

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

11



Contemplating the
Francolí
river valley



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NB: Any established written accounts are limited in terms of concrete time and space. The natural evolution of the landscape and human activity can mean that some accounts may become less reliable over time.

11. *Contemplating the Francolí river valley*

In bygone times, when the rivers and communication routes were vital to the survival of these villages and towns, keeping a watch over strategic sites was absolutely essential. For centuries this task was carried out in the Torre de Petrol, on the summit of Puig Cabré, looking out over the river Francolí and the Estret de la Riba gorge.

This hiking excursion is an invitation to discover the beautiful panoramic views to be had over the wide Francolí valley, as seen from the modest heights of the Serra de Miramar.

We will begin this hike in Valls. We will make our way to the river, passing by the Santuari de la Granja de Doldelops and continue on towards the Pont de Goi, the famous bridge where the battle was lost against the French, and we will continue alongside the river towards the two mills, Molí d'Alcover and Molí del Croc, both in ruins. The next stop on our hike is the small village of La Plana, fortunately in a better condition than the mills. From here, we make our way along easy footpaths alongside the river, finally coming to Picamoixons at the foot of Puig Cabré. We make the mountain ascent using the tracks and footpaths which over the years have wisely sought out the route best suited to making our climb less strenuous. Once at the top, it's well worth taking time to enjoy the spectacular views. We will continue to make our way along the crest up to the start of the crags which we make our way past by taking a magnificent high pass. Finally it remains only for us to make our way down to La Riba, enjoying these incomparable landscapes as we go.

This is a moderately difficult walk which requires some hiking experience and orienteering knowledge, above all on the footpath down from the Torre del Petrol to La Riba, which isn't well marked and requires some orienteering. On the stretch between Pont de Goi and La Plana it can also be difficult to follow the footpath, although in this case there is the option of taking the Picamoixons road. Also an option is that of doing the stretch which appeals most, with respect to competence and ability.



Valls. Església de Sant Joan

11. Contemplating the Francolí river valley

Time

Distance

0:00
Partial  0:00
Total

0,000
Partial  0,000
Total

Valls. Capital of the Alt Camp district and known to be the birthplace of the famous Castellers (Human towers) and the gastronomic Calçotada festival. The town's skyline is marked by church bell towers from the Església de Sant Joan, de la Mare de Déu del Lledó, del Carme, de Sant Francesc and de Sant Antoni.

The town also has various attractions of interest to the visitor, such as the Capella del Roser (a chapel with 17th century glazed tiles depicting scenes from the battle of Lepanto), or the Museu de Valls (with of the finest collections of Catalan art from the last hundred and twenty years).

It's also well worth making a visit during one of the town's many festivals held throughout the year, such as Tres Tombs, the Gran Festa de la Calçotada, la Candela, Sant Joan, la Firagost or Santa Úrsula. Each one being an opportunity to enjoy the town's deeply rooted traditions (horse driven carriages, bestiary and naturally, the Castellers or human tower displays). All the necessary services and facilities can be found in the town including accommodation, restaurants, shopping, etc.

Plaça del Blat (212m). A magnificent square surrounded by an arcade and presided over by the Ajuntament or town hall.

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

Also the site of the spectacular human tower displays by the Xiquets de Valls Castellera.

From in front of the Església de Sant Joan we turn left by the foot of the majestic 74 metres high bell tower and continue to make our way through Plaça dels Escolans and along Carrer de l'Església until we come to a cluster of alleyways of which we take the one by the name of Tomàs Caylà, heading west.

Later we make our way across Plaça del Portal Nou and continue to make our way down along the street named Costa del Portal Nou, which takes us to Pont d'en Cabré, the 12th century bridge over Torrent de la Xamora. Once in the Comarques neighbourhood, the street name changes to Portal Nou.

0:07  0:07

0,500  0,500

Carretera de Picamoixons. We take this road to the right, in the direction of Picamoixons.

0:02  0:09

0,100  0,600

Camí de la Granja. This road goes off to the left, runs parallel to the main road and makes its way up to the start of the Santa Magdalena neighbourhood. The road is surfaced and well signposted. Before long, we are already amongst the cultivations and leaving behind us the access roads to the same.

