

Sierra de Norte de Sevilla



From Carmona take the A-57 north to Lora del Rio – a fairly bland route and then the much more attractive A-455 leads you from Lora del Rio towards Constantina and the massive **Natural Park of the Sierra de Norte** *Parque Natural Sierra de Norte*. Just before Constantina the A-452 runs west to El Pedroso and 1km away is the **El Robledo**, Visitors Centre, tel. 955 881 597, www.egmasa.es. Here, you can learn about this huge park – 438, 572 acres (177,484 hectares) - through an audio-visual exhibition and the publications that are available, as well as details of the 18 walking tracks, of which there are four around Constantina and nine around Cazalla de la Sierra. Also of interest is the **Via Verde de la Sierra Norte de Sevilla**, where old railway lines have been ripped up and made into walking/cycling paths. The main one here runs on the old line between Constantina and Cazalla de la Sierra. Found in the park is an impressive array of birds including Golden Eagles, Vultures and Black Storks as well as much other wildlife such as otters, wild cats, boar, and Fallow deer.



Constantina, considered the most important town in the park, has an ancient history and retains a medieval ambiance around the castle, as well as important churches and mansions.

To get a better perspective of the park, drive north on the SE-162 to Alanis and then the A-433, towards Guadalcanal..

Just after Alanis, though, a short detour up to the **El Mirador de Hamapega** which, at 2,976 ft (907 m), is one of the highest points in the province and offers stunning views back over the park and north towards Extremadura.



Cazalla de la Sierra. Head back now to Alanis and then follow the A-432 south to Cazalla de la Sierra an attractive town in its own right and home to one of the most eclectic attractions in the park. The town itself was formed in 1594 and is dominated by the church of **Nuestra Señora de la Consolación** that has its origins in the 14th century with a mudéjar style, but has elaborations in renaissance and barroco styles from the 18th century.

For those wishing for some energetic activities the **El Berrocal**, Finca El Berrocal, Carretera Real de la Jara, km 1, tel. 667 553 855, offers horse riding in the park in the form of 1-2 hour trips, advance reservation required. **Bicicletas Verde Vía**, tel. 955 954



203, www.bicicletasverdevia.com, located just 100m from the railway station Cazalla-Constantina at the very beginning of the Via Verde cycling path provide bikes for rent by the day with helmet included as well as route maps. The route provides access to the Cerro del Hierro an ancient mining area characterized by the kárstica formation with minor slopes, timber and underground caverns - declared Natural Monument by Medio Ambiente in September 2003.



La Cartuja de Cazalla, A-455, km 2.5 (the Cazalla to Constantina road), tel. 954 884 516, www.cartujadecazalla.com, is a must-visit destination in the Sierra de Norte. This beautiful location has a really ancient history which dates back even before Phoenician times. Recognizing its value, the Moors built a mosque here after their invasion in the 8th century, and added olive oil and wheat mills parts of which can still be seen today.

After the reconquest, it was used as a royal hunting lodge, and its proximity to the **Silver Road** *Ruta de la Plata* attracted pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela to its guest house. In 1418 it became a Jeronimus Monastery, and later that century, in 1476 became a Carthusian Monastery of which there were at one time over 300 in the world and just 26 in Spain. The monastery here suffered during the Wars of Independence against the French in 1810 when it was plundered. After the monks worked hard to repair the damage worse was to come. After the civil war between the Carlists and Liberals, Isabella II acceded to the throne and appointed a liberal government. Needing money the finance minister, Mendizábel, was left with two resources – the nobility and the affluent monasteries. Politically, it was impossible to turn against the nobility, so he turned towards the second largest landowners in Spain – the monasteries, and closed them whilst expropriating their wealth in 1836. These days there are just four Carthusian monasteries left in Spain, none of which are in Andalucía.

Besides a hotel and restaurant – with the latter decorated with original art that's for sale being an excellent place to stop for lunch, the buildings of the monastery as well as other places in the delightful grounds can be explored. But the biggest attraction here is the **Centre of Contemporary Art and Francisco Espinoza Dueñas Museum**, where you will delight in the art work of Francisco Espinoza Dueñas – who specializes in contributing to the art in the world of the Spanish language, Amaya Espinoza, Annet Kosen and Alejandro Velasco. There are also studios and workshops for resident artists and an art gallery with a permanent exhibition.

To return continue south on the A-455 to Lora del Rio, and then follow the A-457 to Carmona.