



The Large Dolmen of the Mezio

(Middle to Late Neolithic, 4th or 3rd century B.C.)

The large dolmen (from low Breton to| = table and men = stone) of the Mezio is a collective funerary monument from the megalithic age (from Greek mega = large and lithos = stone), consisting of a polygonal chamber with seven erect, symmetric supports. A top (or table), the largest slab, rests on the supports. The monument is entered via a corridor facing east, formed by smaller supports also topped by small slabs which have since disappeared. After use, the monument was covered with a protective tumulus formed of earth and small rocks, forming a burial mound. This classical corridor dolmen was never excavated scientifically.

Successive burials, made easier by the corridor entrance, were in the chamber and sometimes in the entrance, normally accompanied by offerings of small ceramic vases or other ritual-type objects.

This Dolmen is one of the most interesting prehistoric monuments within the Peneda-Gerês National Park and is one of the best known of the Mezio necropolis.

Detailed Hike Information

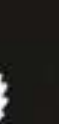
Name:	"Mezio Interpretative Trail"
Sponsor:	Peneda-Gerês National Park
Location:	Arcos de Valdevez District
Type of Hike:	Short
Scope of Hike:	Archaeology and Forests
Total Distance:	About 1.2 miles (2 km)
Length of Hike:	About 1 hour
Difficulty:	Easy
Minimum/Maximum Altitude:	2100 ft (640 m) / 2165 ft (660 m)



Peneda-Gerês National Park



Instituto da Conservação da Natureza



Ministério das Cidades,
Ordenamento do
Território e Ambiente

published by ICN/PNPG, text by Cristina Regalo, José Ginja, Henrique Regalo
photography by António Jorge Barros graphical design by Sublinharte, Lda maps by Ana Fontes
translated by TradExpert - Traduções, Lda. printing by Inova-Artes Gráficas number printed 2000 date May 2003

Parque Nacional
da Peneda-Gerês

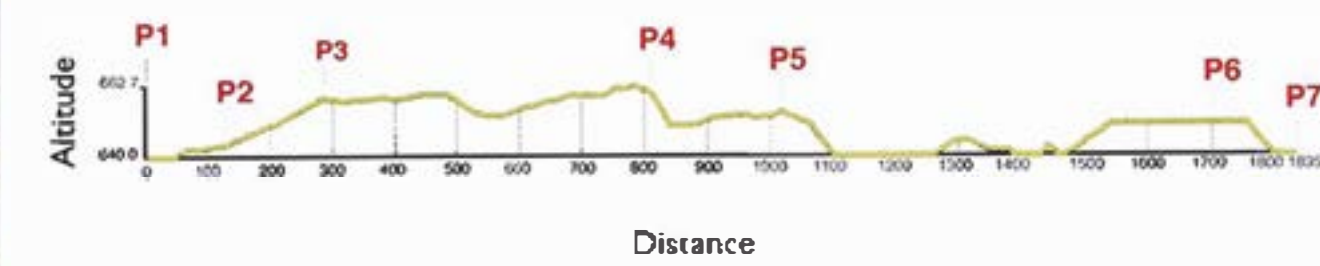


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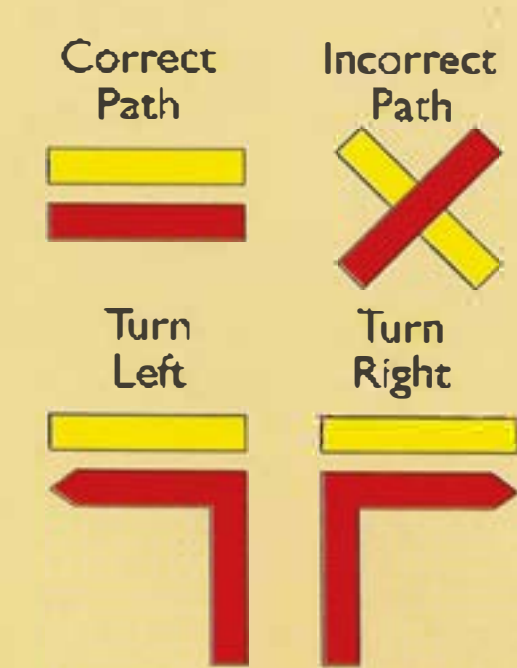
MEZIO INTERPRETATIVE TRAIL

pedestrian trail

Topographical Profile
Distance Scale is 1:5



Start: GPS 41° 53' 15" N; 8° 18' 51" W



PRECAUTIONS:

- Follow posted signs. Do not leave the marked path.
- Avoid making noise.
- Do not leave any trash behind. Carry it to a trash collection point.
- Do not start fires.
- Leave the wilderness the way you found it. Do not collect plants, animals or rocks. Take photographs, they will be an excellent souvenir.
- Dress for comfort. Use appropriate clothing and shoes.

