



# Cúber a Biniaraix Itinerary

Serra de Tramuntana Nature Area



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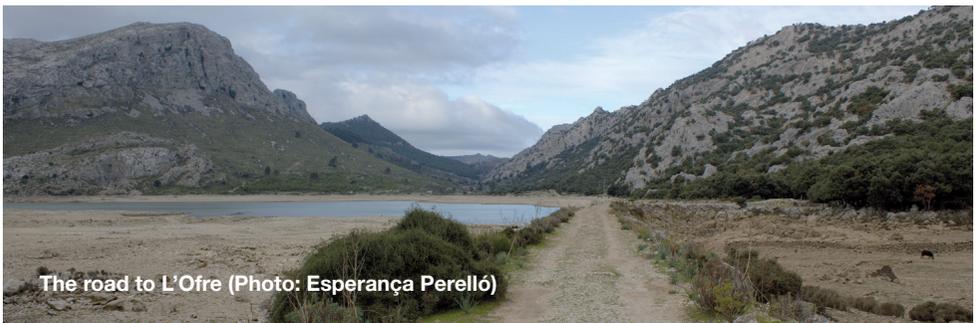
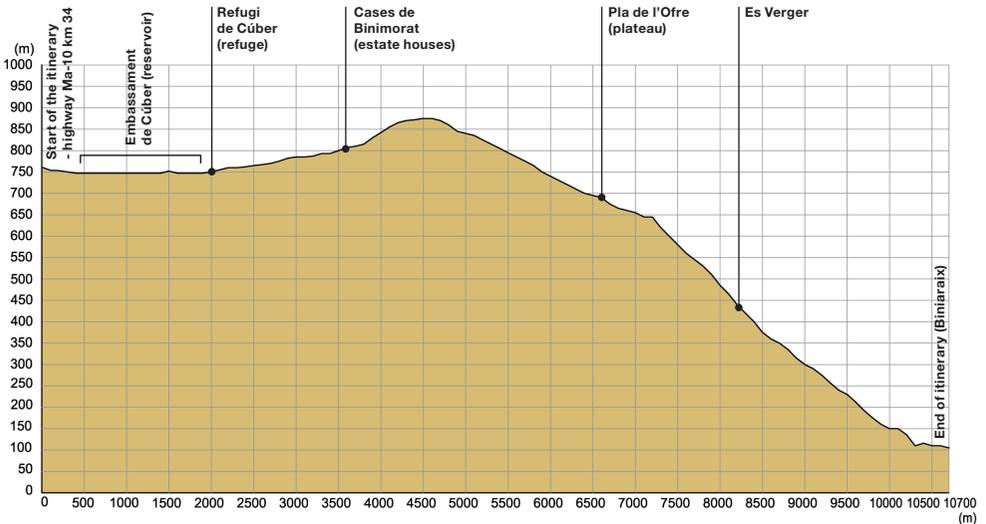
Sitting at an altitude of 750 metres, the Cúber Reservoir is surrounded by the highest mountains in the Serra de Tramuntana. In the past, it was a fertile valley dotted with the cultivation fields of the finest durum wheat on the island. Today, it is the ideal place to listen to the age-old voices of our mountains. The Barranc de Biniaraix ravine is one of the awe-inspiring landscapes in the Serra de Tramuntana. The natural, historic, cultural and landscape value of the Barranc de Biniaraix was acknowledged institutionally when it was declared a Property of Cultural Interest as a monument.

This trail is signposted throughout and runs along the GR- 221. It must be followed on foot.

**Difficulty:** average.

**Distance:** 10.7 kilometres (one way).

**Duration:** 2 hours.



# 1. The mountains of the Serra de Cúber and the inhabitants of the karst landscape

This itinerary begins at the entrance gate to the Cúber Public Estate, which is located at approximately kilometre 34 of the Andratx–Pollença highway (Ma-10).

The Cúber estate sits within the limits of both the Serra de Tramuntana Nature Area and the Natura 2000 Network, as one of the Serra de Tramuntana Summits of Community Importance.

