



ENKARTERRI MEATZALDEA

5 routes to explore and discover the industrial
and mining heritage of Enkarreti and Meatzaldea



INTRODUCTION TO THE TERRITORY

NESTLED AMONG MOUNTAINS, IRN AND SEA

Enkarterri-Meatzaldea is the westernmost part of Bizkaia and is a land of contrasts, where mountains, iron and the sea have set the pace of work and life down through the centuries.

Steep-walled valleys, mountains rich in minerals, rivers running down to the sea and a coastal strip looking out to the Bay of Biscay form a diverse landscape, that is closely tied to its mining and industrial past.

The landscape here is not only a backdrop: it has been created by an ongoing relationship between nature

and human activity. Iron ore mining, its infrastructures and the towns and villages that grew up around it altered the landscape and left a lasting mark, which can today be seen in the paths, layouts and production facilities.

CULTURAL HERITAGE LINKED TO INDUSTRY

Enkarterri-Meatzaldea's municipalities are a mixture of rural areas and urban centres that developed around mining and industry. The landscape reflects this coexistence, as reclaimed nature is to be found alongside industrial remains that are part of the territory's cultural heritage.

Former mines, railways, factories and villages for the workers today bear witness to a time when industry was the driving force behind the social and economic transformation.

Enkarterri-Meatzaldea's cultural heritage is the outcome of that overlapping of eras. Castles, churches, ironworks, factories and industrial complexes coexist with landscapes altered by humans and their work, forming a whole that explains the evolution of the territory.

Historic routes, former railways lines and reclaimed landscapes –beyond the great monuments– are part of a cultural legacy that speaks

of endeavour, change and collective memory.

A heritage that sheds lights on how industry and rural life were intertwined to shape the territory's own identity.

This guide will help you discover Enkarterri-Meatzaldea for yourself, a place where the landscape is the central thread of its mining and industrial history. The following routes will take you through areas where there is a clear relationship between nature and industry.



ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

AN INDUSTRIAL TERRITORY AND ITS INFRASTRUCTURES

Mining and industry were the driving force behind the development of a complex network of infrastructures to extract, transport and process the ore. Mining railways, slide conveyors, loading docks and transport systems connect the ore mining region with the valleys and ports, thus shaping a new industrial geography.

These infrastructures include the **Larreineta Funicular Railway**, designed as a solution for the steep gradient between the mining town and the valley. Then there are the former railway lines that have been turned into greenways, such as the **Montes de Hierro Greenway**, which visitors can use to explore the territory as they follow the trackbeds used to transport the iron ore.

Enkarterri-Meatzaldea also had an important processing industry, alongside the mining. For centuries, hydraulic forges, such as **El Pobal** Ironworks, harnessed the power

of the water to work the iron and supply the local economy.

The onset of industrialisation saw the arrival of larger factories linked to the new production processes. **The Encartada Factory-Museum** is one of the more representative examples of this heritage. Thanks to its exceptional state of repair, visitors can learn about how a textile factory operated at the end of the 19th century and start of the 20th century, along with how the work was organised and everyday life around the industrial production.

Industrialisation left a deep mark not only on the landscape, but also on the social life. Workers' villages and neighbourhoods grew up around the mines, factories and railways; they were home to thousands of people who had come in search of work, and were new ways of living in and relating to the territory.

This manufacturing past is part of the cultural heritage of Enkarterri-Meatzaldea. Mines, infrastructures, factories and industrial landscapes let visitors discover and understand

the origin of a territory that played a key part in the industrialisation of **Bizkaia**, and whose history is written in its paths and tracks, in its villages and towns, and in its landscape.



ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

DISCOVER THE TERRITORY

THE FIVE ROUTES

The five routes in this guide offer different ways of exploring Enkarterri Meatzaldea, but with the same central thread: the relationship between the territory and industry. Each route combines landscape, heritage and memory, offering different experiences that help to understand how iron, water, mountains and sea have modelled this district.

IRON AND MOUNTAINS

- A** Larreineta Funicular Railway
- B** La Arboleda
- C** La Arboleda Mines
- D** Peñas Negras

IRON AND SEA

- A** Itsas lur Greenway
- B** The Hoyo-Ontón Mining Site
- C** El Piquillo Greenway

A UNIQUE FACTORY

- A** La Encartada Factory Museum
- B** Balmaseda

IRON AND MOUNTAINS

- A** The Basque Mining Museum
- B** Concha II mine
- C** Ortuella
- D** La Orconera Greenway

IRON AND WATER

- A** Muskiz
- B1** El Pobal Forge
- B2** Montes de Hierro Greenway
- C** Sarachaga Mining Site
- D** Olabarrieta Rolling Mill
- E** Artzentales

INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

- A** Dolomitas Factory Museum
- B** Armañón Natural Park
- C** Pozalagua Cave



ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5



ROUTE 1A

IRON AND MOUNTAINS

The area around the Triano mountains is one of the most quintessential mining landscapes of Bizkaia. At the end of the 19th century, this area of Meatzaldea – made up by Trapagaran, Ortuella and Abanto-Zierbena – became one of the main iron ore mining centres of Europe.

The route takes in former mining villages, lakes and the iconic Larreineta Funicular Railway.



How to visit

On foot
By bike
By car
By motorcycle

Route highlights

Mining
Industrial heritage
Landscape
Working-class memory
Nature

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5



ROUTE 1A - IRON AND MOUNTAIN

LARREINETA FUNICULAR RAILWAY

Declared a Monument of Cultural Interest, it stands out for its historical value and its social purpose as it was designed to transport people, iron ore and vehicles. Its unusual track layout of 1,198 metres and its horizontal platform make it stand out from the other funicular railways in Europe.

The **Triano mountains** were already famed in Roman times for the abundance and quality of their iron ore; however, the quarries would not begin to be mined on a large scale until the mid-19th century. The best option to explore these mountains steeped in history is to begin the route on the Larreineta Funicular Railway, in the **La Escontrilla** neighbourhood (Trapagaran).

The funicular railway was opened in 1926 to connect **La Arboleda**

mining village with **San Salvador del Valle** (now Trapagaran). The uphill distance, which is now covered in 10 minutes, used to take an hour and a half, which turned the funicular into an essential feature in the life of the local families.

The views as you go up are breathtaking. Once at the stop in Larreineta, you should make time to go up to the station terrace for the panoramic view over the all the municipalities of the mining region,

the left bank of Bizaka and Gexto and Bilbao, with the Bay of Biscay in the distance.

