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English version





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Printed: Centro Especial de Empleo, IVADIS  
Legal Deposit:

Assistance from:



Printing this material has been possible thanks to the Cooperation Agreement signed on 21st April 2006 by the *Caja de Ahorros y Pensiones de Barcelona, "la Caixa"* and the Generalitat Valenciana (Autonomous Community Authority) for Undertaking the Integral Management Plan for Conservation of the Natural Systems of the Valencian Community's Network of Nature Reserves.

**Date of approval of PORN:**

*(Plan for Organization of Natural Resources)*

28th April 2006

**Date declared a Nature Reserve:**

19th May 2006

*La Tinença de Benifassà* nature reserve covers 4,967.548 hectares, including the 25,814 affected by the Plan for Organization of Natural Resources which lie inside the historical county with the same name and Vallibona. This terrain is crossed by rivers Sénia and Servol (also known as Les Corses river), which cut through the last outcrops of the Iberian system, and takes in the towns and villages of *La Pobla de Benifassà*, *Coratxà*, *El Boixar*, *Fredes*, *El Ballestar* Minor Local Community (all in the municipal area of *Pobla de Benifassà*), *Bel* (Rossell), *Vallibona* and *Castell de Cabres*.

*La Tinença* forms part of the great *Puertos del Beceite* massif, covering parts of Aragon, Catalonia and the Valencian Community. This massif is the geographical point of encounter of the mountain systems in the Catalan Coastal Range and the Iberian System, resulting in a series of rugged ranges going from 400 to 1300 metres in altitude. The geological substrate has contributed to the way this was formed, consisting of limestones and dolomites arranged in layers in which the former have undergone erosion processes while the second have remained more unchanged.



Laura Bellure

## History

The most ancient archaeological remains in this area have been attributed to the Eneolithic age, (3rd Millennium B.C.) but it is estimated that the first major colonisation of La Tinença did not take place until the 2nd Millennium B.C., since numerous sites have been found with ceramic remains enabling these to be dated to the Bronze Age and Iberian era. One should also stress the series of Levante art cave paintings in *Cova del Polvorí* or *dels Rossegadors* (*Pobla de Benifassà*). La Tinença is assumed to have developed into a farming and stockbreeding stage in the Bronze age, which went on in the Iberian-Roman era.

From roughly 714 to 1208, the Moslems dominated the area. The whole valley and towns located at the tops of the mountains, probably founded for military purposes, must have formed an area under the sphere of influence of Morella and defended by Benifassà castle (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries), originally known as Beni-hazà or Beni-Hasan, only a few structures of which have been left standing today.

The Christian domination got under way the age of greatest economic, social and cultural success for these counties, which were conquered by the Catalan-Aragonese crown, and remained in their power until 1232-33, then starting to form part of the Poblet Monastery domain. Dependent on this, the convent of *Santa Maria de Benifasar* was





*La barraca del granadí (Bel)*

set up, its building being completed in 1250, and which governed the zone for centuries. From the constitution of Morella as a major town *La Tinença* lay under its administrative, social and economic influence for many years, Vallibona formed part of the Tinença de Benifassà (until it became part of Morella). The commercial and stockbreeding bourgeoisie then flourished and guilds of craftsmen and peasants became established.

Later on the county's economy underwent a major boom, mainly due to the demand for wool, leading to sheep-farming being developed and leaving its traces on the landscape.



*Arenaria conimbricensis viridis*

## Vegetation

In *La Tinença de Benifassà* nature reserve, as well as in its nearby surroundings, there are some of the biggest holm oak groves as regards structure and extension in the whole Valencian territory. The rugged relief, the low productivity of the land for farming and stockbreeding and the low population density traditionally found in this zone have all combined to ensure the endurance of these large tree masses. In spite of some holm oak groves being converted in relatively recent times into pastureland (*bovalares*) or forestry exploitations, leading to a structural simplification of the woods, this has ended up resulting in a greater diversity of settings which has allowed the development of some very interesting pastureland plant communities.







