

The Historical Gola de El Pujol

WALK

ROUTE

The route runs parallel to the *Gola de El Pujol* (El Pujol Canal) from the *Camí Vell de la Devesa* (Old Devesa Road), near the artificial lake, to the lock gates that connect the Albufera with the Mediterranean sea.

LENGTH OF THE WALK

Approximately 700 metres.

DURATION

Approximately 40 minutes.

WHAT TO DO

- _RESPECT THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS. Do not pick flowers or leaves.
- _RESPECT THE SOUNDS OF NATURE. Do not make noise.
- _DO NOT LEAVE YOUR LITTER BEHIND. Use the bins and containers provided.
- _DO NOT LIGHT FIRES.
- _KEEP TO THE MARKED PATHS AND TRACKS.
- _DO NOT GO BAREFOOT. Use appropriate footwear for walking.

USEFUL NUMBERS

DEVESA-ALBUFERA SERVICE	96 161 03 47
EL SALER FORESTRY PROTECTION CENTRE	96 183 00 12
FIRE AND EMERGENCY	112



THE HISTORICAL GOLA DE EL PUJOL WALK



STOPS ALONG THE WAY

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- 2** EEL FISHING
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- 4** BIRDS
- 5** THE TOPONYMY OF THE ALBUFERA LAGOON
- 6** THE LOCK GATES
- 7** THE STORIES THE TREE RINGS TELL US

1st Stop

LA GOLA DE EL PUJOL (EL PUJOL CANAL)

The wetland of the Albufera Natural Park is connected to the sea through five *golas* or canals. Three of these (the *Gola de El Pujol*, the *Gola de El Perellonet* and the *Gola de El Perelló*) connect the Albufera lagoon to the sea. The other two (the *Gola del Rei* or *del Mareny* and the *Gola de Sant Llorenç* or *del Cano de Cullera*) link to the waters of the Sueca and Cullera marsh.



Gola de El Pujol, in the 1960s



Gola de El Pujol

Of the three canals that connect the lake with the sea, the *Gola de El Pujol* is the most modern. It was constructed in 1953, a little over a kilometre south of an existing canal, the *Gola del Pujol Viejo* (the Old El Pujol Canal), due to drainage problems in the Albufera and the pressure of the rice-growers. Furthermore it is the only canal that connects the lagoon directly to the sea, since the other two are connected to the sea through a network of canals. It is 1 kilometre long and 45 metres wide. The name *Pujol* in Spanish means a small hill or hillock and is probably a reference to the nearby dunes. From this point we can see, on the other side of the *Gola* and looking towards to the sea, one of the highest dunes in the Devesa, the *Muntanyar de El Pujol*. This dune, which is 9.5 metres high, was saved from destruction when the development plan of 1965 was implemented. Now it constitutes an example of the dunes of the Devesa as they were then.

The *Gola* crosses the Devesa from East to West. The route of this walk allows us to see both the sea and the Albufera just by turning the head, and this shows us that the Devesa is a narrow strip of sand.

2nd Stop

EEL FISHING



Eels



Monot

Many species of fish that reproduce in the sea and then feed in fresh water enter the Albufera through the *golas*; one of these is the elver, which as it grows becomes an eel.

Eels are currently fished in the *Gola de El Pujol* and in the *Golas del Perellonet* and *Perelló*. Initially eels were not sold, they were fished by the local people for food and the surplus was taken to Valencia, where they exchanged it for other basic necessities. They began to be sold, in 1925, by Basque steelworkers from the *Altos Hornos de Sagunto* plant. The first captures carried out for this purpose in the *Golas de El Perelló* and *el Perellonet* were strongly criticized by the fishermen of El Palmar who saw it as a threat to traditional eel fishing in the lagoon. It began to be regulated in 1936. The eels, which swim along the banks of the *gola* from the sea towards the Albufera, shun the light, and it is therefore easy to fish for them on dark nights with calm waters. Nowadays the fishing is done with the "*monot*" which is placed mainly on the south bank of the *gola*, on the stretch from the lock gates to the sea.

3rd Stop

TRADITIONAL USES OF THE DEVESA



The Cession Document

The Albufera lagoon and the Devesa were the property of the Crown from 1238 (the year when Jaime I, on conquering Valencia, reserved for himself the property of both spaces), until 1869 when they became the property of the State. From 1905 the City Council began the process of requesting the cession of the lagoon and the Devesa from the State. In 1911 the Law of Cession was promulgated and the process culminated in 1927 with the handover to the City Council of the two spaces, in exchange for approximately 7.200 €.