0:09  0:18

0,650  1,250

Fork. Where the road forks we continue straight ahead to La Granja and Alcover, leaving behind the track to the right which goes to the main road.

0:05  0:23

0,350  1,600

Branch. Here we take the right branch, heading northeast, along the more secondary route which descends more gently. A few metres prior to our turning off, we passed the entrance to some fincas. The track continues to make its way towards the river.

0:04  0:27

0,300  1,900

Footpath. Our track comes to an end at the entrance to a finca. We continue making our way down, in the same direction, along what was the old La Granja road, now reduced to a footpath on account of the little traffic and also a little sunken.

11. Contemplating the Francolí

0:04  0:31

0,300  2,200

Camí Nou de la Granja. We make our way straight ahead on this surfaced road. Soon we come to the walls of the sanctuary and, on the right, the iron grid and access to the Font de Sant Bernat, set in the shade of two majestic eucalyptus trees.

0:03  0:34

0,200  2,400

Doldellops (196m). *The old farm and stables to the Monestir de Poblet, located between Valls and the river Francolí. The old farm was reformed and a new gothic construction added by the abbot Ponç de Copons (1516-1548). In 1950 it was purchased by architect Cèsar Martinell, from Valls.*

We pass between the buildings and through a gateway and continue along the footpath alongside the wall. We leave the La Granja boundary behind us and soon the footpath becomes a surfaced road.

0:04  0:38

0,300  2,700

Intersection with the access road to some houses. We make our way along the track to the right which begins to head downhill and also to deteriorate.

0:04  0:42

0,250  2,950

Fork. Where the track forks we take the one to the left, leaving behind the wider track for a footpath which goes over the Balç de la Granja. We can stop a while to take in the sight of the waters of the Francolí River running slowly past, beneath our feet. Opposite we have the fertile plains created by the river sediments. We make our way through the woods and down towards the track we left previously.

0:03  0:45

0,150  3,100

Torrent del Serraller. We cross the bed of this stream and, if there is water coming down, we will be able to see a small waterfall where it flows into the river. We come to a reed bed, to the right of which runs an irrigation canal. Soon after, we come to the hazelnut groves.

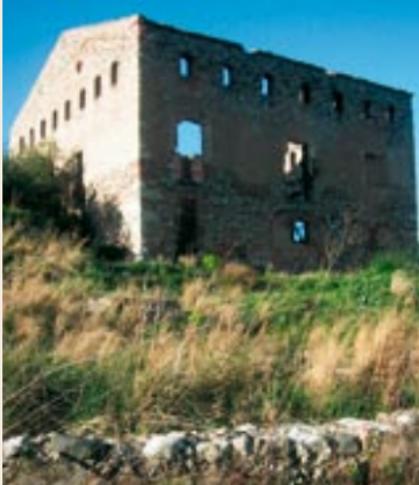
0:03  0:48

0,200  3,300

Molí de la Granja. We pass to the north of this mill. We continue, now along a road, between the hazelnut groves near the Francolí, which we follow upstream, towards the east. On



La Granja de Doldellops



Molí del Pont de Goi

the south side there is a plaque showing the water levels reached during various floods.

0:12  1:00

0,900  4,200

Pont de Goi (159m). *The old bridge over the Francolí on what was once the king's highway from Tarragona to Lleida and famous for the hard battle fought on the 15th February 1809, during the French War, when Napoleonic troops ruled over the entire Camp de Tarragona area.*

The road from Picamoixons to Morell crosses the Pont de Goi. Just before the bridge, there is the monument to the famous battle against the French. We pass beneath the right arch and follow the sheep tracks. On the right, by the side of the bridge, is the ruined mill, which features in many legends around the famous bandit and miller Claudi, el Moliner. On the left, the river runs along the Balç del Serradalt, and on the right, the bank has been reinforced to hold back the flood waters. As we make our way along the river bed, the vegetation becomes increasingly thicker and in certain places it becomes difficult to get through.

