

GPS Walking in Buddhist Valley

By Linda Jeppesen.

GPS units pre-loaded with stunning mountain walks are available to hire in the village of Sella. I recently went there to do a GPS self guided walk and to meet the man behind the project. I chose the Buddhist Valley route, an outstandingly beautiful walk.

Sella is surrounded by magnificent mountain peaks and nestles beneath the spectacular Sierra Aitana which, at 1557m, is the highest point in the Alicante province and higher than Ben Nevis in Scotland.

This whole area is a paradise for walkers and nature lovers. The walk I chose takes approximately 3 hours and I was accompanied by a local English mountain guide, Martin Harrison Smith and his GPS.

The GPS unit is about the size of a mobile phone. On the screen you can see the route that you are taking and also zoom in to your exact position. It also shows nine key waypoints (turns, etc) with a detailed written description of each one. There is an arrow on the screen that points you in the right direction and, if the arrow goes out of line, it means you are going the wrong way. It is therefore a good idea to look at the GPS unit frequently.

We drove down a remote valley to the starting point. The idea was that we four Norwegian friends were going to try to fol-

low the GPS waypoints without Martin getting too involved.

The Buddhist valley

The GPS unit is easy to follow. We tested it out by purposefully walking in the wrong direction; sure enough, the arrow on the unit deviated from the GPS map, even when only 10m off track. With confidence in our GPS friend, we settled down to enjoy our walk. The sun was shining and there was a cool breeze so the temperature was just right.

The Buddhist Valley is beautiful and very peaceful. It could just as well be called the Rosemary Valley as this wild herb is growing everywhere.

After a few minutes we arrived at a remote property set amidst fantastic scenery with a large no entrance sign. This is Guhyaloka, the Buddhist Retreat Centre. Guhyaloka, means "secret realm" and Buddhists come here from all over the world to meditate and study.

Martin explained: "There are more places like this further up. The Buddhists own large parts of land here which is why it is known locally as the Buddhist valley. This valley is known to attract people interested in all things spiritual and there are a number of artists living here who are inspired by the nature surrounding them."

Spiritual or not, while walking along tracks full of scented herbs, terraces of olive and

almond trees, with majestic mountains soaring up around you and the birds singing their song, it is impossible not to feel at peace with the surroundings.

I caught myself thinking that it would be good to spend a week here with the Buddhists, but Martin told me that only men are allowed into these retreats.

He also told me that the World Health Organisation has announced that this part of Spain is the 5th best place to live on earth, due to the microclimate.

"What kind of wildlife can be found in these mountains?" I asked him.

"You can see falcons, peregrines, the colourful hoopoe and bee-eater," he told me. "If you are lucky, you may even see a pair of Golden Eagles. In May and June there are hundreds of butterflies and an abundance of beautiful wild flowers.

"There are also snakes, but only one which could be dangerous - the viper. Wild boars and goats can also be found in this area."

We didn't meet any wild boars or dangerous snakes on this walk. What we did meet, however, were some goats high up in the mountains. The closest we got to the boars were the acorns they eat. They look tasty, but after trying one, I decided the boars can keep them!

With all the talking we lost concentration and, after looking at the GPS, realised we were off track - the arrow wasn't lined up to the marked track. With a smile, Martin pointed out that it would be a better idea to keep the GPS out of my pocket.

A GPS is a good alternative when you want to walk alone - great technology but easy to use and understand. It indicates height above sea level, how long you have been walking, average speed, the length of stops and other fun and interesting information. We cheated by taking a guide along on our walk.

"I think this is the way it will go in the future," said Martin. "You don't need a map and this GPS is very precise."

We agreed that it is a very



Guide Martin Harrison Smith with Norwegian visitor Sophia

easy way to try out new walks but that next time, walking alone, we must concentrate more and talk less!

On our way back down the valley, two mountain cyclists stopped to ask Martin which route to take, and he willingly gave directions. The cool breeze had stopped and we saw a group

of rock climbers hanging on ropes on the rock face.

An air of tranquility layered the valley like a blanket, and I realised that I will probably never get closer to Nirvana!

For more info on mountain walks and other events see www.sunnysidehappenings.com



Fantastic view all the way to Calpe



A Buddhist resort in the Buddhist Valley

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"How," you have to ask, "when we are seeing so many businesses go to the wall, can CHEAP TYRES be growing so fast?"

According to the owners Timmy and Nigel the reason is quite simple. "We've taken the supermarket business model of cut-pricing mixed with top quality customer service." CHEAP TYRES take the attitude that, in these hard time, it's better to concentrate on keeping the price low but selling more. As Nigel says

"It works for the customer and it works for us. We promise to beat any genuine quote and we can sell just about any make and model of tyre that is wanted."

CHEAP TYRES offer great advice too. Here's some from Timmy, "One of the facts that many tyre retail companies try to hide, and many customers are surprised to find out, is that you often don't have to buy one of the major brands and pay top money to get one of the better quality and safest tyres. With international tyre legislation being so strong, you often find that it's the budget tyre that's actually got the higher rating but for a lot less money." Timmy continues: "We also hear all sorts of rubbish that has been told to customers from supposedly reputable dealers, who just seem to want to skim every last cent from the customer. One of the most common is that you must have your tracking (Alineación to the Spanish) done every time you change your tyres, normally at a price of 50€ to 60€. Be aware this is nonsense. You only need this done if you have hit your wheels too hard or one time too many and pushed part of the sus-

pension out of line. We reckon only about one in eight cars will need this and you can easily tell by the fact that your steering wheel is not pointing straight when your car is or your front tyres are badly worn on one edge but not the other. None of those stupid prices here either, it takes us about half an hour to sort out and if you're having one or more tyres done at the same time we only charge 25€."

If you need further proof of CHEAP TYRES' success, look at their client base. What started as an English phenomenon has now spread to include a massive Spanish following that now sends the whole family in, one after the other, and every other nationality you can think of too. I guess it just makes sense though, why pay more elsewhere.

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covering 100km of Northern Costa Blanca coastline there's every chance you'll not be too far from them. You'll find the Gandia branch by following the signs to Gandia North (Nord) (Junction 60 on the AP7) and then follow the signs for the ITV station. When you've passed the ITV take the next left and it's at the end of the road. You definitely won't miss the signs!

Before leaving Timmy and Nigel, I feel compelled to ask them if they will be content with their existing branches or can we look forward to more? They both laugh and say they have only just started - so as they say "watch this space"!

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