It is a pleasant 20 minute walk from the funicular station to La Arboleda; a natural haven that was a landscape studded with quarries until a few decades ago. There is a shuttle bus for your convenience if the weather is poor.

LA ARBOLEDA MINING VILLAGE

Declared a Monumental Complex in 2003, La Arboleda is the archetypal neighbourhood of the history of mining in Bizkaia.

The village grew and records show that around 400 people were living there in around 1870. Timber shacks were first built to accommodate the families by the mines. However, amenities and services would gradually be added, making it a fully integrated neighbourhood.

Some of those original timber houses are still preserved and one of them can be visited at the **Basque Mining Museum**.

MUST



La Arboleda Beans

An essential part of La Arboleda is its culinary heritage. A must when visiting the village is to try its typical dish – beans with all the trimmings – as well as enjoying the range of local dishes served at the restaurants there.



ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

LA ARBOLEDA MINES

La Arboleda is set in a spectacular landscape and natural surroundings.

At the end of the 19th century, explosives began to be used to extract iron ore and its quarries reached the water table in some places.

When the mining stopped, the underground water rose to the surface and the former **Ostion**, **Blondis** and **Parkotxa** quarries are now beautiful lakes. A recreational area where you can enjoy nature and the Meatzalde Goikoa parkea park, with its large sculptures by artists of the ilk of **Néstor Basterretxea**.



MUSTS



Peñas Negras

The visit wouldn't be complete without going to **Ekoetxea Meatzaldea-Peñas Negras**, an environmental interpretation centre just 2.5 km from La Arboleda. You can there learn about how **the mining landscape has been transformed** from an environmental point of view and discover how nature has regained its foothold. You can reach La Arboleda on foot (around 40 minutes), by bike (roughly 15 minutes) or by car (around 10 minutes).

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5



ROUTE 1B

IRON AND MOUNTAINS

The Abanto-Zierbena and Ortuella municipal districts are still home to some of the most striking landscapes of the industrialisation of Bizkaia. For decades, the iron ore quarrying greatly altered this environment and left an important social and industrial footprint. The route is the chance to explore mines, furnaces and spaces linked to Meatzaldea's mining history.

This route rounds off the first one and it is best to combine both to learn about the mining history of Bizkaia.



How to visit

On foot
By bike
By car
By motorcycle

Highlights

Mining
Industrial heritage
Working-class history
Altered landscape

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

THE BASQUE MINING MUSEUM

This route starts at the Basque Mining Museum in the Gallarta neighbourhood of Abanto-Zierbena,

The museum dates back to the 1980s when a group of former miners and local residents witnessed the decline and **closure of the large iron and mining companies**, such as Agraminsa and Altos Hornos de Vizcaya; they decide to recover and retrieve the different parts, machines and tools that are now part of the museum's collection. They were all driven by the same desire: to **preserve a culture** and way of life that had been associated with mining for centuries and which were in danger of falling into oblivion with the closure of the mines.

They visited mines, loading docks, furnaces and other sites of former industrial and mining activity, where they retrieved a myriad of items and elements that were in danger of disappearing or being destroyed due to their being abandoned. The guided tour shows how mining laid the foundations of Basque industrial development and the way of life of the local families. It is the best way to understand the history of a place where **iron ore mining** altered the landscape completely.



CONCHA II MINE

This mining operation would create the Corta Bodovalle and its 50 kilometres of underground galleries that supplied the iron and steel industry of Bizkaia year round. An industrial footprint that fundamentally altered the landscape. The views from the Ekoetxea Meatzaldea viewpoint are a must for all visitors.

The Concha II mine, also known as Corta Bodovalle or 2nd Concha, is to be found next to the **Basque Mining Museum**. Declared a Monument in 2011, it is the largest open-air quarry of the Basque Country. Its dimensions are striking. Its inverted cone hollow has a 700 metre perimeter, a 350 metre diameter and is 150 metres deep; its lowest point is 37 metres below sea level.

Fourteen million cubic metres of material were excavated when it was mined from 1968 to 1983. The mining company that owned the land decided to demolish the old **Gallarta** village; over 225 families were evicted so the iron ore in the subsoil could be mined.



Calcination furnace

The star piece of Ortuella's heritage is the unique and ground-breaking Apold-Fleisner siderite calcination furnace, built by the Franco-Belga mining company.

Decared a Monument of Cultural Interest in 2008, this gem, which is **the only one of its kind in Europe**, was fully operational to enrich the iron ore between 1961 and 1975. It was a great technical advance as it used fuel oil, instead of coal. Furthermore, it has a smoke and dust extraction system that reduced air pollution. Remains of the loading dock, ore washers and a stretch of the railway track used by wagons to transport the ore are under the furnace, which has now been refurbished as a social and cultural amenity.

ORTUELLA

Talking about Ortuella is also to talk about the origins of mining in Bizkaia. The town was home to the terminal station of the first mining railway of Bizkaia, the Triano railway, along with the province's largest ore intermodal transport hub.

The two main mining companies, the Franco-Belga and the Orconera, had their ore stockyard logistic centres in Ortuella; with many calcination furnaces to pre-treat the ore before it was transported along the mining railways to the loading docks on the river estuary in Bilbao, from

where it was exported or used in Altos Hornos de Vizcaya. You should also visit the monument honouring Bizkaia's miners in Otxartaga Park, and the one to the **Barrenadors** [competitors in the traditional sport of stone drilling] next to the Basque pelota court.



LA ORCONERA GREENWAY

La Orconera Greenway is another option to explore Ortuella's mining past and the surrounding area. The greenway is 4 kilometres long and runs through La Orconera (Ortuella) to Trapagaran.

The greenway follows the route of the old mining railway and runs through six tunnels, so you should bring a torch or lamp. There are three areas along the way where you can enjoy the views over the towns on the Bizkaia left bank. You can also

walk or cycle from Orconera to the Basque Mining Museum. At the end of the bike lane, it is 2 km along the small road with markings for pedestrians and bikes to the Basque Mining Museum in the **Campodiego neighbourhood** of Gallarta.



How to get there

Both routes can be reached from different points and each can be easily added on to the other.

Starting at the Larreineta Funicular station – in La Escontrilla neighbourhood in Trapagaran – is recommended to do Route A. Larreineta Funicular > La Arboleda Mining Village > La Arboleda mines. You can get there by public transport (Bizkaibus and the Renfe C2 suburban rail line) or by car.