Caution! This is the start of the stretch which follows the course of the Francolí along the same river bed up to Picamoixons. Whilst this is an interesting and pretty stretch, it is also quite difficult. For those who either don't wish to attempt this stretch, or those accompanied by small children, or if the flow is torrential, there is an option to take the road, which will take you to the village, only 1.9km along this road.

0:11  1:11

0,800  5,000

Molí d'Alcover, on the opposite bank of the Francolí. At our feet, the gate for the irrigation channel from the Serra creates a water pond where the ducks usually congregate and where, if we are attentive, we will also hear many birds. We climb up towards a shack to later return to the current. The abundant vegetation makes the route difficult. If we don't have a clear view, we will continue along the top of the bank, alongside the hazelnut groves.

11. *Contemplating the Francoli*

Time



3 h 20'

Difficulty



13,700 km



Distance

11. Contemplating the Francolí

0:11  1:22

0,800  5,800

Canal sluice gate at the Molí d'Alcover, wrecked by floods, in 1994. We make our way along the opposite bank, on top of the wall or, by the most feasible route, and we climb up the embankment to the markers for the footpath which goes through the poplar grove to Molí del Croc. Further up, the busy C-14 road passes by.

0:03  1:25

0,200  6,000

Molí del Croc, an old paper mill. We pass by the west side of the mill. The place is thick with brambles and the remains of the building barely perceptible. We cut across the irrigation channel to Papelera Catalana. The bottom is waterlogged. We continue making our way alongside, heading northwest. An olive grove, planted with young trees, is an indication that we are finally leaving a state of abandon. Fifty metres on and the ground underfoot is more well-trodden, used as it is to access the olive grove and *masia* and, further ahead still, improves even more as we approach a farm on the left.

0:07  1:32

0,500  6,500

La Plana (187m), a small hamlet attached to Alcover, in the far north of the district, between Francolí and the C-14 road. The four buildings which make up the hamlet are spun out along the one and only street and a square dominated by the 18th century *Mare de Déu de l'Assumpta* church.

The water reserve, albeit with a curious arcade, adds a refreshing touch, opposite which, we have the hermitage. Some of the *trencadís* trims sported by the buildings are reminiscent of Gaudinian modernist architecture. The entire area is filled with hazelnut groves and irrigated crops.

0:06  1:38

0,400  6,900

Crossroads in front of the Papelera Catalana fence. We go by the north side of the building, making our way between the fence full of paper and the river, straight ahead we can see the Picamoixons bell tower. The way left goes to the main road. Next to the crossroads we come across a shed full of dogs.

0:04  1:42

0,300  7,200

El Francolí. We make our way down to the river bed to cross the stream, or in the case there is too much current we will have to cross by the road bridge. Once on the opposite bank we go in search

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

of the confluence where the Francolí meets up with the Riera de les Guixeres, where we will make our way up the river bed.

0:02  1:44

0,100  7,300

River road. On the left, a paved footpath goes up to the village. 50 metres on and we take a cart track to the right and a little further beyond that we take the street going uphill.

0:06  1:50

0,400  7,700

Picamoixons (213m). *This is an attractive and vibrant place set between mountains and left of the Francolí river. A well-known rail link and also famous for its olive oil, made exclusively from arbequin olives.*

Administratively this place actually comes under the municipality of Valls, albeit decentralised. It has a long history, dating back to 1170 when King Alfons ordered Pere de Vilagrassa to repopulate the area. The Església de Sant Salvador is of particular interest. This church was constructed in 1906, in the historicist style with neo-Romanesque and neo-gothic elements. Amenities here include some shops and a restaurant.

We enter via Carrer del Diputat Orga and on to Plaça de l'Església, the church square. Afterwards a narrow alley takes us to another square, Plaça de la Font. We continue heading north, towards the main T-743 road, which we take to the left. Where it goes through the village, the road goes by the name of Carrer Major. A hundred metres on and it becomes Carrer de la Font, going up to the right, to continue as Camí de Fontscaldes. We continue to follow the bend in the road.

0:03  1:53

0,200  7,900

Junction with mini-island in the centre. Here we continue straight ahead, towards the northeast, along Carrer de Sant Salvador. The road turns left and goes over Riera de les Guixeres, the river. Just before is the recently restored 1925 municipal wash place. We pass by a pond and cross the Boscos de Valls gully, on the village outskirts, the road here is surfaced.

