravine and pass the renovated houses with gardens overflowing with shrubs and fruit trees such as medlars, to reach a long low building, probably the former bar. The chapel is a few yards further, at the end of the road.

For the short walk return to Las Toscas by the same route.

To continue to Playa de Santiago, walk back past the former bar then, in 100 yards:

2. Turn right at a tiny stone cairn to descend a little path, soon reaching a dry stream bed. Bear right, over the stones, for 20 yards before the path continues to the left. Pass another dry stream bed. As an abandoned house is approached, keep left, soon zig-zagging down a steep hillside. Join the Lo del Gato surfaced road, turning left, uphill for about 150 yards.

3. Just before the road bends sharply to the left, look for a path marked by a cairn on the right. There are a few rudimentary steps and a blue mark on a rock at the start of this path, now continuous all the way to Pastrana. Underfoot there is soon black volcanic sand but the generally rough stone surface necessitates stopping to admire the superb views. The path passes above Lo del Gato, now seen at much closer quarters, with a distant glimpse of the hamlet of El Cabezo through a cleft in the valley sides, far ahead. The gradient towards the barranco bed is generally quite gentle, with a few twists and turns to cross side valleys and two sections which cling to cliff sides needing a little extra care. Pass an electricity pylon, then two concrete water tanks, to reach the barranco bed. The route among the boulders is not very clear but there are occasional stone cairns and helpful blue marks on rocks. Pass a stone hut; the path now resumes on the right. Re-cross the barranco bed and rise steeply up a stone-laid track to the left. Pass above a stone hut with cultivated areas before reaching the end of the tarmac road at Pastana.

4. Continue along the road, through the hamlet with garden shrubs tumbling over the roadside. This traffic-free road continues for more than 3 miles to Playa de Santiago; until the last half mile or so the surroundings are entirely attractive, with views of El Cabezo on the shoulder of land between the barrancos of Benchijigua and Guarimar and of El Rumbazo in the valley bottom. Pass the junction with the road which

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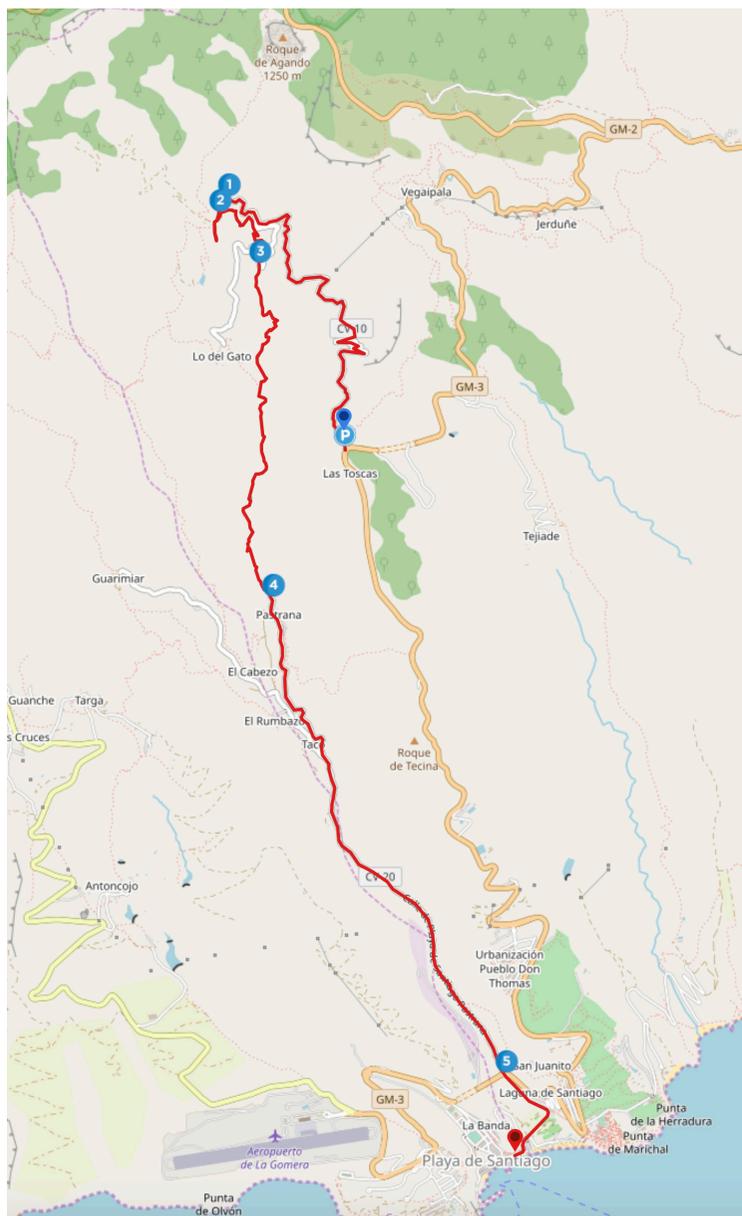
serves these hamlets and Guarimar and continue the steady descent, now in the Barranco de Santiago. Much of the valley bottom hereabouts has been taken over by rampant growth of bamboo. The unattractive scenery of a large area desolated by stone extraction and breaking plants is passed as quickly as possible. Pass two large stone water tanks to reach the main road behind Playa de Santiago.

5. Cross straight over to follow a minor road along the lower edge of Laguna suburb, with a banana plantation and a water tank on the right. At a road junction go to the right to walk by the roadside between banana plantations back into the middle of Playa de Santiago.

Note: It would be a great help to future walkers if you could record any inaccuracies you come across during this walk and report them to reception so that appropriate amendments can be made.

Thank you for your help and happy walking.

Norman & June Buckley



 - Walk

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