

watched his own son executed by the Moors, rather than surrender to them. One would like to know rather more about this great captain, who seems to have been of the same calibre as La Vallette of Malta or Colonel Moscardo of the Alcazar during the Civil War.

Tarifa is full of tiny narrow streets, *culs-de-sac* and delightful squares, like the one on the southern battlements where, beneath waving palms there are beds of violets and an entrancing little fountain emerging from the mouth of a large blue-glazed frog. Glancing over the wall down towards the beach, that blatantly serves as the rubbish tip, one will likely see the bronze leaves of the Castor-Oil plant, *Ricinus communis*, and a murderously spined mimosa, *Acacia farnesiana*, laden with sweetly scented fluffy yellow flowers but it is best left alone.

The event of the year is, naturally, the *feria* in late September which has an unusual religious significance with pageantry that cannot have changed in centuries. For most of the week the *feria* proceeds in much the same fashion as elsewhere; an open space outside the walls on the western side serving as the centre of revelry.

The highlight is undoubtedly the impressive procession that takes place on the Sunday evening at the start of the *feria*. This is centred round the Local Patron Saint, *Nuestra Senora de la Luz*, who is escorted by bands, the local military and some four hundred horsemen from her sanctuary several miles away to the main church of Tarifa. The statue of Our Lady, or *paso* as it is called, is a carved lifesize figure in the likeness of the Virgin gorgeously arranged in velvet robes and jewels. With no disrespect meant, she is no lightweight; thus her progress is inordinately slow, being punctuated by frequent halts to give her thirty bearers time to recover their strength. The procession has many affinities with the religious pilgrimages that were once extremely common in this part of Spain and are now reduced to but a few like the merry *rocio* of Sevilla or that to the incredible mountain shrine of the *Virgen de la Cabeza* in the Sierra Morena near Córdoba.

The horsemen, mostly local farmers and landowners, ride in distinctive groups, some of whom have clearly ridden considerable distances to be there. They are dressed in a style that suggests a South American influence; namely, short tight fitting jackets, soft leather boots and wide brimmed Cordoban hats and are splendidly mounted; in fact it would be difficult to find a finer gathering of horses anywhere. For a grandstand view of this fascinating parade it is necessary to select a vantage point near the church in plenty of time and then to while away the waiting with the rest of the populace in a nearby bar. Presently there is the far off sound of trumpet and drum which gradually grows nearer and then round the corner appear the dignified parade marshals, mounted on great black chargers, followed by church and local dignitaries and, finally, the *paso*

must once have been German E-boats. Several gaily painted fishing boats betoken a flourishing fishing industry and it is usual to see a number of boats congregated a mile or so offshore where they intercept the shoals of migrating tuna.

From Tarifa the coastal road descends to almost sea level, then runs parallel to a long sandy beach, before turning inland after a few miles. A great battle was fought here between the Moors and Christendom and there was once a Roman city too, but this has been lost amongst the invading sands and the ruined arch of a bridge standing in a small estuary is all that remains. A halt near this bridge is not a bad idea because blue sheets of *Gynandiris sisyrrinchium* are prolific on the verges during March and, on grassy slopes, we found a deep scarlet pea rejoicing with the horrific title of *Tetragonolobus purpureus* (the generic name refers to the four winged seed pod) whilst, on the other side of the road, sandy grass covered mounds were carpeted with the deep violet goblets of *Romulea clusiana*.

During August the stony strand behind the seashore is covered with innumerable white umbels of the Sea Daffodil, *Pancratium maritimum*, which, alas, I have never flowered in my Devonshire garden, although it looks well enough. Despite the time of year, there is plenty of moisture beneath the sand where the very large bulbs may be found some eighteen inches down.

PUNTA PALOMA AND DUNE FLORA

When the road from Tarifa starts to turn inland, two side roads, not far apart, will be noticed on the left. The first leads to Punta Paloma at the foot of huge dunes. Here my family have spent many happy weekends camped beside the road amongst the pines; *but one needs to be circumspect since there is a military area nearby*. The long strand of gleaming white beaches are, without question, the finest in the south of Spain; the water is warm and clear and, most important of all, they are swept clean by the winter gales in no uncertain fashion. Wind is, in fact, their one disadvantage and, if there is a *levanter* cloud on the Rock, or nearby hills, they are untenable. There is a fine flora during the spring months. In March thickets of *Lygos (Retama) monosperma* are laden with scented white flowers and are followed by gay annuals like the purple candytuft, *Iberis linifolia*. Bee-eaters, which nest in this stretch, are very common and give a coruscating display while darting in and out of the pines or perched on the telephone wire.