Furthermore, sharing the territory with holm oak groves depending on small local variations in the climate and the characteristics of the soil, there are some of the best conserved masses of cork oaks in the Valencian Community. These cork oak enclaves form one of the most exuberant landscapes in the Valencian territory.

One should also stress the presence of considerable extensions of box trees from whose wood cutlery was traditionally made.

It is finally of interest to stress the large number of species of particular interest or with endemic nature which have led to the declaration of different flora Micro-reserves in the nature reserve zone. Most of these rare species are concentrated in areas with difficult access such as rocky outcrops or deep ravines, as is the case of the *Barranc del Salt* ravine (in Fredes), the *Mola de Mitjavila* hill (in Coratxà) and the Font de Les Roques spring (in Vallibona), which has meant that these are in a good state of preservation. Some examples of these species are the *Pinguicula dertosensis* (butterwort), the *Biscutella fonqueri*, *Arenaria conimbricensis* *Antirrhinum pertegasii* (snapdragon).

Pine of 12 arms (Coratxà)





B. Albiach Galán

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

## Fauna

The fauna in the park is very plentiful, with a large number of species, which is why this constitutes an excellent relictual example of the medium-altitude Mediterranean mountain ecosystems. From a very general standpoint, the main factors producing this situation may be considered to be firstly the physical and geomorphological characteristics of the zone, which have given rise to the existence of different environmental units (sunny areas with a prevalence of undergrowth, pine groves, kermes oaks, narrow ravines etc); and secondly, human activity over the years (hunting, farming uses, etc.) which has in some cases meant



a reduction in the presence or disappearance of certain species, but in other cases has facilitated the expansion of species by creating new areas such as the farm fields and pastureland (*bovalares*) respectively. Finally, due to the particular geographical situation, *La Tinença* is a confluence for several migratory channels used over the last glaciations to both the south and the north. This has meant that the vertebrate fauna in this zone is characterised by including species proper to more northerly environments at the same time as others typical of regions lying further to the south.

The most diverse group of vertebrates, the one giving *La Tinença* the greatest value in the Valencian Community is that of birds. First of all the large group of birds of prey nesting in the area should be stressed. There are above all large numbers of golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and short-toed eagles (*Circaetus gallicus*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) and above all griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*).

As for other groups of birds we should stress the presence of riverbank birds, such as the Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and the white-throated dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*), and high-mountain distribution passeriformes (*Anthus campestris*, *Prunella modularis*, *Monticola saxatilis*, *Sylvia borin*, *Phylloscopus collybita*, *Regulus ignicapillus*, *Sitta europaea*, *Loxia curvirostra*, *Emberiza hortulana*).



Although the birds are the most significant group of creatures in the area, the most representative animal species in the park is the Spanish wild goat or ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*) since it has the largest population in the Valencian Community here.

One should also underline the presence of some species of bats associated with forest and mountain habitats such as *Myotis emarginatus*, *Hypsugo savii*, *Plecotus austriacus*, as well as a wide range of carnivores (genet, mountain cat and stone marten) and above all an excellent community of game ungulates, since apart from the plentiful mountain goats there are also many specimens of boar (*Sus scrofa*), to which the roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) has recently been added, both by expansion from Teruel and thanks to the specimens reintroduced by the *Generalitat Valenciana*.

There is not a great range of fish due to the lack of water habitats, through we should stress the very scanty presence of barbel (*Barbus haasi*) and French nase (*Chondrostoma miegii*). Amphibians are well represented. Small springs and drinking troughs, as well as the Sénia and Servol rivers, constitute an optimal habitat for a wide range of amphibians. Common toad (*Bufo bufo*) can also be found far of water spots. It is also remarkable the presence of the rare Iberian ribbed newt (*Pleurodeles waltl*).

There is a greater variety of reptiles, which include the wall lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) and European smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*), both with high-mountain distribution and which have relictual populations here. The only chelonidonium with confirmed presence is the Spanish terrapin (*Mauremys leprosa*), although in the neighbouring Catalan county of Montsià there are specimens of Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*).