At first glance from the estate gate, you will see a rather austere landscape. From here, the most striking view is undoubtedly the reservoir, which takes up virtually the entire plateau, nestled beneath the peaks of the Morro de Cúber (951 m) on the left, the Puig de sa Rateta (1113 m) in front and the hills of the Serra de Cúber on the right.

Follow the trail to the right, towards the holm oak grove. Next, you will turn to the left, following the path towards the Puig de l'Ofre (1093 m), which lies in the distance. You will need to come up close enough to the rocks at the side of



**Lime kiln at the foot of the Serra de Cúber (Photo: Esperança Perelló)**

the Serra de Cúber to appreciate the marks left behind by karst erosion. Karst is a type of relief generated by the chemical weathering of carbonate stone and primarily calcareous rock. Calcareous stones are sedimentary rocks predominantly made up of calcium carbonate. The process takes place when the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere combines with rainwater, giving rise to carbonic acid.

When the rain falls on carbonate rocks, the carbonic acid dissolves the carbonates, transforming them into bicarbonates and transporting them in such a manner that they generate odd shapes, striations, grooves and wide clefts that together form areas locally known as *rellars* and es-



**Rusty-back fern (Foto: Esperança Perelló)**



*quetjars*, or lapies. Thus, each time it rains, the water dissolves a part of the mountain range in a very slow process.

The cracks in the rocks are colonised by plants that require very little soil to live, such as the southern polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) and the rusty-back fern (*Ceterach officinarum*), among others. To view them, you will need to draw in very close to the stone crevices.

**Southern polypody  
(Photo: Esperança Perelló)**

## 2. Un poco de historia del Pla de Cúber

Si ahora miramos hacia nuestra izquierda, podemos observar que al otro lado del embalse hay una caseta que está tan cerca del agua que se refleja en ella. Se trata del refugio de Cúber, adaptado para hacer pequeñas estancias.

Una vez que dejamos atrás el refugio de Cúber, atravesamos un portillo que nos deja fuera de la finca pública. Seguimos el camino marcado de la GR-221. Aquí el valle se estrecha y se hace más evidente el uso que se daba antiguamente a estas tierras, como es el caso de los cultivos en los bancales al pie de la Rateta y de na Franquesa. Ahora están invadidos por el carrizo, pero no hace mucho eran productivos campos de cereales.

El pla de Cúber, donde nos encontramos, ha sido habitado desde antiguo, tal como lo demuestran los yacimientos prehistóricos en las inmediaciones de la cueva del torrente de Cúber y el poblado talayótico de Almallutx. De hecho, el topónimo Cúber, que antiguamente aparecía con la grafía *Qulber*, es anterior al tiempo de los árabes.

Tras la conquista de Mallorca por el rey Jaume I, una extensión de ocho yugadas de la propiedad de Cúber, fue otorgada a Berenguer Ferrer de Barcelona y las siete restantes a Marino Ferrandi, militar del Infante de Portugal. Una yugada es una medida superficial agraria que equivale a la extensión de tierra que una pareja de bueyes puede arar en un día (aproximadamente 11,36 hectáreas).

Desde estos primeros tiempos, se sembraba sobre todo trigo, y también cebada y avena. Además, había olivares, encinares y matorrales.

A finales del siglo XVI, Cúber era un gran latifundio ganadero que durante el verano recibía muchos rebaños de ovejas procedentes del Pla de Mallorca.

El embalse de Cúber se construyó entre abril de 1970 y junio de 1971, y la finca pasó a ser propiedad pública el año 1988 a fin de proteger la cuenca del pantano.

Actualmente, la gestión de la finca pública corresponde al Govern de les Illes Balears, mientras que EMAYA es la encargada de gestionar y mantener el embalse.

### 3. Sky full of vultures

Continue along the clearly marked path. You will soon pass by the houses of Binimorat, and in ten minutes' time, you will come to the pass known as the Coll de l'Ofre. Be sure to look back from here to take in the magnificent panoramic view of the reservoir, with the towering peak of Puig Major in the background.