0:03  1:56

0,200  8,100

Tunnel beneath the train line. With a semicircular slanted arch with stone voussoirs and a brick built vault. The tunnel serves as a way through both for the road and the river. Once on the other side, we leave the surfaced road on the left, which goes to Coll de la Creu, known by the locals as Coll de les Moles. A dirt track goes up the opposite bank. As we continue to make our way we can see the sheds of Pessebre Vivent.

11. Contemplating the Francolí

0:08  2:04

0,600  8,700

Mas del Poetó spring and pond (246m), left of the road and below the *masia*. The water runs permanently and fills the pond. We continue along the bed of the gully and make our way through the canes.

0:04  2:08

0,250  8,950

Fork. We take the fork to the left, towards the *masia*. We leave Camí de Fontscaldes, which continues straight ahead. A hundred metres on and we come to a crossroads. We continue making our way uphill heading east, passing terraced olive groves. On the left, is the entrance to Mas del Poetó and on the right, a track leading to the cultivations.

0:02  2:11

0,100  9,100

Fork. We continue straight on, heading northeast. The old paved road surface has been reinforced with concrete. We ignore the uphill dirt track on the left. A little further on we pass close by two sheds, there being little distance between the two.

0:05  2:16

0,300  9,400

Fork. We take the fork to the left, which climbs barely a hundred metres up the rock and then levels out beneath a bank. The other branch disappears into the olive grove.

0:04  2:20

0,200  9,600

Track. We join the uphill track to the right, at the side of which are the four walls of a collapsed barn. The track to the left, goes to Coll de la Creu (de les Moles), five hundred metres away. The track is closed off by huge stones and a chain, but can be passed on foot or bicycle, this being a good alternative to return to Picamoixons or to go to La Riba without having to climb up Puig Cabré. The track we take, initially opened in the nineties, winds its way up to overcome the steep slope, damaging the sides of the old olive terraces in the process.

0:08  2:28

0,400  10,000

Pylon. We pass right next to the base of the pylon for the Ascó to Rubí power cable. The power cables extend across the valley at a great height from Estret de les Roixelles. The buzz of the current is pretty disturbing.

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

0:02  2:30

0,050  10,050

Coll de la Cabana (373m). Named as such on account of the cabana or dry stone hut and which could serve us as a shelter. The saddle of the hill allows us to have a good view over Francolí valley: in the foreground, the bridge for the high speed train, and next to the foot of a pillar, the remains of Molí d'en Roca, and beyond, the village of La Riba. In between run the river, railway line and highway. The high plateau is filled with crags making their way up and down until they meet up with the precipices. In front of us we have the Cova de l'Olivar crags. Underfoot the ground is now a reddish earth, but soon will return to be chalky again. We head north.

0:09  2:39

0,450  10,500

Footpath (405m) on the left, facing east, just after the second pylon. The footpath is indicated by milestones.

We leave the track, by the name of Carretera dels Moros, which goes through Coll de la Sivina, Pla de Gràcies a Déu, Coma Fonda and Coll de les Guixeres, and on to Fontscaldes in 6.2km.

We make our way up the hillside, surrounded by white rock-rose, rosemary, heather and gorse. If we look behind us we will see the hollow plain stained with crops and dotted with *masies*, with Fontscaldes behind, and in the distance the peaks of Montgut, Montmell, and the Serra de Montferri and, in the centre, dominating el Camp, the town of Valls.

0:10  2:49

0,500  11,000

Torre de Petrol (525m) on top of Puig Cabré. From here there is a spectacular view to all four sides. We leave the scrubland and make our way along the crest heading northwest, as if we were going to Vilaverd. Right of the footpath we are protected by some vertical rocks. On the left a trench drops straight down to Molí d'en Roca. Further on we pass over the top of the crest. On the right is Coll de la Sivina, which joins up with the very twisted and cracked Serra de les Guixeres. From the hill, la Canalissa drops straight down to the river, before Molí de l'Estret. Carretera de los Moros turns to make its way towards Coma Fonda, between the aforementioned sierra and the Mas de Gínjol hill.