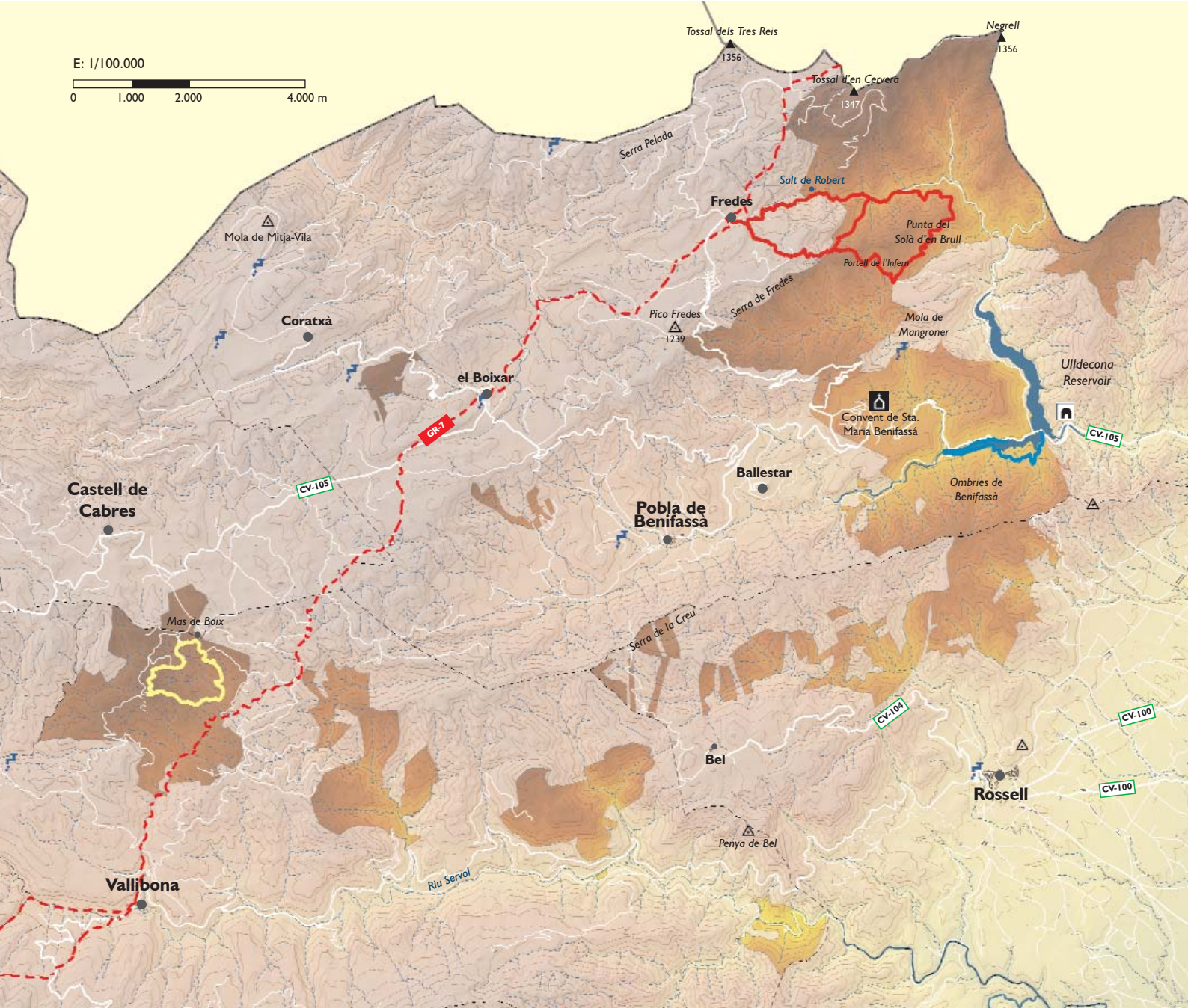
Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*)