Mezio Interpretive Trail



Point 1
Mezio

The hike begins next to a group of houses belonging to the Peneda-Gerês National Park, at an altitude of 2100 ft. The houses are the former facilities of the Forestry Service which was, during the Salazar regime, responsible for the management of open land and plantation of most of the forest we see in this part of the Park. Note the architecture of that era, patent in the houses and buildings composing the forestry nurseries, maintained here to support forestry activities.

Point 2
First Burial Mound

Leaving from the information panel and following the signs, walk around the two houses on your right and, behind the second house, you will see a small raise in the ground level. It is a burial mound (a small, artificial hill made of earth and small stones that cover a prehistoric funerary monument called a dolmen) and which forms part of the Mezio necropolis (a group of tombs).

Point 3
Second Burial Mound

Follow the paved road (which marks the edge of the National Park) for about 220 yards and you will see another burial mound on your left at an altitude of 2150 ft. This monument is partially excavated and you can see the construction details of the dolmen, with the supports resting against each other and bearing the weight of the large top slabs. Note the geographical orientation of the access corridor, which faces East. This feature is common to all the dolmens in this set. These monuments attest to human occupation of this territory for approximately five thousand years.

Point 4
Corral / Pasture

Cross the road and enter the Port-Orford-cedar (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) forest. Note the absence of vegetation on the ground and the density of the overhead canopy. The trees are coniferous and they provide good shade. The absence of grasses and bushes in this area is due to the lack of light so necessary to the survival of plants. Continue following the markers, now below the canopy of red oaks (*Quercus rubra*) or birches (*Betula sp.*). Now you can see a covering of dead leaves that were not present in the previous area, and an understory of shrubs and grasses begins to appear. Recall that we are under deciduous trees that loose their leaves during part of the year, allowing more light through. When you arrive at the cart path, turn left and follow the path. Pass through a stand of pine trees and soon thereafter you will see a corral with a stone wall, next to an irrigation channel, at an altitude of 2165 ft. Encircled by birch and oak trees, it contains better quality soil watered by the water of the stream, allowing sowing of seed and thus increasing the quantity and quality of pasture for the cattle.



Point 5
Mosqueiros Summer Pasture



Follow the water-course and cross the Mosqueiros river. Now the most noticeable trees are the chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), but soon the birch and European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) will dominate again. Cross another water-course and you will see the Mosqueiros summer pasture, of which only ruins of walls and dwellings with false battlements remain. This was a summer pasture for cattle that formed part of the extensive herder support system.

Point 6
Outlook Point



Cross the level area under the birch trees until you reach the water-course. Cross it and follow the narrow path, pass a stand of Port-Orford-cedar and then a forest of pine trees composed mostly of the scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). Further along, turn left, walk 110 yards and you will be on an outcropping of granite which will provide a partial view of the Lima river and surrounding area. This altitude has a greater variety of trees, with holly trees (*Ilex aquifolium*) and strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*) along with oak, birch and pine trees.

Point 7
Mezio

Descend through the maritime pine trees and note the gnawed pinecones on the ground proclaiming the playful presence of squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Domestic animals are often present in the corrals delimited by a hedge. Some of these animals are native races, such as the barrosa and cachena cows, the garrano horse, the bravia goat, and the bordaleira sheep from Entre-Douro e Minho.



Geology and Geomorphology



Geological and geomorphological aspects characteristic of this region can be seen all along this trail. The strong influence of atmospheric agents is present here and they can be seen through their effects, namely in the granite on the surface. This granite has been altered (kaolinized) and deformed considerably, with well aligned (NW–SE) feldspar megacrystals. This is a medium-grade porphyritic granite with two micas. While enjoying this beautiful landscape we can observe how the people here have taken advantage of the geological riches by using this granite. The fact that the granite here has a slab-like separation contributed to its use, through the centuries, in the construction of dolmens, corrals, homes and walls.



Suggestions

In order to see the animals, we recommend that you walk quietly, without speaking, and look for signs such as feces, tracks, gnawed pinecones, marks left by animals resting, and holes dug up by the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*). Use your binoculars and camera. Consult field guides to identify trees, birds and other animals. Visit the remaining burial mounds of the Mezio megalithic group and the cave drawings in Gião. The village of Soajo is located 3 miles away and deserves a long visit.