We make our way through some old cultivation terraces which take us to a plateau defined by crags. At our feet we have the crest of the Roques Caigudes, the crag which forced Francolí to



La Torre del Petrol

turn back on itself and form the Estret de la Riba. In front, just a stones throw away, is the village. We pass some curious boundaries and turn south towards the Serrat del Querol in search of the pass. Now, beneath us we have the south end of the La Riba rail tunnel and high speed train line. We begin to descend sharply, carefully following the marker stones which guide our way.

0:13  3:02

0,650  11,650

Grau del Coster de la Cansaladeta (403m). We come to the start of the pass, a wide gully running between the Barbet and Cova de l'Olivar crags. The footpath zigzags its way down to compensate for the steep slope. On some of the bends and narrower stretches, the path is reinforced by stone banks. It is essential to stick to the footpath at all times and avoid making any short cuts, which aside from being dangerous, also damages the path. This is a surprisingly beautiful spot with some nice views. Unfortunately it is also accompanied by some factory noise.

0:05  3:07

0,250  11,900

Forest track (355m). The footpath has brought us to the bottom of the crag, at Coster de la Cansaladeta. We follow a forest track downhill for twenty minutes after which we abandon the track and head southwest along the barely visible footpath, luckily indicated by stone markers. We pass through Pla de les Forques, where we can see some larger cultivation terraces, the first ones we come to look abandoned but the ones we see later appear to be well tended. A little further still and the footpath makes its way over the bordered rock facing towards the properties of la Ràpita. If we continued along the track would also come to La Riba, albeit a longer way round.

On the opposite slope, in front we have the Corral del Bresca and also the Corral de l'Annet, above, the Serra Gran together with Puig d'en Marc and further to the right, the Pena del Puig, from where the Castell Dalmau monolith can be made out.

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

0:06  3:13

0,450  12,350

The first of La Ràpita properties (261m). We walk by the side of a property with an orange façade and make our way down the concreted slope with the aid of a handrail, which will take us to this district's main street, on the opposite side of the river, with the train line and main road. We make our way towards the crossroads at the entrance to the town.

0:03  3:16

0,150  13,500

C-14 road. We cross this main road beneath the bridge which accesses the town. Once across, we turn left and make our way down the street Carrer de Roser. On the right, in a niche, is a fountain.

0:04  3:20

0,200  13,700

La Riba (221m). *Set in the river Francolí gorge between the Muntanyes de Prades and the Serra de Miramar, just where the river Brugent flows into the Francolí. La Riba has always been synonymous with walking and rock climbing, the landscape here marked by a rather unusual topography. The area has a great many water sources and paper mills scattered throughout. The centre of La Riba is for ever rising, the reason for which many streets are actually stepped to make it easier to get up and down, although this is something of a curiosity to the town's visitors. Apart from the old paper mills (from the 18th and 19th centuries), the water springs and the sight of the urban nucleus, the neoclassic church or Església de Sant Nicolau, is also of interest. Here we can find shops and restaurants, where we can enjoy the local gastronomy.*

We enter by the street Carrer del Roser which leads to the Plaça del Pont square, also an excellent viewpoint from which to contemplate the Francolí, with water gushing between the rocks and crashing against the town's buildings. Over the bridge there is the Font de cal Sisquet, a water source with numerous streams of permanently rushing water adorned by a medley of anglers.

We make our way up the stepped street, Carrer de la Costa Baixa. Once beyond the Quatribal paper mill, we turn right beneath a portal and the water conduit for the mills. We come across Casa Torrens, the headquarters for the Casa de Cultura and the local public bodies. Some more steps take us to the Era del Ciurana and Carrer Major, opposite the church (254m), with its beautifully decorated façade. On the façades of many of the buildings we keep seeing plaques reminding us that these were once paper mills.

This is the end of our walking excursion.



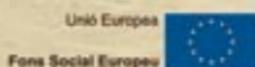
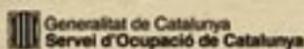
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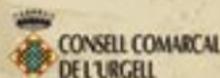
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