E: 1/100.000

0 1.000 2.000 4.000 m



— road

----- administrative boundary

● town, buildings

△ geodesic vertex

▲ peak

⛪ hermitage

⛕ cave

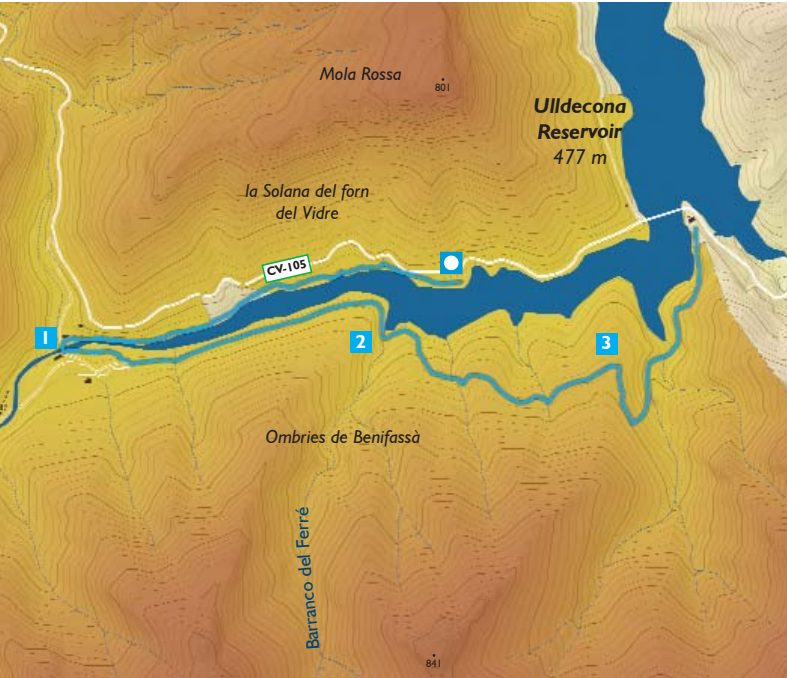
💧 spring water

— Route 1: **Around the reservoir**

— Route 2: **Portell de l'Infern (hell's door) and Salt de Robert (waterfall)**

— Route 3: **Mas del Boix forests**





Matte Pastor

Reservoir

- **Route 1: Around the reservoir**  
Ombries del Benifassà leisure area-  
Ulldecona reservoir dam

**Distance:** 4 km

**Time:** 1 h 15 min

**Total ascent:** 70 m

**Level:** Easy

- **Departure:** From **Ombries de Benifassà leisure area**, an easily accessible spot with tables from which you can go to the reservoir, ideal for having a rest with a pleasant view across the water. The path, heading west, leads along a few metres from the bank to the back of the dam.

- 1 The back of the reservoir is crossed by a cement bridge by an old forestry house and the nursery and Forn del Vidre Fauna Recovery Centre.

- 2 After leaving the path which leads to a **small natural beach**, go on along a path between pines (*Pinus halepensis*) and holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*), where you will easily observe traces of the emblematic wild goat, very plentiful in this area.

- 3 From an abandoned stockyard there is a **panoramic view** of *Barranc de la Fou*, as well as of the reservoir and its dam. The path, which goes on towards the dam, leads along a ravine in which the typical vegetation associated with these water courses can be enjoyed. Up the ravine there is another path which leads to a spectacular pass between the rocks forming part of the Serra de la Creu which connects up with the reservoir by the *Barranc del Ferri*.

**Arrival:** at the **dam of the reservoir**.



## Route 2: **Portell de l'Infern (hell's door) and Salt de Robert (waterfall)**

"Fredes-Portell de l'Infern-Pi Pastor-Salt de Robert-Fredes"

