

ÁINSA, ANCIENT TOWN OF THE KINGDOM OF SOBRARBE

At an altitude of 589mts above sea level and with a population of 2000, Ainsa sits in the perfect position between the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park, the Canyons and Sierra de Guara Natural Park and the Posets-Maladet Natural Park.

Ainsa has a lot to offer in terms of tourism and commerce. The modern retail area down below grew up around the cross roads and is clearly different from the Ancient medieval Town which has earned itself the accolade: "Historic Artistic Monument".

Today its municipal zone is made up of 22 villages which offer a treasure trove of places to visit : Arcusa, Arro, Banastón, Camporrotuno, Castejón de Sobrarbe, Castellazo, Coscojuela de Sobrarbe, El Coscollar, Gerbe, Griebal, Guaso, Javierre de Olsón, La Pardina, Las Bellostas, Latorre, Latorrecilla, Mondot, Morillo de Tou, Olsón, Paules de Sarsa, Santa María de Buil and Sarsa de Surta.

As far as history goes, the year 724 is recorded as the time of the Reconquest of Ainsa under the command of Garci Ximeno. Having fled the Muslim regime of the time, Ximeno rallied his Christian troops and marched on Ainsa intent on recapturing it. According to legend, it was a burning cross appearing in an oak tree that gave the Christian army the inspiration and courage they needed to win the battle and take back the town. The victory is commemorated bi-annually with a street theatre representation: "La Morisma".

Throughout the course of history various monarchs have bestowed many privileges on Ainsa. In 1124 Alfonso 1st gave it a Fayre licence, customs and excise powers and the right to appoint its own judiciary system.



1 THE MEDIEVAL SQUARE

The square reportedly dates from the 12th-13th Centuries (the town's boom period). It was the setting for numerous Fayres and markets and its characteristic medieval dimensions make it one of Spain's finest and possibly the only one to have kept most of its original buildings. Its most striking features are its porches. The square's style is typically Romanesque, with its semi-circular arches, although some are pointed and it's difficult to find any two the same. The houses surrounding the square are of a similar style and their roofs, which were originally Stone slab, have been replaced by traditional roof tiles. Two communal wine presses can be found underneath the porches.

The rest of the houses grew up around the two main streets that lead off the square and meet up down at the Plazeta de San Salvador (which gets its name from the old church next to it, of which there are few remains), they are Calle Mayor (also called Gonzalo I) and Calle de Sta. Cruz.

2 THE CHURCH

The Parish church takes its name from Santa Maria. With its bare, austere style, it's one of Sobrarbe's most remarkable religious buildings. It dates from the end of the 11th century when building started and was finished around the middle of the 12th century. The tower fulfilled religious and military functions, the latter due to its strategic position and considerable height.

3 THE CASTLE

This impressive Stone fort was originally surrounded by a moat only crossable by a draw-bridge, giving access to a large interior parade ground. Of the four towers that stand at its corners, the 11th century Torre de Homenaje stands out as the most significant.

Other features include the semi-circular arches supporting the raised walk way that runs around three sides of the fort.

