



Cúber a Biniraix Itinerary

Serra de Tramuntana Nature Area



**Govern
de les Illes Balears**



Obra Social "la Caixa"

ENGLISH

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Serra de Tramuntana Nature Area

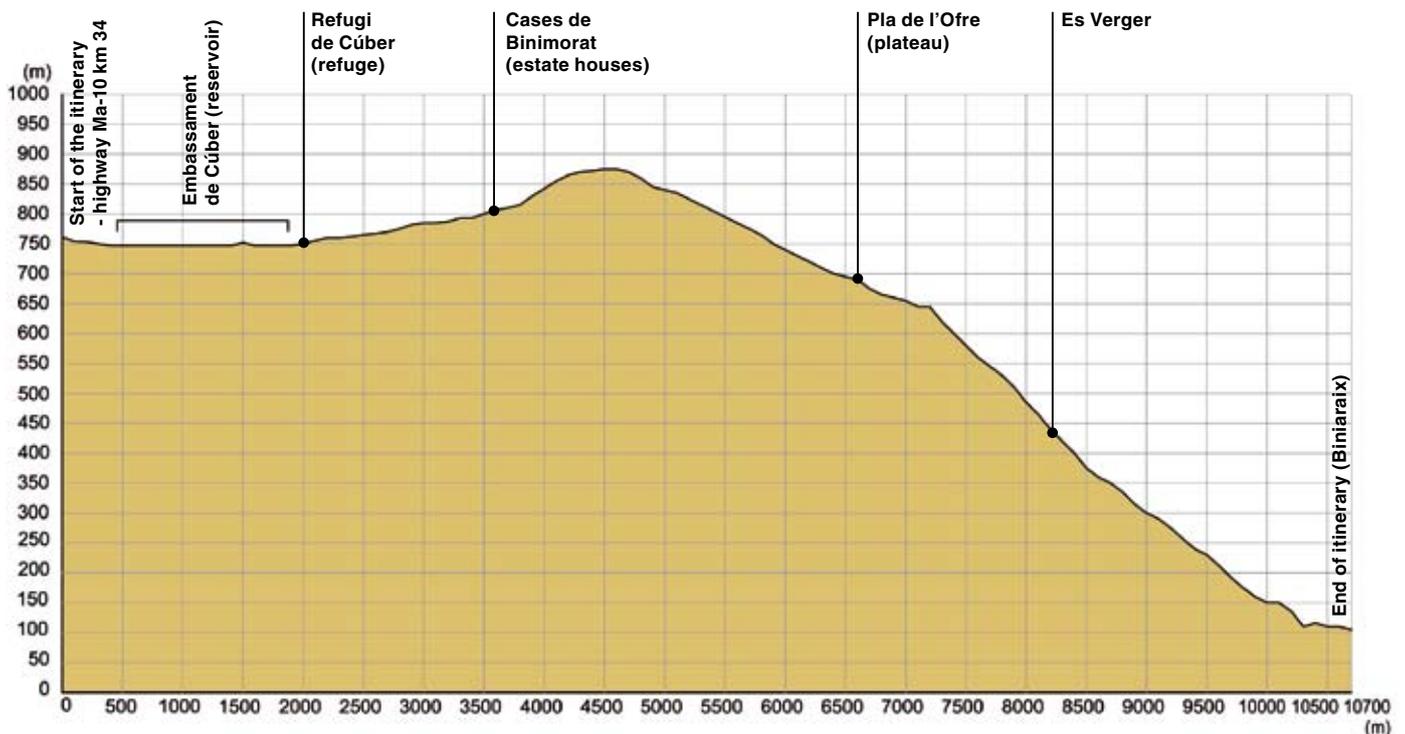
Sitting at an altitude of 750 metres, the Cúber Reservoir is surrounded by the highest mountains in the Serra de Tramuntana. In the past, it was a fertile valley dotted with the cultivation fields of the finest durum wheat on the island. Today, it is the ideal place to listen to the age-old voices of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



The road to L'Ofre (Photo: Esperança Perelló)

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)



Rusty-back fern
(Foto: Esperança Perelló)

known as *rellars* and *esquetjars*, 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)

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



2. A bit of history of the Pla de Cúber (plateau)

If you look to the left here, you will see a small house on the other side of the reservoir. The house sits so close to the water's edge that it is reflected in the water itself. Known as the *Refugi de Cúber*, this refuge has been adapted to accommodate short stays.

Once you have passed the Cúber Refuge, you will cross through a gate on the left, leading you outside of the public estate. Here you will need to continue along the path marked GR-221. At this point, the valley narrows and the past use of this land becomes more obvious, as can be seen in the stone terraced cultivation fields at the foot of Sa Rateta and Na Franquesa. Though they are now full of Mauritanian grass, not long ago these plots were productive grain fields.

The Pla de Cúber plateau, where you are standing, has been inhabited since ancient times, as can be seen in the prehistoric deposits of the cave alongside the Torrent de Cúber (stream) and the Talayotic settlement of Almallutx. In fact, the name Cúber, which was written as *Qulber* in the past, existed before the era of Arab rule.

Following the conquest of Mallorca, King Jaume I granted approximately eight *jovades* of the Cúber property to Berenguer Ferrer of Barcelona in 1229, and the other seven to Marí Ferrandi, a military officer of the infantry of Portugal. A *jovada* is an agricultural surface area measurement equivalent to the amount of land that a couple of oxen can plough in a day (approximately 11.3 hectares). In those early years, this land was primarily used for the cultivation of wheat, as well as barley and oats, yet there were also populations of olive trees, holm oaks and scrubland.

In the late 16th century, Cúber was a great cattle ranching estate that received countless herds of sheep from the Mallorcan flatlands in the summer.

The Cúber Reservoir was built between April 1970 and June 1971, and the estate became public property in 1988, as part of an initiative to protect the reservoir basin.

At present, the public estate is administered by the Govern de les Illes Balears, whilst EMAYA (the municipal water and sewage company) is in charge of the management and maintenance of the reservoir.

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 Lluç 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.



Biniaraix
Final
itinerari

Torrent de Biniaraix

Es Comadors

Es Verger

Coll de
l'Ofre

Pla de l'Ofre

Puig de l'Ofre
1.091m

Cases de
Binimorat

Serra de Son
Torrella

Serra de
Cúber

Torrent de l'Ofre

Puig de
sa Rateta
1100

Refugi
de Cúber

Embassament
de Cúber

Morro de Cúber

Inici
itinerari

ctra. Ma-10