The Basque Country Mining Museum is also easily accessible by public transport (Bizkaibus bus stops and Renfe C2 suburban rail line). The Montes de Hierro Greenway is close by; it links up with the towns along the Nervión-Ibaizabal river estuary and the other industrial tourism routes: Iron & Sea and Iron & Water.

By car

Basque Mining Museum
Larreinetra Funicular Railway
La Arboleda Mining Village

By bus

Bizkaibus

[Information and timetables](#)

By train

Renfe: Bilbao - Muzkiz

- Gallarta Stop

- Trapagaran Stop (Urioste)

[Information and timetables](#)

Bike rentals and trips

www.beroutes.com

www.enkarterribike.com

www.enbike.com



ROUTE 2

IRON AND SEA

The industry spread to the coast along the former railways lines that connected the mines to the Bay of Biscay. This route takes in cliffs, greenways and remains of the mining industry next to the sea, where you can see how the iron was exported through the ports and coastal loading docks.



How to visit

On foot
By bike

Route Highlights

Coast
Landscape
Mining heritage
Nature
The Way of St. James

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

MUST



Pobeña, La Arena Beach and Zierbena harbour

Pobeña, a port with a mining past from which the iron ore was shipped to supply the ironworks of Cantabria or of Urdax, is now a pleasant neighbourhood that – just like Kobaron – has many **bars** and **restaurants**. It is also a perfect spot for a pleasant walk along the River Barbadún upstream to **Muskiz** and then follow the river up to El Pobal ironworks (7 km one way).

Crossing the Pobeña bridge takes you to **La Arena Beach**. It is the second largest stretch of sand on the Bizkaia coast and falls within both the Muskiz and Zierbena municipal districts. It is perfect for walking along the sand, admiring the dramatic tides and surfing at the La Arena Surf Centre. A real must is to watch the sun setting from the right side of the beach.

The picturesque Zierbena harbour is very close to La Arena. The charming spot still has a certain seafaring atmosphere, with fishing boats and yachts moored in the port, and surrounded by typical restaurants and grill houses with the air heavy with the delicious aroma of fish cooked over embers.

ROUTE 2 - IRON AND SEA

ITSASLUR GREENWAY

On its route through Muskiz, the Way of St. James coincides with one of the most breathtaking coastal stretches of Bizkaia. It here runs along the Itsasur (Bizkaia) and El Piquillo (Cantabria) greenways, former railways lines that served the important mining operations in the surrounding area.

This is a place of great landscape, environmental and cultural interest, as the River Barbadun estuary, near to **Pobeña**, is a **Natura 2000 Network** special protection area, along with the breathtaking views of the landscape along the coastal path.

The Iron & Sea route is an easy linear trail (around 6 km), which you can start either from Kobaron or from Pobeña, and both neighbourhoods are in Muskiz.

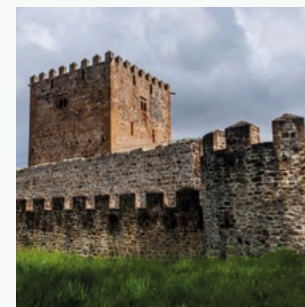
From Kobaron, it is straightforward to reach the path by car, with nearby car parks, and the route is easy. From Pobeña, you can get there by bike, public transport or by car, but the start includes a steep flight of steepes, which means it may be a challenge for people with reduced mobility.

If you decide to start from here, you can also take a pleasant stroll inland along the River Barbadún to Muskiz. Pobeña used to be a mining port, from which the iron was shipped, and is now a pleasant neighbourhood with bars and restaurants.

Adding **Zierbena harbour** to the route is a perfect option to discover a place with a seafaring tradition, with its fishing and leisure boats; you can also make the short climb up to Punta Lucera to enjoy the magnificent views over the surrounding area.



MUST



Muñatones Castle

Muñatones Castle, declared a **Site of Historical Importance** in recognition of its system of outer walls, is close to Muskiz train station.

It was built over a long period in the 14th and 15th centuries amid the wars between the different factions of the landed nobility. It is considered to be the only tower in Bizkaia deemed worthy of being called a castle, given its system of outside walls and its state of repair. This building is also linked to one of the most colourful figures of the history of Bizkaia, the powerful **Lope García de Salazar**, a man of arms and letters. Contact El Pobal Ironworks to arrange a visit.

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

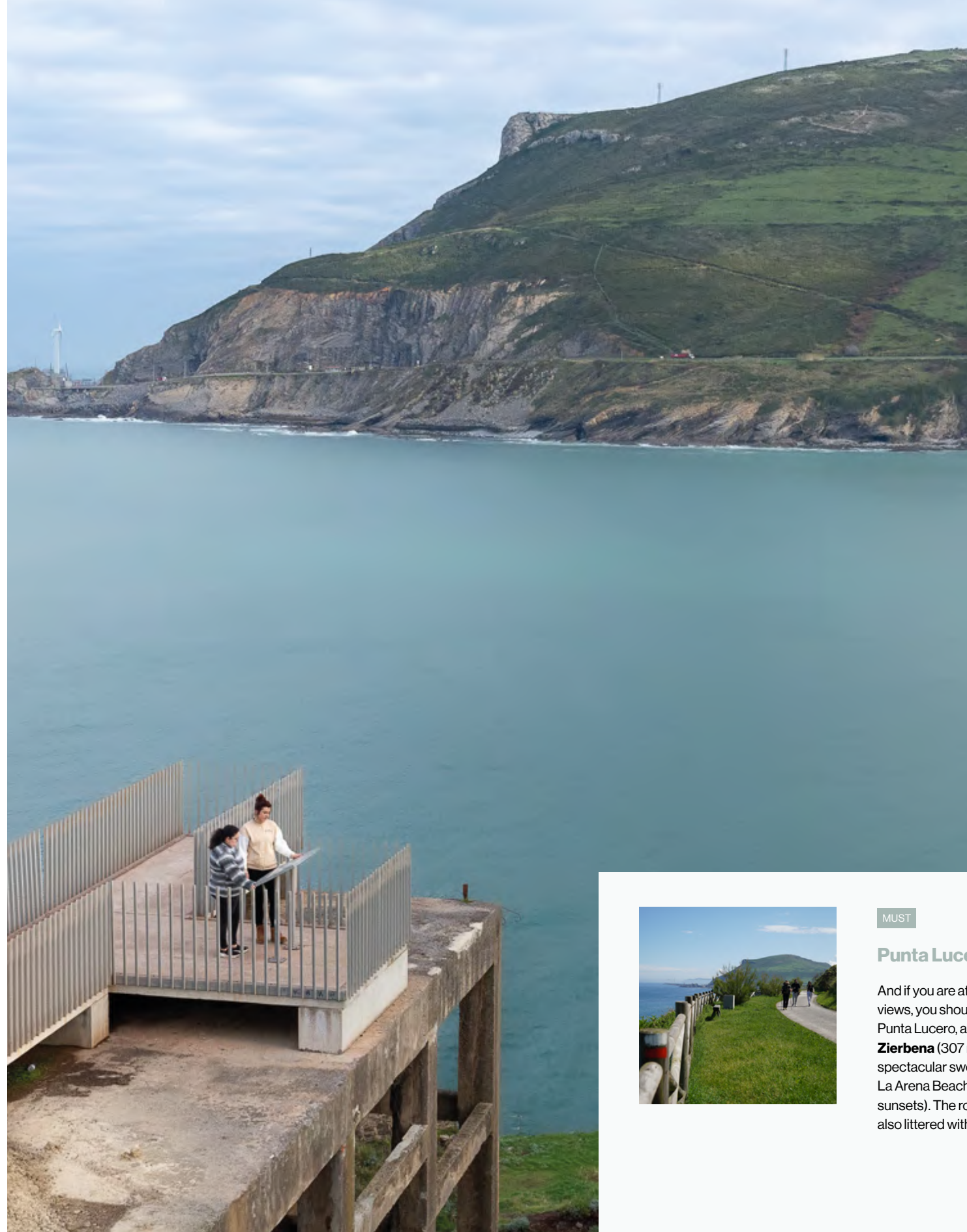
ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