Between May and June there is truly the most vivid show of blue I have ever seen; this is provided by a pimpernel, *Anagallis monelli* ssp. *linifolia*, that, in company with a small yellow *Lotus*, covers big areas with their tangled mats. The flowers, almost the size of primroses, are of an extraordinary intensity and have the usual habit of this genus of partly closing when the sun is obscured. A

BOLONIA AND ROMAN RUINS

Returning to the main road again and travelling north, there are some fields where *Gladiolus italicus* (*G. segetum*) and large specimens of *Arum italicum* may be seen. Then comes the rather inconspicuous second side road on the left. This leads to Bolonia which is a place well worth a visit. *Iris xiphium* (the common form) is very common about here and a crimson Pheasant's Eye, *Adonis aestivalis*, grows in the fields on the way down to the bay. In its heyday, some two thousand years ago, Bolonia was a thriving Roman town and small port but now the harbour is silted up and of the extensive ruins, largely covered by drifting sand, only the hypocaust of the single excavated building, portions of the ramparts and a theatre are visible above ground. I have been unable to discover anything concerning its decline and fall into oblivion but suspect that the hostility of the Visigoths in the hinterland made further occupation impossible, once the imperial power could no longer provide succour. Due to its remoteness there has been only local pillage of building materials so that, beneath the mantle of sand, the city survives largely intact but there are so many other Roman remains in Spain that it will be time before further excavations are started here.

Artefacts and coins are often turned up by the local ploughs and then offered for sale to casual visitors. There is a superb sandy beach and at the end of it a line of low cliffs which have been much cut into by the Bolonians for stone and indeed, there are still plenty of huge half dressed slabs remaining.

Our track after passing through the ruins goes on for about three miles and stops at a military camp at the end of a promontory. By the roadside will be seen yet more green lizards sunning themselves on the stones and probably, the rare solanaceous annual, *Triguera ambrosiaca*. This is a very interesting species bearing sumptuous purple flowers with a deep golden eye and it is most surprising that it has never been introduced to our gardens.

In the vicinity of the military camp there is much virgin ground and on it grow many fine plants. Bulbous species like *Leucojum trichophyllum* are well represented; so is the *Cistus* family and, finally, a real rarity, *Viola arborescens*, a small twiggy shrub with typical violet flowers which is more remarkable than beautiful. I have always considered Bolonia to be the western limit for a day trip from Gibraltar, although Cape Trafalgar can be reached in three hours.

I will now say something about the country eastwards of Gibraltar, towards Marbella and the *Costa del Sol*.

SAN ROQUE EASTWARDS

From San Roque the highway runs through undulating country where there is a tremendous variety of plants throughout the season, many of them already discussed and including the common myrtle, *Myrtus communis*. Some rocky dry slopes in one place are turned a deep red in April by that splendid heath, *Erica umbellata*—would that it would do the same in England—and in moist *terra rossa* there were tiny delicate spikes of *Ornithogalum unifolium* bearing sparkling white flowers. At Sotogrande there is a huge rebuilding scheme which

and the coastal strip irrigated by its waters, is extremely fertile as witnessed by groves of citrus and fields of rice, maize, groundnuts and cotton, where such exotics as the Bermuda Buttercup, *Oxalis pes-caprae*, and a white Angel's Trumpet, *Datura metel*, may also be found growing as weeds.

From San Diego onwards there are countless small beaches which are ideal for bathing and picnics. Behind them stony bluffs are clad in continuous thickets of the Gum Cistus, *C. ladanifer* which are a sight in April laden with countless floppy white blooms (but no purple blotch) like so many pocket handkerchiefs. During the intense heat of the summer the leaves curl slightly and exude an unforgettable fragrance and, in olden times, the gum *ladanum* was distilled from them.

Nearer the beach, purplish-red *Cistus crispus* and the yellow discs of *Odontospermum maritimum* are splendid; so too are the twisted lilac mats of the Sea Lavender, *Limonium sinuatum*, and such elegant pricklies as the blue Cardoon and a little golden thistle, *Pallenis spinosa*.

MANILVA

At San Luis de Sabinillas one can turn off up the hill to the charming village of Manilva, whose speciality is a sweet wine similar to a red *málaga* which is pressed from grapes gathered from local vineyards. From Manilva one can either walk or hire a donkey to visit the ancient sulphur baths some three miles up the valley below the village. Although now disused and forgotten, these baths were well known sixty years ago and frequented by visitors from all over Europe. In earlier times both Moors and Romans patronised them and it is even recorded that the Emperor Trajan was cured of a scrofula. In any case, whatever the therapeutic properties of the waters, their flavour is so unpleasant that the mere act of drinking them must be psychologically beneficial.

