

## PLACES OF INTEREST

Less than 20 km away:

### **Suarbol**

3 Km from Piornedo this village is the first we encounter in the province of Leon. There is a Romanesque chapel with arcades and which boasts one of the most interesting architectural sites in the area.

There is a tale that says Suarbol takes its name from a place called A Cespedosa; the saint from the village escaped and established herself in a tree known as Entrambas Aguas (i.e. between two rivers) The image was returned to the village but ran off again. Finally they decided to change the location of the village and called the place Suarbol i.e. Under the tree.

In the 50's the village of Suarbol suffered a fire and was completely gutted; so there are no *pallozas* here and the houses were rebuilt using slate as a roofing material. As we stroll around the village, do not fail to see the Casa de Cadenas which has some interesting stone carvings on its walls and some say these strange sculpted images have something to do with fertility.

### **The Pass of Ancares.** (1670 m)

This is on the way to Ponferrada, after leaving Suarbol and Cespedosa. On clear days, leave the car on the clearing at the top of the pass and admire the valleys of Balouta, Suarbol and Ancares.

This is also an ideal place to enjoy the snow without having to walk too far since the road is at a considerable height. The hiking tracks to Miravalles and Cuiña set out from this point.

### **Balouta**

15 Km aprox. from Piornedo

Balouta is another must in the Ancares mountains. This hamlet is similar to many others in the mountain districts used to have quite a few *pallozas* years ago (judging from the photos on display in the only bar in town, taken at the latter end of the last century.)

The village has suffered from the loss of many *pallozas* over the years and from the building of houses which are not in keeping with local architecture.

### **The Ancares Visitor Nature Centre**

Located in Campaña do Fieró some 19 km from Piornedo, beside the Ancares Refuge Hostel (turn left at Campa da Braña, and head towards Tres Obispos.)

The Centre offers information leaflets on the area, flora and fauna as well as activities to be enjoyed in the mountains.

### **Donís Church**

About 3 km. from Piornedo

To reach the church go through the village of Donis (after Casa de Naipes, a long building, turn off to the right) – Take care as the lanes are narrow and one stretch is

unpaved. You may leave the car beside the road and go down to the village on foot – about 1 Km.

The village of Donis, now almost abandoned, had an interesting history as can be seen from some of the houses –Casa de Naipes, Casa da Casoa with its coat of arms of the Grajal family who were lords over the Cervantes area...

The church stands in the centre of the village and from here most of the other villages in the parish can be seen. It is a sober building – an authentic cathedral hidden away in the mountains; built of solid stone, granite and very expertly sculptured.

It has a central apse and side chapels and has recently been restored. During the restoration work mural painting dating from the XVI century were uncovered. It is closed to the public except on days when mass is celebrated.

On the third Sunday of each month market fairs were held here. Four make-shift bars were installed in the meadow and the villagers, besides buying and selling, also enjoyed a nice day's outing.

From the church of Donis there are tracks and paths to all the villages in the parish; these lanes were originally footpaths or bridle-paths and still retain the old world charm. We recommend the track to Castelo which crosses a Roman bridge – the Ponte de Castelo.

#### **- Pan do Zarco**

This hamlet is what we call *alzada* that is an upland settlement with smaller houses where people grazed their cattle during the summer months, on the remote lofty highlands.

Pan do Zarco was an upland hamlet for the villagers from Murias, Rao and Navia de Suarna. It is 15 km from Piornedo and to reach it you should turn off to the left at the Pass da Cespedosa (just before the crossroads to Balouta)

It is well worth a visit for its ideal location near Pena de Murias and for the breathtaking views. Unfortunately, over the years it has lost the attraction it used to enjoy years ago – the original dwellings were *pallozas*, smaller than those in the villages which were inhabited throughout the whole year. Some round walls (which previously were roofed with more modern materials) can still be seen here.

#### More than 20 Km. away

#### **-El Castro de Cervantes**

From the shape this place adopts and judging by its name there is evidence that a *castro* or hill fort existed in the parish of O Castro. This evidence came to light during restoration works on the church when walls and stone slabs were uncovered.

This hill fort settlement has been partially excavated and a group of houses have been found. These had kitchens, small ovens, strong slate walls and channels between the houses to drain off the water.

This is a fort (*castro*) dating from Roman times. It was occupied by gold miners since this mineral was much needed for the Empire; there is no sign of there being any agricultural activity or livestock. It was surrounded by a moat and was inhabited from 50 BC to the II Century AD.

### **- La Torre de Quindous.**

About 20 km. from Piornedo

In Quindous we should visit the tower-fortress which belonged to the dynasty of the Lords of Quindous. Founded in the XV century by D Paio Quindos and inherited by D Suero Fernández Quindós who brought a lawsuit against D Pedro Osorio, Lord of Cervantes. The name has served to designate both the mansion-house and the parish. The palace (mansion-house) is of rectangular shape with two circular towers on each side of the main door over which is the coat of arms. It is of sober appearance with small windows and many embrasures at the rear of the building. There is a large interior patio made up of the four inhabited houses of the building.

The tower is private property and cannot be visited. It has fallen somewhat into decay since it was left uninhabited but it still conserves some wall paintings.

The parish church has ties with the palace because it was the chapel which fulfilled the palaces needs.

### **- Navia de Suarna**

Navia is the nearest large town to Piornedo, just 25 km away. For many years it was the main market town in the area where people came to buy and sell. On market days it was frequented by merchants from far and near and business flourished thanks to the mountain village shoppers. It is best to visit Navia on market day (second Sunday and 29 of each month) as many come in to savour a plate of octopus and there is always a lively atmosphere. Besides, Navia is an ideal nice place to take a stroll, to see its Roman bridge, its medieval tower (privately owned and closed to the public), nooks and corners, its bars and riverside walk.

For fishing enthusiasts it is a privileged place.

### **- Castillo de Doiras, Vilarello da Iglesia y San Miguel**

At about 30 km from Piornedo

The castle is located in the parish of Vilarello, on a promontory overlooking the entire valley of Cancelada.

This is an interesting and well preserved medieval tower, which belonged to the lordship of Cervantes and the Counts of Grajal.

It dates from the XV century. It is rectangular and has two towers, one 16-meter high.

The high, thick walls and its ideal location make it an almost impregnable fortress.

It is fairly well preserved and was declared of Cultural Interest in 2004; it is still privately owned. It is at times open and other times closed completely as if it lacked any interest whatsoever.

Some researchers who are investigating into the origins of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra are associating the name of the famous writer with the castle of Doiras. They claim that the stage name of the famous writer is simply an allegory to his origin or of his family's origin and in the parish there are sufficient indications to this claim, i.e.:

- The castle of Cervantes,

- The house of Saavedra, a palace located in the village of Vilarello da Igrexa and which boasted the coat of arms of Saavedra on the facade (This has now been removed by the present owners). Nowadays, the palace is dedicated to farming and is rather in a delapidated state.

- The town of San Miguel, a nearby village also belonging to the parish of Vilarello

**Coro de Rao**

This is a small village that has been restored and conserves a fairly harmonic group of buildings. Located some 25 km from Piornedo it can be reached via Balouta or from the Pan do Zarco road.

It is best to park your car at the entrance of the village and continue on foot as the roads are narrow and there is nowhere to park in the village itself, especially in summer.

There is a small, typical bar and you could take a very pleasant stroll down to the river. This area features other treasures such as pottery from Orballo.