4 THE COVERED CROSS

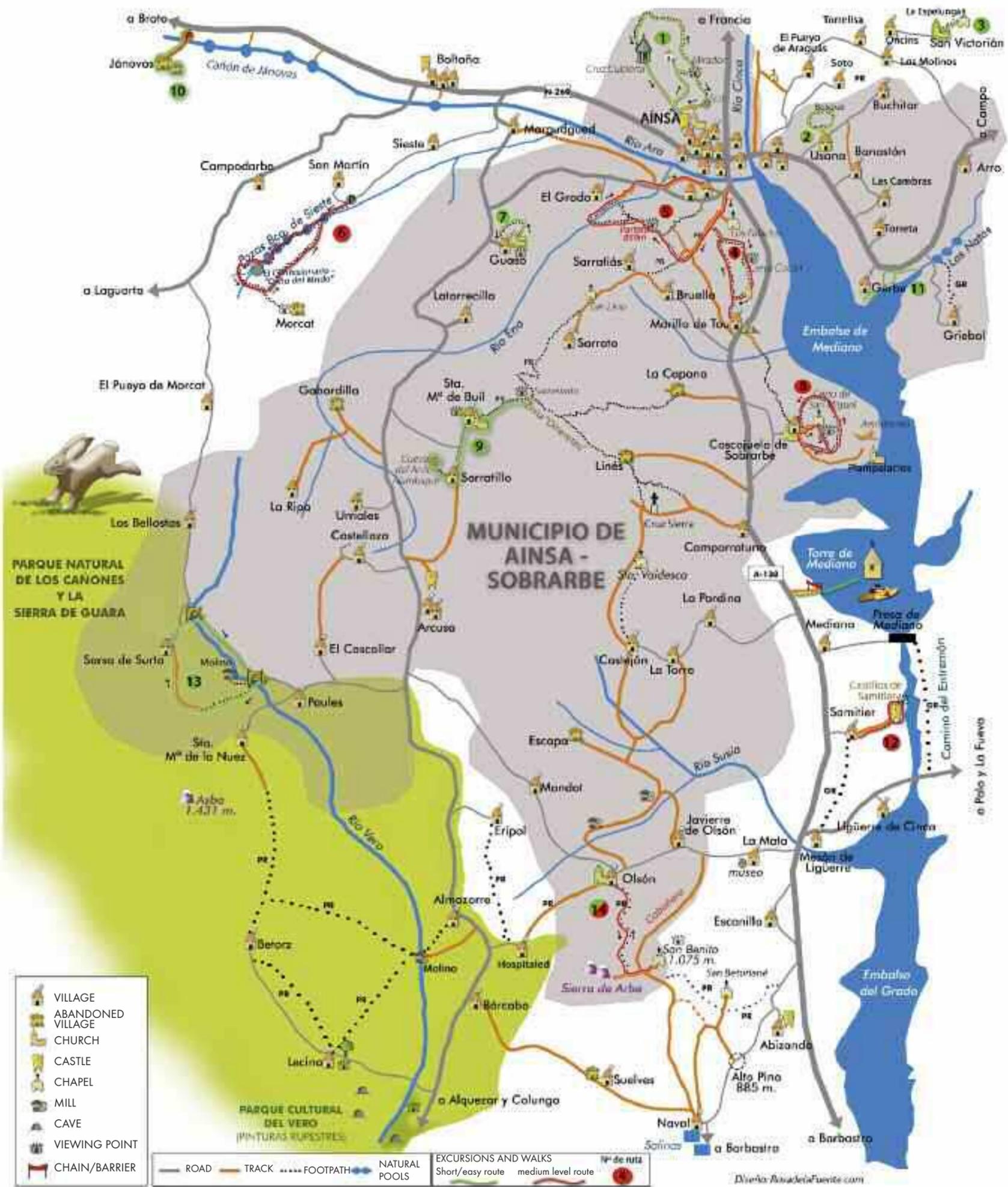
A small circular temple built in 1655 as a commemorative monument to the recapturing of Ainsa in the battle against the Moors. It shelters the cross in the oak, symbol of Sobrarbe and the first quadrant of the coat of arms of Aragon.

5 DEFENSIVE WALLS

Most of the original walls remain, though they are largely hidden behind house walls on the inner side of the fortifications. You can still see five of the seven gates that existed in the two walled areas: Portal de Abajo, Portal de Afuera, Portal Alto, Portal de Tierra Glera y Portal del Callizo.

MUSEUMS:

- 7 ECOMUSEO OF PYRENEAN FAUNA. Audiovisuals, models, mock-up of a woodland floor, shelter for Pyrenean fauna...
- 8 TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS MUSEUM .A fascinating collection of traditional objects and tools used by craftsmen in bygone trades.
- 9 MUSÉE DES ARTS ET MÉTIERS TRADITIONNELS: collection d'objets en rapport avec les anciens métiers traditionnels.