It is a pleasant walk and the only place where I have found *Mandragora autumnalis*, whose tight clusters of amber fruit in December have an evil quality about them. Just before the baths there becomes visible a most spectacular gorge cutting clean through the coastal range of hills but the cliffs and ledges are rather disappointingly devoid of anything except *Iris foetidissima* with stinking blue flowers and *Acanthus mollis*, also common on the Rock. The sulphur waters emerge from an opening in the hillside at a constant temperature of 75 degrees giving off their characteristic smell of bad eggs and then tumble into the river. Inside the opening there is a domed vault of Moorish construction, judging by the appearance of the bricks and beneath is a large pool of welling waters into which one can plunge and enjoy a splash.

CASARES

A mile after San Luis one can turn off into the foothills of the Sierra Bermeja where the village of Casares lies perched upon a steep detached hillock that overlooks a precipice. The road is distinctly rough but Casares is an intriguing spot, worth seeing for its narrow streets and the ruins of the old fort above. Inside its walls is the cemetery which, as is the local custom, consists of a long

ESTEPONA

The next port of call is the pleasant little town of Estepona, now in the throes of development that must soon remove much of its charm. There is a thriving fishing industry and a spacious harbour, where a walk round and look at the boatyards, can be informative. Methods of construction have changed very little from those in use centuries ago and result in an exceedingly stout vessel that lasts many years and which is little different from the wide beamed Phœnician craft with tall stem and stern posts. Fishing takes place almost entirely at night and generally on the banks some five or more miles offshore. Each boat is fitted with powerful acetylene lamps that attract the fish into the nets and, for those who relish their seafood, they can do no better than pay a call on the Buenavista Hotel.

BENAHAVIS

After Estepona one passes through richly cultivated country all the way to Guadalmina where there is a turning off to Benahavis. This is a very beautiful district and, starting at Benahavis, there is an exciting walk along the riverside into the heart of the mountains and then up rough tracks over the pine covered divide into the valley of the Rio Genal. Two days are required for this journey, spending the night at Gaucin and a pair of stout boots are essential.

From Guadalmina, for the first mile or so, the land is well cultivated with big stands of bananas and, in season, fine crops of melons and egg fruit, *Solanum melongena* var. *esculentum*. Then one passes over an arid ridge with an occasional bush of *Genista umbellata*. There is a sharp descent to a small farmhouse, its front a tangled mass of vines and pelargoniums, standing in an orchard of figs which *Chrysanthemum segetum* turns into a cloth of gold in springtime. A few hundred yards beyond, there is a plantation of Blue Gums where I often camped and, in the early mornings, lay entranced by the strange calls of the Golden Orioles above. Road and river now enter a gorge at whose foot lies a deep pool, ideal for swimming, and a big Carob tree nearby provides shade for picnic meals and the *siesta*. The Carob, or *Ceratonia siliqua*, is an interesting monotypic genus of very ancient lineage as suggested by the absence of any near relations. Like the Judas Tree, the small green flowers are produced anywhere along branches and trunk and these develop into long beans which are gathered and used for cattle food. The oleanders here are a really wonderful sight in May, growing along the banks of the streams or anywhere where there is moisture and many people think that some of my photographs of them are rhododendrons. Many beautiful ferns, including the Maidenhair, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, *Blechnum* and *Cystopteris* species, grow out of clefts in the damp walls of the gorge, so does *Trachelium caeruleum* with panicles of tiny blue flowers and, higher up in less moist positions, a few plants of blue *Campanula velutina* and *Lapiedra martinezii* will be found.

At the top of the gorge is the finest natural swimming pool I have ever seen; some forty feet across and fifteen deep, it has been slowly carved out of pure marble by the tumbling waters leaving smooth slabs for sunbathing, a variety of

CHAPTER III

CADIZ, SEVILLA AND JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

Vejer de la Frontera—Cabo Trafalgar—Cádiz—Sevilla—Jerez de la Frontera—Arcos de la Frontera—Medina-Sidonia.