The imposing structures that are the remains of the McLennan Mining Company stand out among the many remains of the bygone mining era.

As you follow the old mining railway along the cliff tops, you will come to two overgrown calcination furnaces of the **Amalia Vizcaína** mine, which were built in 1900 in Kobaron and still stand. There is also the former El Castillo ore loading dock, which was served by the railway line and the **McLennan Company** used it to transport iron ore from nearby mines to England. Although a violent storm tore away the metal structure in 2008, the impressive stone base of the dock remains.

The only one of its kind in Bizkaia, it is one of **the most sought-after spots** for photos locally and provides breathtaking views out to sea.



EL HOYO-ONTÓN MINING SITE

Once you reach Kobaron, you can continue for a further 3 km along El Piquillo Greenway (Cantabria) towards Ontón.

Along this section, you will also come across interesting remains of the mining heritage, this time of the El Hoyo-Ontón mining site. The **Josefa and Celedonia** mines also belong to that site; some of the mining infrastructures have been recently restored, such as the sorting plant and the loading station. From the late 19th century until the 1970s, ore was extracted from these mines and transported by rail to **El Piquillo** loading dock in Ontón to be exported by sea.



MUST

Punta Lucero

And if you are after breathtaking views, you should climb up Punta Lucero, a small peak in **Zierbena** (307 metres), with a spectacular sweeping view of La Arena Beach (and glorious sunsets). The route to the top is also littered with remains from

the Spanish Civil War: bunkers, tunnels, gun emplacements... that were part of the **Bizkaia Iron Belt**. That horseshoe-shaped fortification was over 80 km long and was built to defend Bilbao and its surrounding area against Franco's troops.

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5



How to get there

You can reach the start of the route by car and park either in Kobaron, where you will find plenty of parking, or in Pobeña. There is also a large car park at La Arena Beach, from where you can walk across the bridge to Pobeña. If you start the route in Pobeña, you can also get there by bike and by public transport.

Cycling can be a very interesting option, as an extensive network of bike and pedestrian paths connects this area to the left bank of the Bilbao estuary and to the mining region and Enkarterri. Discover the many cycling and hiking routes in this eastern area of Bizkaia.

By car

Kobaron
Pobeña

By bus

Bizkaibus
[Information and timetables](#)

Bike rentals and trips

www.beroutes.com
www.enkarterribike.com
www.enbike.com

Where to eat

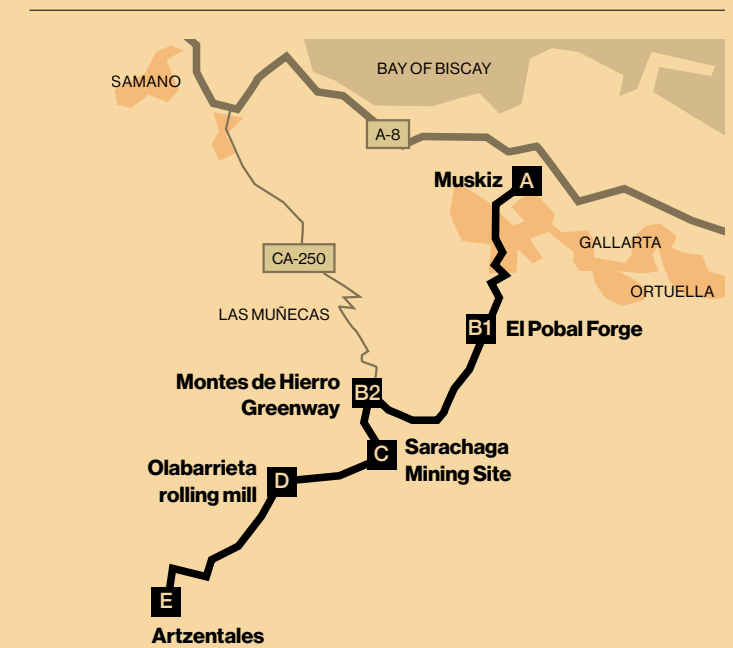
There is nothing better than trying the delicious fish and seafood served at the restaurants in Zierbena and Pobeña. There is also a wide variety of culinary options in Kobaron and at La Arena Beach.



ROUTE 3

IRON AND WATER

Rivers played a fundamental role in the history of industry. This route follows the course of the River Barbadun and other inland valleys, where ironworks, mills and factories harnessed the power of the water to transform the ore and create an industrial landscape that has now been returned to nature.



How to visit
On foot
By bike

Route Highlights
Industrial heritage
River landscape
Mining
Nature
History

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

RIVER BARBADÚN

The industrial landscape along the River Barbadun as it flows through Muskiz, Galdames, Sopuerta and Artzentales is a magnificent catalogue of mining and industrial heritage remains – including ironworks and flour mills; it was therefore declared a cultural asset, specifically, in the site of historical importance category in 2017.