You will also want to remember to look up at the sky from time to time, so as not to miss the striking display of the black vulture in its silent flight. The largest bird of prey in Europe, the black vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) measures some 100 centimetres in length and has a two-and-a-half-metre wingspan. This bird usually weighs around eight kilos; however, it can come to weigh as much as twelve. Endowed with a great, robust beak, this vulture's plumage is totally black, though more intensely coloured in the younger specimens and more chocolate brown in the adults. The finer down feathers on its head and neck are generally lighter in colour. This species enjoys an enviable lifespan of up to 40 years, and it seems that once paired off, black vulture couples tend to live together until one of the two dies.

As to its nesting habits, the black vulture usually builds its nest out of tree branches at the tops of pine trees (*Pinus halepensis*). Though the bird does not nest in this area, it is indeed a regular visitor, possibly due to the abundant supply of animal remains found here, including dead goats and sheep, its primary source of food.



**Vulture (Drawing: Vicenç Sastre)**

## 4. The Barranc de Biniaraix (ravine)

From the Coll de l'Ofre pass, the bridle path winds downhill, making several turns, until you reach the plateau known as the Pla de l'Ofre, in approximately 15 minutes' time. Cross the barrier, and you will soon find yourself on the most spectacular section of the hike: the Barranc de Biniaraix ravine. Ahead of you from here is a stepped path made of stone (with nearly 2000 steps!) that comprises one of the most striking works of popular transportation engineering in Mallorca. The ravine is a west-facing karst canyon that was formed by the erosive action of water. Bordering the ravine are the mountains of the Serra de Son Torrella to the north and the peak of Puig des Cornadors to the south. This stone trail was once the primary route that connected the valley of Sóller with the valleys of L'Ofre, Cúber, Orient and the Lluc Sanctuary.

On both sides of the trail is yet another wonder: a series of stone wall terraces dotted with olive trees, bearing witness to the tenacity and steadfast devotion of the people who have inhabited these mountains throughout the centuries. The path once provided access to all of these terraced fields, and the olive growers used to use it to transport their olives down the mountain.



Ses Voltetes (Photo:Esperança Perelló)

## 5. Dry stone structures

*Marjades* are dry stone wall terraces that serve to create horizontal surfaces in steeply sloped places like the mountainsides of the Serra de Tramuntana. This enabled our ancestors to create places that were flatter and more appropriate for the cultivation of olive trees.

These structures are very important for their unquestionable historic and landscape value and for the essential role that they play in soil retention and erosion prevention. Moreover, the arrangement of these stone wall terraces was by no means arbitrary. Rather, it was the result of the knowledge of the area's physical features (slope, lithology, the water network, etc.), which also served for the construction of other rainwater channelling structures, such as ditches and underground drain channels, as well as the stone paths themselves.

The ditches are long and narrow excavations lined with dry stone that collected the water at the foot of the terrace wall and conducted it to the main stream.



Gutter alongside the stone path (Photo: Esperança Perelló)



*Iberellus balearicus*  
(Photo: Gràcia Salas).

The drain channels are underground galleries that were built in places where water tended to accumulate. To build these structures, a part of the soil was removed and a layer of stone was laid in its place, to promote drainage. The soil was then placed on top of the stone, thus enabling the cultivation of the field.

The most elaborate stone trails in the Serra de Tramuntana, these paths bear witness to the importance of this route as a frequently used thoroughfare in the past. Here, the cobbling is not a constant throughout the entire road; rather, it appears in the steepest sections or in places where the rainwater could potentially cause the most damage to the trail.

