

# IRON AND WATER

As it winds through the municipality of Muskiz, the Barbadun River tells a remarkable story of industrial and mining heritage.

Nestled between iron-rich mountains, the river and its tributaries were the lifeblood of a significant industrial activity that flourished here from the 15th century onwards.

The output of these ironworking complexes reached the sea through the now-vanished port of Lavalle in Muskiz.

To explore this route, follow the riverbed on foot from Pobeña and venture upstream to take in the natural beauty.

Alternatively, join the Iron Mountains Greenway and explore the area by bike.

## > Iron Mountains Greenway

➔ The Iron and Water Route is a 28-kilometre route that follows the Barbadun **River upstream**. **The route starts at the mouth of the river in the municipality of Muskiz, goes to the El Bentorro neighbourhood in Galdames**, and finally joins the Iron Mountains Greenway to reach Traslaviña in Artzentales. Although the total distance is considerable, the route is of low difficulty and offers several access points. If you are coming from Muskiz, start your exploration in Pobeña or in the town centre. On the other end, you can enter the route from the Traslaviña train station located on the Iron Mountains Greenway itself. Alternatively, you can access the route from various intermediate points, such as the **El Pobal ironworks** (Muskiz), La Aceña (Galdames) or the town centre of Sopuerta.

➔ Muskiz offers easy access. From Pobeña, there is a pleasant 4-kilometre river walk (on foot or by bike) that follows the **San Julián neighbourhood** and

skirts the Petronor industrial complex. Alternatively, you can cycle (there is an extensive network of suitable paths) or take public transport (Bizkaibus, Renfe) from the centre of Muskiz. Ample parking is also available if you are driving. Specifically, there are two large car parks in Muskiz.



➔ Once in the San Juan neighbourhood, follow the **Barbadun River up the valley** for 3.5 kilometres to the impressive El Pobal ironworks, which is well worth a visit. After your visit, cross the nearby **El Pobal bridge** to the other side of the river.

A few metres from the bridge, a fork in the path offers you two options for continuing your journey: either the Iron Mountains Greenway, or the Barbadun River path, which will take you to the El Bentorro neighbourhood.

➔ If you choose the first option, prepare for a steeper climb as you join the Greenway. This section of the route overlaps with the **former Galdames mining railway**, the longest in Biscay. Inaugurated in 1876 by the British Bilbao River & Cantabrian Railway Company, it ran from La Aceña neighbourhood of Galdames, skirting the **Triano Mountains** and ending at the Benedicta loading dock in Portugalete. To reach **La Aceña**, follow the Iron Mountains Greenway for 5 kilometres. It's an ideal place to rest before continuing along the Greenway towards **Arenao and Sopuerta**.

If you decide to take the river path from El Pobal, be aware that it's not suitable for people with reduced mobility. However, it is a unique opportunity to explore a landscape that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Follow the river for around 4 kilometres and you will come across remnants of the past such as the **La Olla** and the **Valdibián iron mills**, in Galdames. From this point you can join the Iron Mountains Greenway in Arenao and head towards Sopuerta.



A defensive tower seemed the best choice to harbour this great collection – not to say the best in the world – of vintage luxury cars. The Rolls-Royces are the crown jewel of the collection, which includes every single model until 1998. This Antique and Classic Car Museum is located in an enchanting setting filled with beeches, oaks and a breeze from the near sea, and opens to visitors on Sundays and national holidays.

Loizaga Tower attests to the brutality of the side wars that ravaged the region in the Late Middle Ages. The feuding Loizaga and Achuriaga factions confronted each other with extreme violence. It's not a coincidence that these forts had a homogeneous – almost perfectly rectangular – contour that allowed for residency as well as for defensive purposes. Nestled in a strategic spot, Loizaga Tower has presided over the surrounding fields for centuries, standing out as an exceptional historic landmark in the town.