The River Barbadun and its tributaries take centre stage in a valley running between iron ore mountains; from the 15th century onwards, there was important economic, productive and **industrial activity** along the Barbadun, and the production of the ironworks was shipped through the former port of Lavalle (Muskiz), which has since disappeared.

This route can be walked or cycled following the course of the river upstream.

We recommend starting the route upstream in the San Juan neighbourhood, right in the centre of Muskiz. The path gradually becomes more rural until it enters a valley where **silence reigns** between the steep walls. Your way continues along the river between **meadows, old farmsteads** and **riverbank groves** until it comes to one of the landmarks on the route: El Pobal Ironworks.



MUST



El Pobal Ironworks

El Pobal Ironworks stands on the banks of the River Barbadún in the heart of Bizkaia's mining region. It is a hydraulic factory that has been used to process iron ore since the 16th century. It was built by the Salazar

family and continued to operate until 1965. There are **guided tours** from Tuesday to Sunday and the highlight is a live blacksmithing demonstration every Saturday at noon.



MONTES DE HIERRO GREENWAY

This section is the part of the old Galdames mining railway track. It was the longest mining railway in the whole of the Bizkaia mining region.

The routes forks after crossing El Pobal bridge. One option is to climb up to the **Montes de Hierro Greenway**, which follows the former Galdames mining railway line, opened in 1876. The route will let you relive that journey, as you go through

forests and two tunnels until you reach **La Aceña** neighbourhood in Galdames. After crossing the industrial estate, you rejoin the greenway and continue on to **Sopuerta**.

LA OLLA AND VALDIBIÁN

If you prefer to continue along the river path from El Pobal, the route enters a landscape which has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Follow the river for around 4 kilometres and you will come across remains of the former Olla Mill Forge and the Valdibián Mill & Ironworks (Galdames).

It is an easy route that takes you to **El Arenao** neighbourhood when you can join the Montes de Hierro greenway. Carry on towards Sopuerta, where after going past the **Sopuerta Abentura** treetop adventure park, you will come to El Castaño neighbourhood.

MUST



Loizaga Tower

This 13th-century fort in a hillock in Galdames houses the only European collection that includes every single Rolls-Royce model produced between 1910 and 1998, and which are in perfect condition. Nestled between mountains, forests and vineyards, the museum is a chance to marvel at true automotive gems of the most exclusive models of Rolls-Royce; along with other brands including Hispano-Suiza, Isotta Fraschini, Delaunay-Belleville and Ford, which share the space with Ferrari, Lamborghini and Jaguar.

www.torreloizaga.com



Sopuerta Abentura

Tibetan rope bridges, zip lines, Tarzan ropes, boarding nets, etc. Thrills and fun are guaranteed at the Basque Country's largest adventure park. It has eight circuits and two for beginners.

www.sopuerta-abentura.com

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

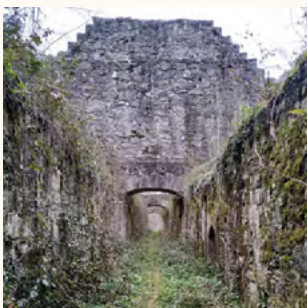
ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

MUST



Alén mining village

The Alén mining village, which boasted some of the largest ore mines in Bizkaia, had over 1,500 inhabitants in 1900. The port of Castro Urdiales (Cantabria) was the logical destination of the ore quarried in Alén and Artzentales; the Alén-Castro Urdiales mining railway was therefore built in 1892. A perfect place for a gentle walk, enjoying the countryside or the views from the surrounding peaks, such as Mount Alén and Mount Betaio.

SARACHAGA MINING SITE

The magnificent calcination furnaces at the Catalina mine are one of the highlights in the Sarachaga Mining Site, which stretches between Linde, Alisal and Las Muñecas.

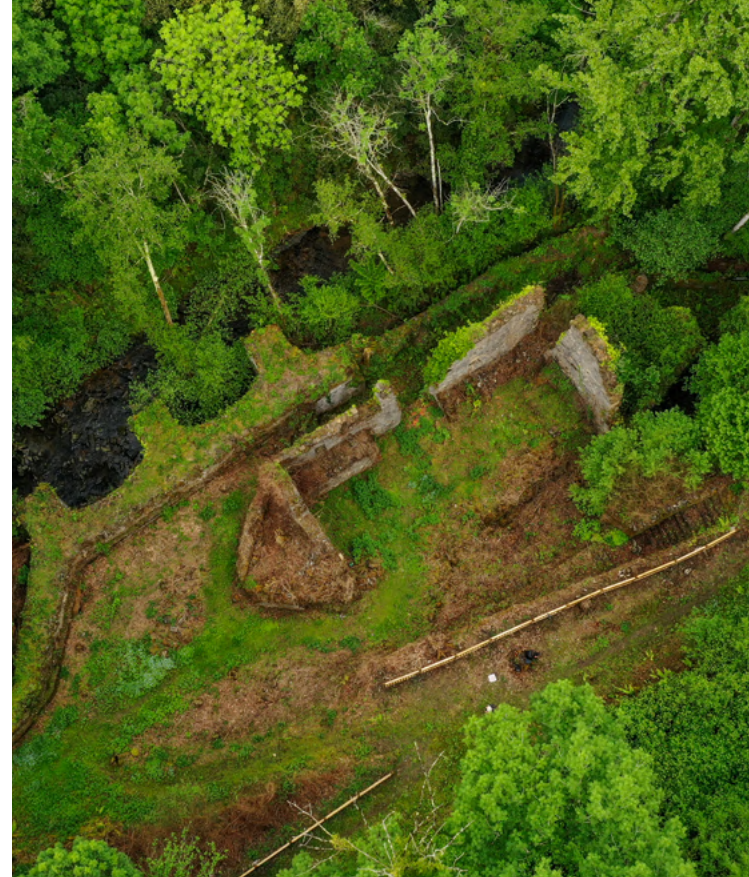
It is very easy to reach. From the greenway in the Castaño neighbourhood, take the road to the right, just in front of the motorhome car park. Follow the trackbed of the former Castro Urdiales- Traslaviña railway line until you come to Las Barrietas neighbourhood. You will find there the 20-metre-high furnaces, built between 1955 and 1960.