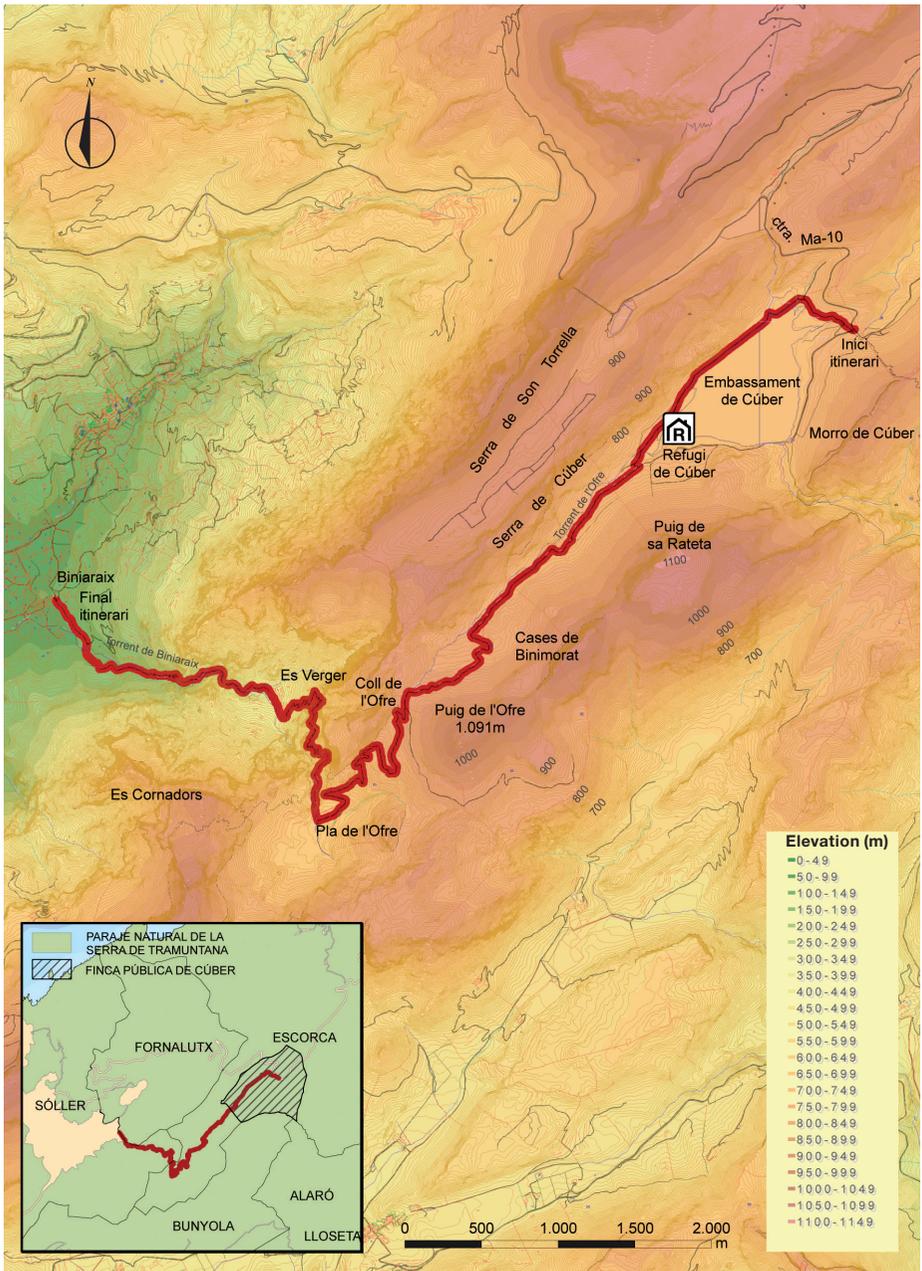
The idea behind the cobblestone is essentially to ensure the conservation of roads and trails. First, stone favours the infiltration of water, thus reducing downhill stream flow in the case of heavy rains. Second, whereas rainwater is likely to displace the soil on an unpaved path, it is not strong enough to drag the stones out of place, meaning that the trail is left undamaged.

## 6. Stone walls and biodiversity

Through the ages, the stone walls have also become a refuge for different animal and plant species. The cracks and crevices between the stones are a refuge for countless vertebrates such as wall lizards and weasels, as well as invertebrates, some of which are endemic, as is the case of the snail species *Iberellus balearicus*. Endemic animals come from species that originated on the nearby continents and colonised the islands, where they have evolved in isolation. In other words, these species have evolved over time without any contact whatsoever with the continental species.

The spaces between the wall stones are also an ideal place for certain plant species, which tend to root here.

Finally, the ravine path will take you to the quaint hamlet of Biniaraix.



## Serra de Tramuntana Nature Area

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