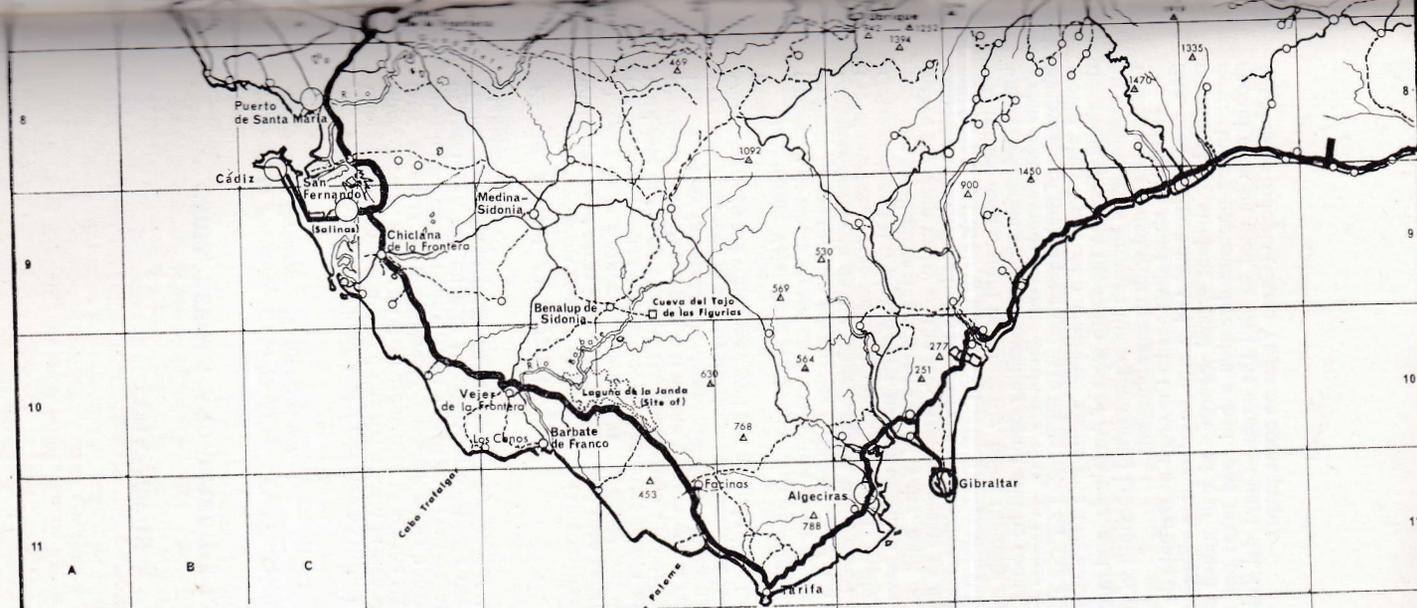
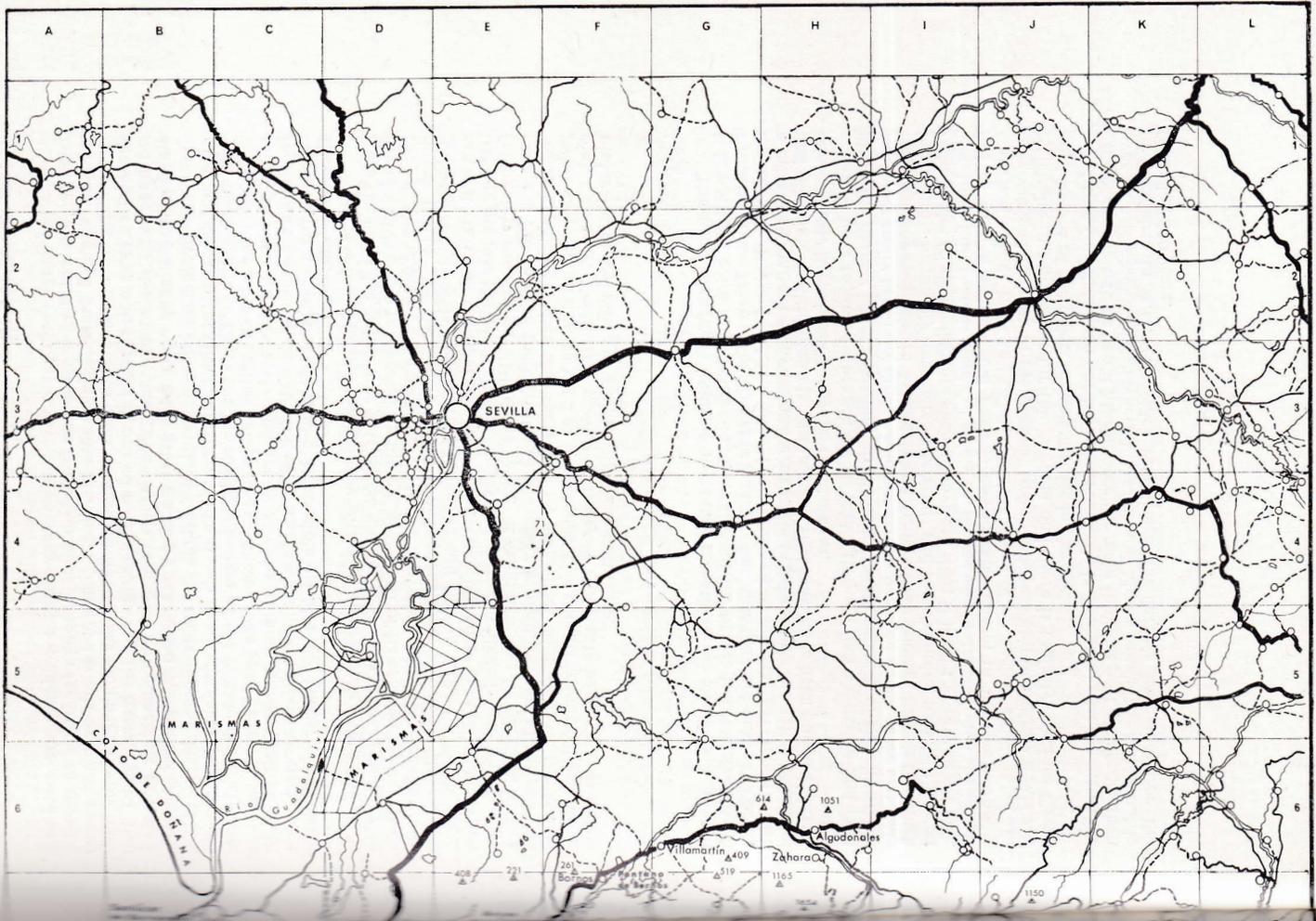
These beautiful cities of Andalucía may be rushed through in two days from Gibraltar but this would be doing them scant justice when they have so much to offer. Really, five or six days are needed to see the sights and in Sevilla particularly, to enjoy her graciousness. Excellent guide books and pens far superior to mine have extolled their virtues; I shall do no more than record a few impressions of them. In this chapter I shall describe briefly the journey up the coast to Cádiz, then inland to Sevilla returning by way of Jerez de la Frontera and Medina-Sidonia.