Los Herreros tunnel is also there, but is closed off. It is 2 km long and was dug with picks and shovels in the first half of the 20th century. It meant that the railway could go under Las Muñecas mountain pass and emerge in Otañes valley in Cantabria. The line ended at the

cantilever loading dock, that clung to the Castro-Urdiales cliffs.

You can here join the greenway in Arenao that runs to Sopuerta.

Talking about **Sopuerta** is to enter into the history of one of the most important mining regions of Bizkaia in the 19th century and early 20th. The Alén and Sarachaga mining sites and mining neighbourhoods such as Las Barrietas are an important heritage left by the industrialisation that radically altered the surrounding area.



MUST

San Miguel de Artzentales

This hilltop neighbourhood offers breathtaking views over the valley. Its square is home to the Church of **San Miguel de Linares** and the Council Oak. During the Middle Ages, the authorities of each of the ten small republics that made up the Enkarterri region would meet under the Oak.

After you leave San Miguel, crossing the Ribas neighbourhood will take you to **San Antolín**, an unusual complex made up of a shrine chapel and a bullring; that is common in this part of the region and its origin is linked to the festive pilgrimages when capeas (bloodless bullfights) would be held.

OLABARRIETA ROLLING MILL

Return to the greenway, with beautiful views of Sopuerta before you enter in a wooded section that will take you to Las Barrietas mining neighbourhood.

The road that climbs up to the **Alén mining village** (around 6 km away and so should be a separate visit) starts from there. A century ago, this village had over 1,000 inhabitants who had a shrine chapel, school, commissary and Basque pelota court. Only the Basque pelota court and the shrine chapel of San Luis now remain.

Continue along your route and you will come to the interesting mining remains of two pitheads. They are close to each other and served the María and Cecilia mines on Mount Alén.

The Cecilia pithead is impressive in scale and was built in 1898; the ore

was taken from when it was mined 700 metres higher up and sent down a slide conveyor to the loading dock, where it was put into wagons. In turn, the María pithead, a simpler design, was sent ore from the mine 300 metres higher up and sent down another slide conveyor, after being washed with water from a nearby spring.

The remains of the former **Olabarrieta foundry** are 600 metres up River Koltza towards Artzentales. Built in 1762 by the Bilbao merchant José Ignacio de Gallatebeitia, at a time that the traditional iron business was in crisis, the foundry used European technology; that meant

that cylinders were used to coat and cut the iron mechanically, to replace the manual work carried out at the ironworks. Its design and hydraulic system reflect those advances.

There were foundries in Oñati, Rentería and Iraeta (Zestoa), and two in Barakaldo, but this is the only one preserved in the Basque Country, which means it is of exceptional heritage value.

Following the crystal-clear waters of the River Koltza, and through two tunnels (147 and 87 m), continue along the greenway to end in Artzentales.



ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5

Other highlights



Txakoli wine of Enkarterri

The Iron and Water Route is the chance to discover the secrets of txakoli wine when visiting the local wineries. During a vineyard tour, you can learn about the local production, the wine-making tradition and its processes, before ending with a delicious tasting of the unique wines of Enkarterri.



Las Encartaciones Museum

The old **Assembly House**, surrounded by txakoli vineyards, is in the Abellaneda neighbourhood (Sopuerta). For many centuries, the assembly was the symbol of the freedoms of Enkarterri, which allowed its residents to govern local affairs. It now houses Las Encartaciones Museum, which seeks to research and disseminate the history and heritage of the region.

www.enkartermuseoa.eus



How to get there

It is long, but easy route and can be reached from different points. If you are coming from Muskiz, one of the ends starts in the Pobena neighbourhood or from the town centre; the other end starts from the Traslaviña railway station on the Montes de Hierro greenway. You can also join the route at different points along the way, such as at El Pobal ironworks in Muskiz, La Aceña in Galdames and the centre of Sopuerta.

By bus

Bizkaibus
Bilbao - Muskiz
Santurtzi - Balmaseda
[Information and timetables](#)

By train

Renfe: Bilbao – Muskiz
Renfe: Bilbao – Santander
[Information and timetables](#)

Bike rentals and trips

www.beroutes.com
www.enkartribike.com
www.enbike.com

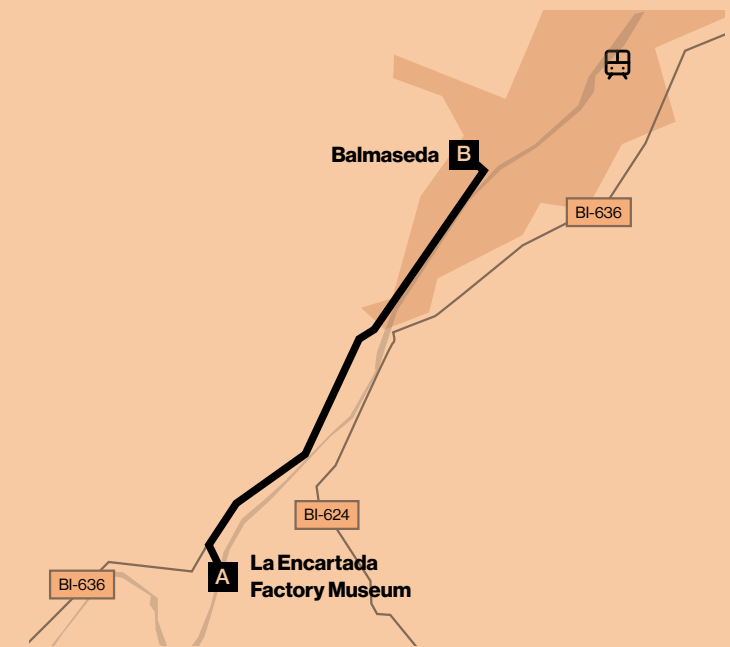


ROUTE 4

A UNIQUE FACTORY

Balmaseda, originally a trading post on the medieval wool route, is home to a real gem: La Encartada Factory Museum. This textile factory, now considered a landmark of industrial heritage in Europe, has been preserved practically intact since the end of the 19th century.

It is a must see in the oldest charter town of Bizkaia.



How to visit

On foot
By bike
By car
By motorcycle

Route highlights

Industrial heritage
History
Architecture
Textile culture

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

LA ENCARTADA FACTORY MUSEUM

Just outside Balmaseda, on the way to the Mena Valley, there is one of the gems of the Basque Industrial heritage: La Encartada Factory Museum. Founded in 1892 by five 'indianos' (wealthy individuals who had emigrated to the Americas and returned having made their fortunes), this textile factory worked wool for a century. Its heritage value and uniqueness are such that it appears as an Anchor Point on the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH).