**Distance:** 11 km (short variant: 7.8 km)

**Time:** 5 h 30 min (short variant: 3 h 15 min)

**Total ascent:** 600 m

**Level:** Average - high

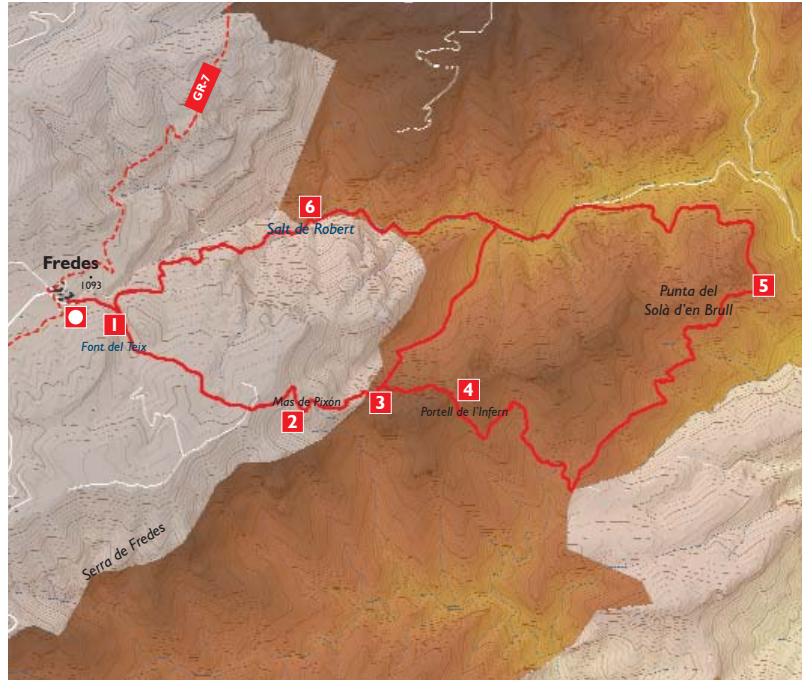
● **Departure:** From **Fredes**, which is the northernmost town in the Valencian Community.

**1** **Font del Teix**, a permanent spring which is at present used for animal drinking trough. The path goes gently up through a black pine grove (*Pinus nigra*). The vegetation on this route is of great ecological importance, as is vouched for by the different Flora Micro-reserves to be found by the way.

**2** **Mas de Pixón**. A traditional building with a threshing floor in good condition. From this country house you can enjoy some stunning views of the Baix Maestrat county.

**3** A **rock** forming a vantage point with wonderful views towards the Ombries del Salt. A beauty spot where one can see birds of prey such as the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), or the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). A few metres from this vantage point a path starts to the left which will let you take the short alternative for the route, leading to the Salt de Robert.

**4** **Portell de l'Infern**. An impressive natural pass through a rock wall. You can see "gamellons" (traditional drinking troughs built in hollow trunks where the water filters through from La Balma del Portell accumulates). The path goes on among some impressive specimens of black pine.



**5** **Punta del Solà d'en Brull**. From the Pi Pastor you can see the striking Morral Desplegat and Pont Foradat, characteristic structures of Tinença de Benifassà. Before reaching Salt de Robert, you can enjoy a pleasant rest at La Tenalla Forestry House.

**6** **Point 6: Salt de Robert**. This waterfall creates a habitat of special botanical and zoological interest, with endemic species protected through a Flora Micro-reserve and a Fauna Reserve.

**Arrival: Fredes.**







Alvar Sabater Armengol



Ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*)

### Route 3: **Mas del Boix forests**

Mas del Boix - Mas de Cardona - Font del Noto - Mas del Boix


**Access to the start of the route:** from *Castell de Cabres* by forest track and from Vallibona by the GR-7.

**Distance:** 5 km

**Time:** 2 h 15 min

**Total ascent:** 200 m

**Level:** Average

 **Departure: Mas de Boix.** Wonderful views of the valley and *La Gatellera* ravine. The dominant vegetation in this zone are the holm oak groves. Today cows can be seen in these hills due to the extensive stockbreeding in the zone.

**1** **Mas de Cardona.** From this point one can take a path linking up with the GR-7 and communicating with Vallibona by *La Gatellera* ravine.

**2** The route continues along a path crossing half way up the slope to reach the track from *Castell de Cabres* to Vallibona. *L'Avenç de la Caseta* is just at ten minutes from the track.