VEJER DE LA FRONTERA

We have already seen something of the coastline as far as Punta Paloma where the road turns inland to Facinas and then skirts the Laguna de la Janda to Vejer de la Frontera. During the extremely wet winters of 1962 and 1963 the Laguna formed a continuous lake some fifteen miles long and it was not until late in the spring that the floodwaters subsided and the ground could be ploughed up. Once upon a time the Laguna was a famous bird sanctuary and indeed, many interesting birds are still found there but the lake has now been very much reduced in size by drainage schemes; the latest, a giant dyke financed with American aid which may well put an end to the Laguna altogether—such is progress.

Just before Vejer there is a long stretch of road running through sandy pine covered flats where several choice treasures may be found with many other plants. In these I class the two *Iris* species *I. filifolia* and *I. xiphium* var. *taitii*, *Leucojum trichophyllum*, with dainty white hanging bells, surely the most beautiful of all the Snowflakes (see cover photograph) and, lastly, a compact little blue *Campanula* and tiny pink *Sedum*, neither of which have been identified.

The small glistening white town of Vejer, built on the crest of a steep hill above the deep valley of the Rio Barbate, seems to float above the heat haze.

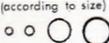


KEY TO SYMBOLS

Roads



Towns (according to size)



Rivers



Mountains (height in metres)



Map drawn by A.P. Hamilton © 1969

Kilometres



Miles



CABO TRAFALGAR

Cabo (Cape) Trafalgar is seven miles away along a graded gravel road and is a long but worthwhile excursion from Gibraltar; though far better to spend a weekend camped near the lighthouse or village. The road winds over and round low rolling hills golden with corn or stubble during the summer months and, more often than not, reaping is carried out by scythe and the harvest piled high on huge carts drawn by oxen. Fine beasts too, with soft appealing eyes and standing so patiently bearing the great wooden yoke lashed across their horns.

Ornithogalum arabicum grows fairly freely in the fields near the coast and is a most handsome plant with stout stems and a dozen or so glistening white flowers with black centres. There are big roadside hedges of the Prickly Pear, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, near the straggling village and the showy wide open yellow flowers are really very beautiful in early summer. Later the bulbous purple fruit are sold locally and are just palatable, but woe betide anyone who fails to peel them carefully for a mouthful of the almost invisible prickles will take weeks to work themselves out.