Even though it is best known for its traditional Basque **berets**, it also produced blankets, shawls and other wool garments. A small working-class neighbourhood grew up around the factory with houses, a chapel-school and allotments, which tells us much about the way of life at that time. The place has remained practically intact after a century of producing textiles.

Its original machinery, still with the pulleys, belts and bushbars from 1892, are what makes **La Encartada** unique. The complex also includes a middle-class house to show how the owner's family lived.

Since 2007, the museum has showcased the essence of the factory and takes visitors back to the earliest day of industrialisation in the Basque

Country. It is an outstanding example of industrial archaeology, where visitors can learn about the process to produce knitted garments, including the **txapela**, the traditional Basque beret. You can round off your visit by buying one at the very factory where they were made.



BALMASEDA

After the visit, head to the old town of Balmaseda, around 2 km from the factory. After crossing the Old Bridge (13th century), you will come to the medieval alleyways of Bizkaia's first charter town. As you wander through the old town, you will come across religious buildings, nobles' houses and remnants of another era.

It is worthy climbing up the **hill to the castle** to understand the charter town's strategic role. The old fort and its walls rise up on its highest point. Balmaseda had one of the main medieval markets, was the gateway to Bizkaia and was an important trading centre in the province's history.

Visit the **History Museum** and the **Passion Play Interpretation Centre** to learn more about the origins and traditions of the town. Balmaseda's Stations of the Cross – which is the best known of the Basque Country, is famed for the realism of the **Crucifixion**. Both museums are in the heart

of the old town, surrounded by **restaurants** and **pintxo bars** for a break and some refreshments.

You should round off your visit by climbing up **Mount Kolutza**. Set off on foot from behind the Town Hall and it will take you a couple of hours to reach the summit. You can enjoy **panoramic views** over the neighbouring holidays from the top, standing at 879 metres high. It is one of the five horn or **beacon mountains** of Bizkaia. For centuries, horns were blown and beacons lit to call the residents to the Gernika General Assemblies from its summit, topped by the Romanesque shrine chapel of San Roque.

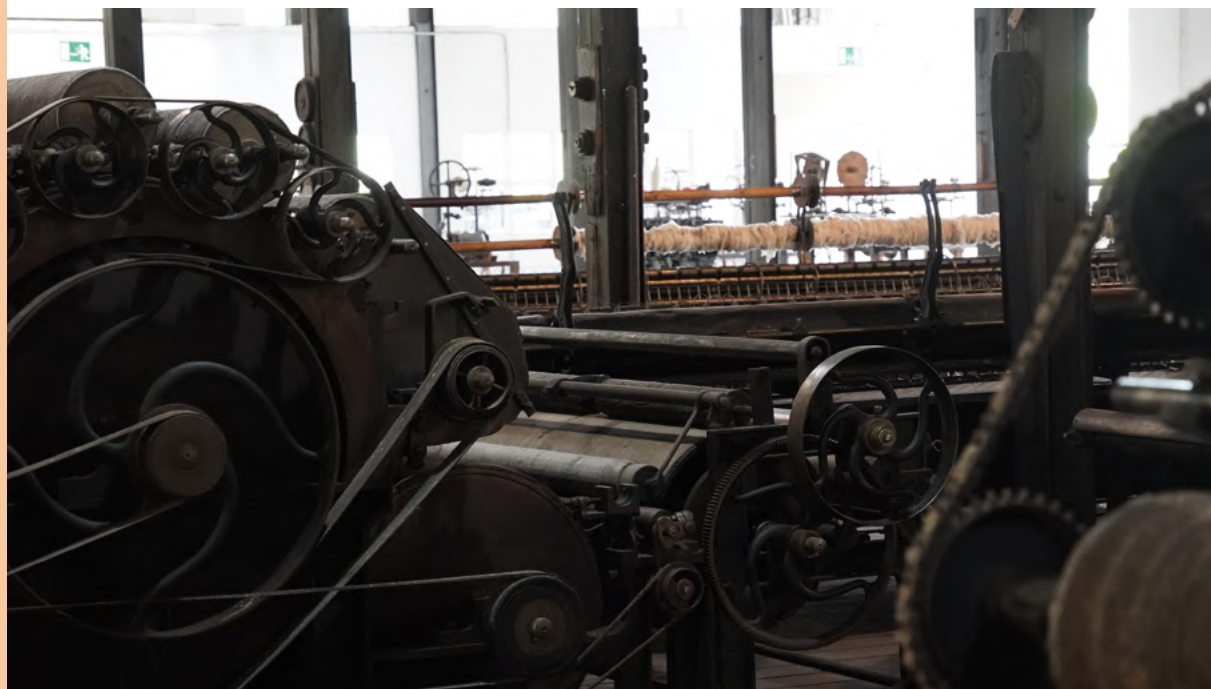
MUST



Castle Hill

As well as wandering the charming streets, climbing up Castle Hill is worth the effort. Thanks to its strategic site looking out over the charter town and the valley, fortified walls were built around the hill in the 13th century and completely enclosed the town.

The Balmaseda **Tourist Office** offers a journey through in time with its bespoke immersive reality experience. Thanks to the virtual reality goggles, the city's iconic places will come to life and visitors can see how the city's residents lived in the past.



Other highlights



River Kadagua

Balmaseda is the perfect starting point to do the River Kadagua route, a watercourse that was key in the history of Enkarterri. The river transported merchandise and pilgrims, was stained red with blood in the Middle Ages and majestic palaces and mansions were built along its banks. It now leads us on a route steeped in secrets, nature and delightful spots.



Kolitzza

Mount Kolitzza is Enkarterri's most iconic peak and one of the most beautiful in Bizkaia. It rises up 879 metres and offers breathtaking panoramic views over Balmaseda and the surrounding valleys. It one of the five horn or beacon mountains of Bizkaia. Horns were blown and beacons lit to call the residents to the Gernika General Assemblies from its summit, topped by the Romanesque shrine chapel of San Roque.



How to get there

The most convenient and easiest way to get there is by car along the River Kadgua valley (BI-634), which takes around 30 minutes.