The Crown, as owner of the Albufera and the Devesa, received part of the profits obtained from the exploitation of the two spaces. The main profits came, in order of importance, from the leasing of fishing rights (the Crown received a fifth of all the fish taken from the lagoon), from the salterns (which were in operation until well into the 17th century), from pasture and from hunting. This last activity, traditionally linked to the nobility, was reserved for the private use of the majority of the successive monarchs and nobles who held the title to the land.

Throughout history the traditional uses of the spaces have been subject to different levels of regulation, depending on who was governing. In this way, for example, during some periods of the Middle Ages the practice of fishing and other related activities was prohibited. During the reign of Carlos 1 (1516-1556) pasture, wood cutting and hunting were permitted, however during the reign of Felipe III (1598-1621) and Carlos II (1665-1700) all extraction activity was completely prohibited, although in those times of maximum restrictions anyone was allowed to hunt in the lagoon on two days; Saint Martin's day (11th November) and Saint Catalina's day (25th November). This custom continued until 1987. It is now prohibited to hunt in the lagoon and the 100 metre strip that surrounds it.

4th Stop

BIRDS



Grey Heron

Despite the fact that on this route not many birds can be seen, if we pay a little attention we can usually find the Grey Heron and the Little Egret looking for small fish on the banks.

During the spring and summer, many of the birds that breed in the Albufera come here to look for food. In this period of the year, along the canal we can see the Common Tern, Little Tern, Black-headed Gull and Slender-billed Gull and, in the area closest to the sea, the Sandwich Tern and Audouin's Gull.

From autumn onwards, and during the winter months, species such the Balearic Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Razorbill and Great Skua can be seen near the mouth of the canal with other more common species of gulls and terns. During this period the fishermen of El Palmar set up their fishing tackle in the Albufera, next to the *Gola*, and this makes it possible to see birds such as the Great Cormorant, perched on wooden stakes to dry their feathers after long dives in the water of the Albufera.



Tern

5th Stop

THE TOPONYMY OF THE ALBUFERA LAGOON



The Albufera

The first surviving description of the Albufera dates from the 1st century and is ascribed to Pliny, who called it the "*Estanque Ameno*" (Pleasant Lake). The dimensions of the lagoon given in this description coincide approximately with the current dimensions of the whole of the Natural Park. Later, in the 4th century, Festo Rufo Avieno describes the Albufera lagoon as *Palas Nacararum*, *The Lagoon of the Nacres*, a name which probably comes from the abundant oysters that could be found in the lagoon, due to the fact that until the 17th century it was strongly salty.

The current name of the lagoon "*Albufera*" comes from the Arab *Al-boeira* or

Albuhera, meaning "the lagoon", defined in the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy as "a lagoon formed by sea water on low beaches".

6th Stop

THE LOCK GATES



The lock gates

From this point we can see the 11 lock gates of the *Gola*. These are used to regulate the level of the water in the Albufera lagoon and stop salt water entering the lagoon during storms. The level is determined according to the needs of the rice fields. A system of turbines is used to raise and lower the gates and a numbered scale is used to measure the level of the water.

Three different levels are used during the year:

- **Winter level:** this is the period when the lagoon is at its highest level and floods the *tancats* (low lying rice fields) that surround it. Historically it was around 60 centimetres above sea level, although in recent decades, mainly due to the mechanization of rice growing, it does not tend to rise above 35 or 40 centimetres. This period, which lasts from 1st November to 1st January, is known as the *perellonà*.
- **The level just before planting:** from the 1st of January the level descends to reach the "zero" level of the lagoon, which is around 18 centimetres above sea level. This is the longest period during which the rice fields are kept dry. This is when the soil is prepared for planting. It lasts until mid-April.
- **Cultivation level:** At the end of April the level is raised a little, to around 25 centimetres above sea level. It is maintained at this level till mid August when it is lowered again to the minimum. At the beginning of September the harvesters begin their work and the lagoon is kept at this minimum level until the next *perellonà*.

7th Stop

THE STORIES THE TREE RINGS TELL US

Nature provides us with signs that at particular moments, if properly interpreted, can be very useful. If we walk a little to the left here, we can see a cut tree trunk.

Its concentric circles reflect each year of its life, which allows us to date it and provides us with data about the climactic conditions during its growth (humidity, temperature etc). The thicker rings indicate that the living conditions were better then, while the narrower or double ones reveal more adverse circumstances due to drought, insects, frost, fire or disease.



The rings of a tree trunk

Did you know that the analysis of the rings of the oldest trees has made it possible to reconstruct the climate of the peninsula? Did you know that the rings can guide us?

The thickest parts of the rings appear where the trunk received more heat from the sun and therefore tend to be oriented to the south.

From this point we can link up to the botanical walk or continue straight on to the El Pujol lookout from where we can see the Albufera.