The Cape is an isolated promontory with a lighthouse built only a few yards from the cliff edge, where our English Samphire, *Crithmum maritimum*, may be found and is easily recognised by the pungent smell of its crushed leaves. Both the yellow and pink *Carpobrotus* have been successfully used to stabilise the sandy dunes round the lighthouse and in little dells Sea Daffodils, *Pancratium maritimum*, and blue pimpernels (*Anagallis*) add further beauty. The beaches are first class and the sand of a very fine texture but some care is needed when bathing because the beach shelves steeply and there is a powerful current, though fortunately running parallel to the shore. Refreshment can be obtained at Los Caños, a mile east of the Cape and the marshy ground, inshore of the road, is worth exploring. Here and there was an annual St. John's Wort, *Hypericum pubescens*, and, almost as vivid as herbaceous *Phlox*, some wonderful groups of pink Centaury, *Centaureum erythraea*; many of the plants being over two feet and a liberal sprinkling of albino forms amongst them.

CADIZ

There has been much improvement made recently to the Cádiz road, so that it is not long before one is crossing over the narrow bridge into Chiclana de la Frontera, once famous for its gypsy quarter, but now they are gradually being assimilated. Beyond Chiclana there is a wilderness of salt marshes (*salinas*) with a criss-cross pattern of dykes and evaporating tanks where the salt is raked up and piled into conical mounds; an industry that must have been pursued almost continuously here since the days of the Romans.

It is little trouble to branch off to Cádiz through San Fernando and then along the narrow isthmus leading up to the imposing gateway of the city which has many walls to be seen. Life appears to be taken rather more seriously

SEVILLA

By now time will be short and it is better to leave Jerez for the return journey and press on along the excellent road to Sevilla which can be reached comfortably in under two hours. The country is mostly flat and so highly cultivated that, perhaps with the exception of an occasional flash of blue in February betraying *Iris planifolia*, there is absolutely nothing worth looking for.

The approach to Sevilla along wide boulevards and through parks is perfectly appropriate to a city of such fame and grace. Here in the Paseo de Las Delicias is the focal point of the glorious *feria* where, for night after night, the great crowds, wondrously dressed, gather to give themselves up for parading, dancing and feasting. May I implore readers to learn all they can about Sevilla before their arrival; thus primed they will enjoy their visit far more. Personally, I have found nothing remotely so informative as the wonderfully descriptive chapter on Andalucía in Sacheverell Sitwell's *Spain*. Here I will leave Sevilla for, alas, my pen cannot do her full justice, and merely leave you with a few impressions that should arouse an anticipatory glow of pleasures to come. For they alone, the *feria* and Holy Week should be experienced, for there is nothing else in the world like them. Architecturally, there is extreme satisfaction to be felt in the contrasting styles, exemplified by the sombre gothic magnificence of the vast cathedral and the delicate Moorish masterpieces like the Giralda tower and the Alcázar with its subtle elegance and high walled gardens. Those who like to imbibe atmosphere and see something of their fellows should seat themselves one evening and sip sherry in the narrow Calle de las Sierpes and watch the world go by. Finally, for the romantic, there is the enchanting quarter of Santa Cruz with a thousand winding alleys, tiny squares and mysterious cool patios overflowing with palms and potted plants, hidden away behind grilled windows and ornate mahogany portals; these carrying shining brass door knockers often in the likeness of a clenched fist.

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

And so back to Jerez; the birthplace of sherry. This is a pleasant, prosperous town with fine renaissance buildings and numerous old churches. Stay if you can at the Los Cignes; a hotel with real old world charm. Jerez de la Frontera seems first to have been recorded in history as a Phoenician trading station established about 100 B.C. under the name of SHERA. This later was romanised to Seritium and, after the Moors invaded Spain, reverted to Scheris which is the undoubted origin of our English name "Sherry". From this name the Spanish form of Xeres was derived—the old Spanish X pronounced as SH and later, the modern form of Jerez. It is a remarkable fact that there are hardly any vineyards in the immediate vicinity of Jerez and it is necessary to drive to Sanlúcar de Barrameda and its grim hexagonal castle frowning down on the Rio Guadalquivir to see them. Across the river lie Las Marismas, the great salt marshlands of the delta and Coto de Doñana and, in spite of gradual reclamations, still the haunt of rare wildfowl and animals like the Spanish Lynx. The whole region has a savour of

dry in summer, yet it retains moisture deep down. This environment and the *solera* system gives sherry its unique flavour. The vines are planted in squares, some 2,000 plants to the acre which, on an *albariza* soil, will produce about 500 gallons of wine and, on other classes, rather more of a lesser quality. Each plant is so pruned to grow four low growing branches which are allowed to fruit in pairs on alternate years. Several varieties of grape are grown grafted on to American roots as a protection against the gall-forming aphid, *Phylloxera vitifoliae*, to which they are less susceptible. This dreaded pest is capable of devastating whole vineyards unless strictly controlled.