By car
Balmaseda
La Encartada Factory Museum

By bus
Bizkaibus
Bilbao - Balmaseda
Santurtzi - Balmaseda
[Information and timetables](#)

By train
Renfe: Bilbao - Balmaseda
[Information and timetables](#)

Bike rentals and trips
[www.beroutes.com](#)
[www.enkarterbike.com](#)
[www.enbike.com](#)

ROUTE 1A

ROUTE 1B

ROUTE 2

ROUTE 3

ROUTE 4

ROUTE 5



ROUTE 5

INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

A route along Karrantza Valley that connects industry and underground nature. Quarries, factories and industrial transport systems coexist with one of Bizkaia's most unusual geological areas, showing how the exploitation of natural resources revealed landscapes hidden under the earth's surface.



How to visit

By bike
By car
By motorcycle

Route highlights

Industrial heritage
Geology
Cave
Mining history

[VISIT THE WEBSITE](#)

DOLOMITAS FACTORY MUSEUM

Visiting this factory, in the Ambasaguas neighbourhood of Karrantza, is the chance to go back in time to the years of the industrialisation heyday of Bizkaia.

Founded in 1947, Dolomitas del Norte quarried basic refractory material for the metallurgical furnaces of Bizkaia's industry, mainly for the Altos Hornos de Vizcaya.

In 1956, operations began at **Donosa Quarry** (on the Peña de Ranero next to Pozalagua Cave), which was one of the largest outcrops of hydrothermal

dolomite. The extracted dolomite was transported along a material ropeway from the quarry to the **Ambasaguas** neighbourhood (around 8 km away), home to the Dolomitas del Norte factory.



Material ropeways were commonly used transport systems in mining, as they significantly cut distances and make it easier to transport the ore between hard-to-reach areas.

This ropeway ran for nearly 3 kilometres between the quarry and the factor. The cable was suspended from 27 metal support trestles along the route. This material ropeway was the last to be used in Bizkaia and was operational until 1976, when the quarry shut.

After being stored in silos at the unloading station, the dolomite was transferred to rotary kilns, where it reached temperatures of 1800° and was transformed into sintered dolomite. This material was used to make refractory bricks.

Those bricks were essential for the industry to advance as they lined the blast furnaces of the great foundries.

The sintered dolomite could withstand the high temperatures reached in these furnaces; the bricks eliminated the need to shut the furnaces down for constant repairs and which helped to increase production.

The Dolomitas Museum is the only place in the Basque Country where the huge pulley system used to operate the material ropeways can be seen. This system is at the Unloading Station of the Old Factory, which was declared a site of cultural interest in the **Monument Category** by the Basque Government in 2002.



ARMAÑÓN NATURAL PARK

The visit is the chance to learn about a part of our industrial history which, despite being very important, is relatively unknown. What is also surprising is that it is in such a breathtaking scenic and natural setting: there are few places where nature is seen in such splendour as in the Armañón Natural Park.

The park's peaks and forests are home to an endless network of trails and over two hundred caves. The route starts from the Dolomitas Factory and after 7 km or so, you reach Pozalagua. The Armañón Natural Park's **interpretation centre** is there and is located in the old station where the ore was crushed and loaded. At the refurbished building, visitors get a comprehensive view of the natural heritage of the

park and of the mining that took place there; thus, helping to understand the close relationship between landscape, industry and subsoil.

The **Pozalagua Cave** is barely 100 metres from the centre. The former Donosa quarry stretches out over **Peña de Ranero**. It is a striking space where high quality dolomite was produced for the iron and steel

industry. This shows the scope of these operations in the heart of nature. In 2007, this enclave was also redesigned with the opening of an auditorium cut out of dolomite-limestone rock of the quarry. A unique example of integrating industrial heritage and cultural use.

POZALAGUA CAVE

Discovered by chance after a blasting operation by Dolomitas del Norte S.A., Pozalagua Cave is now a true natural wonder: it boasts the world's highest concentration of eccentric stalactites, formations that defy gravity to form a dazzling mosaic.

The myriad of stalactites and the many different formations give Pozalagua a hypnotic quality, turning it into a veritable underground cathedral.

The **guided tour** takes in the columns, flowstones and a dry lake with tens of thousands of seemingly random eccentric stalactites, that seem to form an endless coral reef,

a forest in the bowels of the earth. The tour ends at a viewpoint when you can appreciate the grandeur and beauty of this underground spot in all its glory. The temperature inside the cave stays at 13 °C year round and so you should wear suitable clothing.

www.cuevadepozalagua.eus



Other highlights



Interpretation centre

The Armañón Natural Park Parketxea or interpretation centre is , in the former Dolomitas del Norte mining premises, opposite the Pozalagua Cave. It is a three-storey building with a viewing terrace and a panoramic lift that takes visitors to a 3D artificial cave.



Indiano houses

Enkarterri boasts a record number of lavish houses built by indianos returning to the Basque Country. The architecture for these buildings was trailblazing at the time and the mansions have stories to tell about the indianos emigrated to the Americas, where they made huge fortunes and returned to the Basque Country to flaunt their wealth. We recommend a guided tour of the mansions in the Concha neighbourhood in Karrantza, where you will learn about how they amassed their fortunes, their luxurious daily lives, their great charitable works and many other stories.



Karpin Fauna

Karpin Fauna is about 3 km away. It is a shelter for wild animals that are victims of trafficking, abandoned pets and native fauna that can no longer be returned to their natural habitat. They come here from recovery and other similar centres.



Lanestosa

Lanestosa, the smallest municipality in Bizkaia in terms of area to be a charter town, is around 13 km from the Dolomitas Factory Museum. Barely a hundred people live there and it seems to be untouched by time. Its cobbled streets, flanked by mansions with balconies overflowing with flowers, have preserved the same structure since the 13th century.



How to get there

The best way to get to Karrantza is by car. The main route from Bilbao is along the BI-630 and it takes about an hour. If you come from Cantabria, via Colindres, you should take the CA-629 towards Ramales.

By car
Dolomitas
Pozalagua Cave

By bus
Bizkaibus
[Information and timetables](#)

By train
Renfe: Bilbao - Santander
[Information and timetables](#)

Bike rentals and trips
www.beroutes.com
www.enkarterribike.com
www.enbike.com

Where to eat

In Karrantza, the local cuisine pays homage to the land. The valley is famous for its local produce and livestock, which provide us with a range of local products, such as the milk used to make the traditional sheep's cheese (don't forget you can visit one of cheese dairies and spend time as a the shepherds). Yet, above all, Karrantza is a haven for food lovers, thanks to the use of local fresh products. Hearty meals were essential to replenish energy after a hard day's industrial work, but at a time when health is paramount, there is no shortage of options to suit every palate.