Pithead at the Cecilia mining site, Olabarrieta - Sopuerta

Sopuerta boasts a rich mining history, being one of the most important areas in Biscay during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This legacy is embodied by the **Alen and Saratxaga mining sites**, and by mining communities such as Las Barrietas. Industrialisation from the mid-19th century onwards profoundly changed the landscape, leaving behind an important heritage.

Within the extraction zone of the Saratxaga mining site, encompassing areas like La Linde, El Alisal, and Las Muñecas, stand the **Catalina mine's impressive calcination furnaces**. These are easily accessible. To get to the El Castaño neighbourhood, take the Greenway and turn right just after the caravan park. This route follows the dismantled Castro Urdiales-Traslaviña railway line to Las Barrietas. The furnaces themselves are quite picturesque, some 20 metres high, and remarkably well preserved despite having been abandoned in the 1970s when the mine became unprofitable. Built between 1955 and 1960, they are a testament to the area's industrial past. Although it is not open to the public, you can still witness the **Los Herreros Tunnel**. This monumental work of engineering, 2 kilometres long, was dug entirely with picks and shovels in the first half of the 20th century. The tunnel allowed the railway to cross the Las Muñecas pass and reach the valley of Otañes (Cantabria), where it finally connected to a magnificent cantilevered loading dock (no longer standing) that hung over the cliffs of Castro-Urdiales.

**Continuing along the Greenway, a gentle climb takes you to the Las Barrietas neighbourhood,**

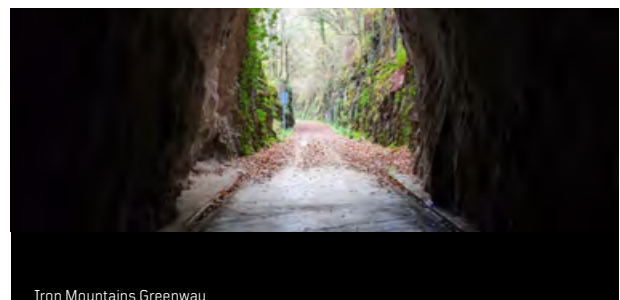
**from where the road** climbs to the **mining village of Alen**. A century ago, this village had more than 1,000 inhabitants who enjoyed a chapel, a school, an on-site general store and a Basque pelota court. Today, only the court and the chapel of San Luis remain. Remnants of the area's industrial heritage lie next to the Greenway. Two remarkably close pitheads, belonging to the María and Cecilia mines, stand like silent sentinels. The Cecilia pithead, built in 1898, is impressive in its scale. Imagine the hustle and bustle as ore descended 700 metres from the mines on Mount Alen to be loaded directly onto waiting wagons. The María pithead, of simpler design, received ore from the mine 300 metres above it via another inclined plane, after being washed with water from a nearby spring.

About 600 metres up the Kolitza River towards Artzentales are the **remains of the ancient Olabarrieta foundry**, which dates back to 1550. This well-preserved



Iron Mountains Greenway

complex offers a glimpse of the region's industrial past. Although the roof is missing and some of the stone walls have collapsed and become overgrown, the overall structure remains impressive.



Iron Mountains Greenway

Following the crystal-clear waters of the Kolitza River, the Iron Mountains Greenway winds its way towards its end in Artzentales. On this final stretch, be prepared to pass through two tunnels: one 147 metres long and the other 87 metres long.

# THE MUST-SEES

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Nestled in the heart of Biscay's mining region, alongside the Barbadun River, stands **El Pobal ironworks**. This historic hydraulic factory has been turning iron ore into a variety of tools and items since the 16th century. From ploughs and hammers to hoes and picks, El Pobal played an important role in the production of everyday objects. Built by the Salazar family, who ruled the region from their Muñatones Castle, the forge continued to operate until 1965.

Today, guided tours offer a glimpse into its fascinating past, the most spectacular of which includes a live blacksmithing demonstration every Saturday at noon.