A visit to one of the famous *bodegas* is one of the most pleasurable rituals imaginable and one very soon appreciates all the care and skill that go into making one of the great wines of the world. The intricate processes of pressing, fermentation, maturation and blending, known as the *solera* system, are most carefully explained and one is left with nothing but admiration for the incredible patience shown and the rigid adherence to principles which ensure that quality comes first.

After walking through the last great *solera* and, perhaps, allowing oneself the delightful calculation of how long it would take to drink its contents, one is led away to a palatial hall where samples are most generously provided. More than once after one of these sessions I must admit to pursuing a distinctively wavering course down to Cape Trafalgar, there to sleep off the soporific effects on the golden sands. It is a fool indeed who does not avail himself of the chance to purchase a few bottles of the precious liquid at bargain prices.

Naturally Jerez has a splendid *feria* but the most important event in the local calendar is the *Fiesta de la Vendimia*—Feast of the Vintage—which takes place in early September. Each year a different country is honoured by being invited to provide a "Queen" and is represented by both her diplomatic corps and the trade.

The culminating moment of the ceremony takes place when carts containing baskets of Palamino grapes, drawn by black oxen, arrive at the front of the Collegiate Church and young girls carry the grapes up to a raised platform where a team of four vineyard workers begin to tread the grapes. This is done in a great square trough of wood, called a *lagar*. The four wear shorts and special leather pressing shoes and begin their dance so that the first juice starts to run at midday; this is the signal for the start of the *Fiesta*. The vintage is now blessed and a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving sung; all the church bells commence pealing and hundreds of carrier pigeons are released to announce the birth of yet another sherry wine.

Should the *Costa del Sol* be next on the calling list, the alternative route through Ronda might be considered although, in wintertime, the road may be damaged during the heavy rains as indeed happened on one occasion when I found that a quarter of a mile of the road had slid down the hillside near Zahara.

ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA

The first night of Arcos de la Frontera, set high up on its golden cliffs above

MEDINA-SIDONIA

From Jerez de la Frontera the direct route to Gibraltar runs across a mixture of arid and well tilled land to the old town of Medina-Sidonia and both, *Iris planifolia* and *Narcissus jonquilla* may be found flowering in February on the verges. On the outskirts of Jerez one will be brought to a sharp halt by the magnificent Carthusian monastery which was, until very recently, in a sadly neglected state but is fortunately now being restored to its former glories. It would be nice to think too that the famous Zurburan paintings of priests and prelates that once hung there will be returned. Approaching through a small avenue of palms one is confronted by a majestic gateway that could almost be one of those triumphal arches so beloved of the Romans. It is ornamented with fluted pillars, coats of arms and religious figures set into niches; the whole imaginatively worked in the same golden stone. Inside, against the walls of the great courtyard, there are such fine shrubs as two jasmine species, *Jasminum revolutum* and *J. polyanthum*—the latter deliciously fragrant and the double yellow Banksian Rose, all of which are commonly grown in this part of Spain.

Some fifty yards away is the Cartuja, a noble chapel surrounded by enormous cloisters built, I understand, in the "Apulian" style that is, in two storeys of eight pillars stoutly buttressed and surmounted by innumerable carvings. The whole building creates an impression of mellow timelessness and a peep through the wicket gate into the Gothic interior showed that the artists, carvers and masons were carrying out their work of renovation with exactitude and loving care.

Medina-Sidonia lies beneath the crest of a conspicuous hill from which there is a commanding view of the surrounding countryside and perhaps, in 1588, the famous Duke gazed out long and anxiously at his Armada squadrons anchored in the gleaming roadstead off Cádiz. Since those times the town seems to have gone into slow decline; there is an air of languor and decay epitomised by the crumbling walls and weed covered façade of two fine churches built on steep slopes above half-ruined dirty streets.

After Medina there is nought but wide *mesa* and low hills and only an occasional big ranch (*cortijo*) or bull farm to show that there are any human beings about. A few miles before reaching Alcalá de los Gazules, a great rock may be seen standing in isolated grandeur in the middle distance and a walk here makes a pleasant afternoon in wintertime when one will see plenty of *Narcissus viridiflorus*. I would think that this must be the northern limit of its foothold in Spain.