<p>1</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>THE CINCA VIEWING POINT</p> <p>Spectacular bird's eye views of the Cinca valley, the Pyrenees and the old town of Ainsa. 2 options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Short (Eco): - 1,5 km - Climb: 33 mts. - Time: 30 mn. * Long (The covered cross): - 4 km. - Climb: 115 mts. - Time: 1h30.
<p>2</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>USANA</p> <p>Wander through the streets and passages of this charming village and discover its hidden nooks and crannies on a pleasant stroll.</p> <p>Optional: Walk up to the Woods and follow a signed trail.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From 500 mts to 1,5 km - Climb: 50 mts. - Time: From 30 mn to 1h30.
<p>3</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>SAN VICTORIÁN AND LA ESPELUNGA</p> <p>San Victorián dates from the 6th century and is the oldest monastery on the Iberian Peninsula. It sits in a very special place at the foot of the Peña Montañesa and enjoys magnificent views.</p> <p>If you feel like a walk you can go up to La Espelunga chapel. (PR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3,8 km there and back - Climb: 200 mts. - Time: 1h30 to 2h.
<p>4</p> <p>MEDIUM/SIGNED</p>	<p>CERRO DE COTÓN</p> <p>Start at the bridge over the River Ara and walk along to discover the Cerro de Cotón and the 11th century Tower of Tou. Impressive panoramic views from the top of the hill.</p> <p>Option of a shorter circuit from Morillo de Tou (shorter: 5,5 km.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * From Ainsa: - 8,5 km. - Climb: 250 mts. - Time: 2h30 to 3 h. * From Morillo de Tou (camp site): - 5,5 km. - Climb: 230 mts. - Time: 2h to 2h30.
<p>5</p> <p>MEDIUM/SIGNED</p>	<p>PARTARA - ENA RIVER</p> <p>The same starting point as No.4 but going up to Partara (859 mts).</p> <p>Sit on the bench at the top and take in the views of the Pyrenees. The way down is fun, as it follows the warm waters of the River Ena. Avoid this route in heavy rainfall as the river rises.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9,3 km. - Climb: 250 mts. - Time: 3 to 4 h.
<p>6</p> <p>MEDIUM/SIGNED</p>	<p>BARRANCO SIESTE COÑO DEL MUNDO</p> <p>Take river shoes and swimming costumes because you'll be going up through the magnificent San Martín natural pools to the Confesionario waterfalls (Coño del mundo). You can either go back along a parallel path (longer) or the same way you came.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5,5 km. - Climb: 250 mts. - Time: 3h to 4 h.
<p>7</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>GUASO TOWER</p> <p>One of central Sobrarbe's most emblematic spots. This low, four arched tower was originally built as a place to curse and divert storms away from the area. You can walk a circuit that takes you around the hill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1,5 km. - Climb: 100 mts. - Time: 45 mn to 1 h.
<p>8</p> <p>MEDIUM/SIGNED</p>	<p>CERRO DE SAN MIGUEL</p> <p>A circular route around a hill with commanding views over the Mediano reservoir and south Sobrarbe.</p> <p>There are two options for the return leg of the walk: longer and cooler or shorter and sunnier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Short: - 3,2 km. - Climb: 130 mts. - Time: 1h45 to 2h15 * Long: - 4,4 km. - Climb: 175 mts. - Time: 2h15 to 2h45.
<p>9</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>BUIL AND SARRATILLO</p> <p>The centre of "Old Sobrarbe" is a magical place, with its monumental churches, its viewing points, its fossils and its incredible waterfall at Alambique de Sarratillo (also known as the Cueva del Anís)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2,5 km. - Climb: 40 mts. - Time: 45 mn to 1h20. <p>Sarratillo-Alambique: 800 mts, 30 mts climb, 30 mn.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>JÁNOVAS</p> <p>Janovas is the best known of the many abandoned villages in the area. Jump back in time by wandering its streets and try to get a sense of the injustices committed in the Ara valley. The reservoir that never was.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2,5 km. - Climb: 50 mts. - Time: 45 mn to 1h30.
<p>11</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>THE GERBE ORNITHOLOGICAL ROUTE</p> <p>Start out at San Miguel church heading for "Punta de San Pedro" and return to Gerbe following signs to CABO LUGAR (higher part of the village); this is the perfect place for orchid lovers. Come back into lower Gerbe to the church. Viewing points over the Mediano reservoir and the River Nata.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4, 5 km. - Climb: 20 mts. - Time: 1h30
<p>12</p> <p>MEDIUM/SIGNED</p>	<p>SAMITIER CASTLE</p> <p>By far the best views in the area. An authentic medieval location built from skillfully carved stone over 1000 years ago in unbelievably stunning surroundings. Accessible by 4X4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4,4 km. - Climb: 230 mts. - Time: 2h30 to 3 h.
<p>13</p> <p>EASY/SIGNED</p>	<p>SARSA AND ITS MILL</p> <p>At the heart of the Sierra de Guara Natural Park at the birth place of the River Vero you'll find a landscape of natural pools and limestone formations.</p> <p>Try this circular walk taking you to an ancient mill and through the pretty village of Sarsa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3,5 km. - Climb: 70 mts. - Time: 1h20 to 1h45
<p>14</p> <p>EASY-DIFFICULT / SIGNED</p>	<p>OLSÓN AND UP TO SAN BENITO</p> <p>The 16th century church at Olsón, known as the «Cathedral of Sobrarbe» for its solid, sharp beauty, is tucked away in the southern most reaches of the area.</p> <p>Our recommended route takes you up to San Benito in the Sierra de Arbe along the PR foot path. From there, looking north you will see the "Sob-arbe"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Easy: - 600 mts. - Climb: 60 mts. - Time: 25 mn. * Difficult: - 10 km. - Climb: 470 mts. - Time: 3h30 to 4 h.