**3** **Font del Noto.** A drinking trough for cows and tank for putting out forest fires. View of the valley and of different old farmsteads. The path goes on along the ravine where a splendid old holm oak can be seen.

**Arrival: Mas de Boix.** Leisure area.

Lastly, one should not forget that one part of the GR-7, a long-distance path, goes through the Nature Reserve, connecting Fredes with Boixar (6.7 Km.) and the latter with Vallibona (14.5 Km.).





## Visits of interest

Any of the villages in this old historical county has a charm of its own making it well worth a visit in its own right, but there are also a large number of sites of interest, either historical or natural or for the scenery. Some of these are:

*Tossal dels Tres Reis*, a peak where the provinces of Teruel, Tarragona and Castellón meet and which provides some wonderful views.

*Santa María de Benifassar Cartuja* Monastery. This was a walled area with a set of buildings of different ages going from the 13th to the 16th century in which one can see items of late Romanic and Gothic styles. The area (entrance and church) can only be visited at midday on Thursdays.

The Parish church of Vallibona was officially declared Site of Cultural Interest (BIC). It has an extremely valuable organ dating back to 1791, and an interesting decoration of coats of arms in the ceiling done by a Mudejar artist.

Other villages in the area also possess interesting examples of religious architecture

La Pobla de Benifassà is a retirement and inspiration place for artists. Renate Steen shows her paintings and sculptures in her museum-house. Peter's Garden, integrates Peter Busch's artistic creation into the landscape. By using colorist sculptures and small ponds and constructions, all adorned by mosaic, gives the opportunity to enjoy of a magical walk into the nature.



*Salt de Robert (Fredes)*

## Accommodation

There is a wide range of accommodation in the towns around the park, including rural hotels, rented housing, camp sites and hostels.

## Cuisine

The typical dishes of this area are amongst others its *recapte* pie and lamb cutlets with potatoes, not forgetting the typical desserts such as curds, *carquinyols* almond sweet, honey, almonds or *crepsell* pastries.

Apart from this fine typical cooking there are also many recipes that caterers in the area have brought in for their customers' delight. One should not forget that two of the natural assets in the area are game and mushrooms, which is seen in the traditional and modern facets of its cooking.





## How to get here

You can get to *La Tinença de Benifassà* by the A-7, taking exit 42 towards *Vinaroz* (N-238) to turn off after a few metres along the CV-11 towards *San Rafael del Río*. Once you get there you should continue towards *La Sénia*, heading into this town by *La Sènia Norte*, until you reach the CV-105, taking you to *Pobla de Benifassà*.

Another possibility starts from the N-340 on its way through *Vinaroz*, where you should take the N-232 towards *Morella*. Before *Morella*, you can get to *Vallibona* taking the CV-111. Once passed *Morella*, near *Torre Miró*, take CV-105 to get to *Castell de Cabres*.

A third possibility is to take the CV-10 in *Castellón* towards *Borriol*, *Cabanes* and *San Mateu*. When you get to this last town continue until coming to the N-232, where you have two options. The first is to continue towards *Morella* until you reach the turnoff to *Vallibona* or to *Castell de Cabres*. The second involves taking the same N-232 but towards *Vinaroz* as far as *Traiguera*, where you should take the road that heads towards *San Rafael del Río*, from which you can get to *Rosell* or to *La Sénia* road, which leads to *Pobla de Benifassà*, *el Ballestar*, *Fredes*, etc.

*El Pont Foradat (Ballestar)*







Daniel Montesinos

Peter's Garden

## Recommendations



Respect the trails, do not take short cuts



Keep your dog on a leash



Take care of traditional constructions, respect the cultural heritage



Respect mountain springs, keep them clean



Observe the plants without harming them; do not collect flowers or other parts



Do not bother or collect fauna



Leave your garbage only in the trash bins



Camping is permitted only in authorized areas



Park your car and walk, get closer to nature and enjoy silence



Never light fire in the Park. Do not smoke, breathe pure air



Remain silent and enjoy the sounds of the forest

In the event of any emergency, **call 112**.