The **mining village of Alen** boasts a rich history. Once home to some of the Basque Country's largest iron mines, Alen reached a population peak of 1,565 in 1900. Residents enjoyed amenities such as a bakery, butcher, co-operative shops, taverns, a chemist, a school and even a public army barracks. In 1892, a railway line was built to transport the iron mined in Alen and Artzentales to the port of Castro Urdiales (Cantabria).

This scenic route is now an ideal place for a peaceful stroll, with breathtaking views from peaks such as Alen and Betaio.



Perched on a hill in Artzentales, the **San Miguel neighbourhood** offers spectacular views of the valley. In the main square, next to the church of San Miguel de Linares, stands the mighty Council Oak, or **Rebollo del Concejo**. Its overhanging branches served as a natural canopy for the medieval councils of representatives from the Enkarterri valleys. Leaving the neighbourhood, a narrow street near the Basque pelota court leads through the Ribas neighbourhood. Here you'll find **San Antolín**, a unique complex of chapel and bullring that reflects the festive traditions of western Enkarterri, where bullfighting was often part of the pilgrimage.



At the top of a hill covered with txakoli vineyards in the Abellaneda district stands the old **Assembly House**. For centuries it was a symbol of the freedom of the Enkarterri region, granted by a charter authorising self-government. Today it houses the **Las Encartaciones Museum**, dedicated to preserving and sharing the region's rich history and heritage. A visit is highly recommended.



Discover the secrets of **txakoli**, the quintessential Basque wine, by visiting one of the wineries in Enkarterri. Guided tours by the producers will explain the traditional wine-making process and its history. During the visit, you'll explore the vineyards, tour the winery facilities and even indulge in a delicious txakoli tasting in a unique setting.



Have you ever dreamed of flying through the trees? **Sopuerta Abentura** makes it happen! This vast treetop adventure park, the largest in the Basque Country, offers a thrilling mix of adrenaline and fun. With eight trails ranging from one to 24 metres in height, including two beginner-friendly options, there's something for everyone. Challenge yourself with Tibetan bridges, ziplines, lianas and rope nets!

# HOW TO GET THERE

The route can be accessed from different points. If you're coming from Muskiz, you can choose to start in the Pobeña neighbourhood or in the town centre, or from the Traslaviña train station (Artzentales), via the Iron Mountains Greenway.

There are also access points from various intermediate points, such as El Pobal forge in Muskiz, La Aceña in Galdames, the El Benterro neighbourhood and the centre of Sopuerta.



By private car

## Sopuerta

[43.2744342,-3.1528667]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/n97phzyAZzm3Ycoa6>

## Muskiz

[43.320897,-3.123709]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/3dyFPaQPBBQtekZRL7>

## Galdames

[43.2728841,-3.11917]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/4cpySDPP8PP8rrse6>

## Artzentales

[43.233204,-3.197804]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/HXHLd8vbCyWyeoAr6>



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



By train

## Muskiz

[43.321026,-3.112240]:

<https://www.renfe.com/es/es/cercanias/cercanias-bilbao/horarios>

## Traslaviña

[43.233204,-3.197804]:

<https://www.renfe.com/content/dam/renfe/es/Comunicación-y-renfe-al-dia/sala-de-prensa/General/PDF-y-otros/20220703-MD-Horarios-R3f-Santander-Bilbao.pdf>



RENT A BIKE AND GO CYCLING:

Beroutes <https://beroutes.com/>

Urgebi Bikes <https://www.enkarterribike.com/>

## TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes.



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



Enjoy nature without noise or haste.



If you're driving, remember that cyclists and pedestrians have priority.



Adhere to general traffic rules.



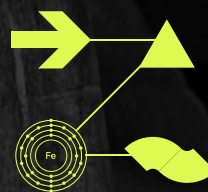
Be careful, especially in tunnels and viaducts.



If you're cycling, always wear a helmet and ride carefully on sections shared with vehicles.

LEARN MORE AT: [www.visitenkarterri.com](http://www.visitenkarterri.com)

JATORRIA; MENDIA,  
BURDINA ETA ITSASOA  
EL ORIGEN; MONTAÑA,  
HIERRO Y MAR



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