CHAPTER IV

THE SERRANIA DE RONDA

The Coast Road to Ronda—Ronda—Pantano del Conde de Guadalhorce—Peñarrubia—Cueva de la Pileta and Montejaque—Grazalema—Zahara—Ubrique—Ronda to Gibraltar—Gaucin.

THE COAST ROAD TO RONDA

The Serrania de Ronda cover almost a thousand square miles of rugged mountain terrain and are intersected by deep valleys. They rise to almost 7,000 feet and are formed of a hard limestone which is extremely resistant to weathering. So rugged is the area that it is sparsely inhabited. There are very few roads and, as I have mentioned before, they are very liable to closure through flood or subsidence during periods of heavy rainfall in winter. It is certainly possible to visit Ronda in a day from Gibraltar, although undesirable due to the distance and, for the purpose of seeing as much as possible of the savage Andalusian scenery, it is advisable to travel by both the inland and coastal routes. Let us suppose that in early April we are going by way of the coast where, at San Pedro de Alcántara, we branch off inland and the long climb up and over the Sierra Palmitera begins. For the first few miles of foothills there are patches of white *Cistus salvifolius* and *Lavandula stoechas* with its striking purple bracts and, here and there, a violet candytuft, *Iberis pruitii*, and a white or yellow flax, *Linum suffruticosum*, growing amongst them. Through some trees on the left a mansion, surrounded by palms, arouses envy of the owner of such a perfectly chosen position. Above this point there is a thick cork forest containing typical Lusitanian shrubs like *Viburnum tinus*, *Erica arborea* and *Cistus populifolius*. In clearings made by charcoal burners some of the smaller plants are given a chance to reveal themselves. Here may be found *Coronilla juncea*, covered with scented yellow pea flowers; a noble mullein, *Verbascum boerhaviai*; two tiny annuals, blue *Convolvulus undulatus* and *Tolpis barbata* (like a dusky *Coreopsis*) and violet spikes of *Anarrhinum laxiflorum*. The next twenty miles are some of the most sinuous I have ever driven over; a seemingly unending series of precipitous wooded ridges are slowly traversed until a limestone formation at the top of the watershed is reached. *Some of the hairpin bends are blind and need to be taken cautiously.* More than one car has gone over and it is a long way down! About halfway there are a few safe parking places from where there are glorious views of the nearby hills and a great panorama southward that takes in Gibraltar and

laciniata, a shrubby foxglove with spikes of rusty red flowers. I have never seen the latter species grown in England, although it should be hardy as it is found further north and I have seen it snow covered in the Sierra Nevada. Were it proved to be hardy and equally floriferous in British conditions, it would be a real acquisition. Earlier in the year several species of *Colchicum*, *Crocus* and *Romulea* may be found in flower underneath the pines.

The geological transition to limestone is an abrupt one and, clearly, there must have been some spectacular play between conflicting forces during the period of formation. Despite its hardness the limestone, which has been turned to marble in some places, is much fissured and small colonies of plants flourish in them. The most surprising of these is *Narcissus papyraceus*, the scented paper-white daffodil. A pendulous rock plant with pink flowers is *Putoria calabrica*, and really quite attractive too but the smell is very unpleasant, as its name implies. After a few miles a barren rocky plateau is reached where the car can be left by the Camineros house, if one wishes to ascend Torrecilla (1919 m), the highest point of the Sierra de las Nieves. It is actually possible to get a little nearer by driving off on a poor side track to a big ranch (*cortijo*) but this is inadvisable, unless it is dry. I have only climbed Torrecilla once and that was in June when it was far too hot. It then took six hours and only two of us staggered up the final scree to the shattered summit. There was little of interest here beyond juniper scrub (*Juniperus sabina*) and, even lower down, only a few bushes of *Daphne laureola* var. *latifolia* and a hellebore, *Helleborus foetidus*, with drooping sprays of bell-shaped stinking yellow flowers.

It is rather more sensible to start from the Camineros house and then walk along parallel to and below the ridge of the Cerro Abanta, until the forest of *Abies pinsapo* appears on the north side of the mountain above the *Cortijo*. It is pleasing to be able to record that the trees are regenerating well naturally. On the way groups of *Paeonia broteroi* will be seen. This flowers in May in colour shades between wine red and rose and is a lovely species which does well in our Devon garden. In August the furry seed pods open up displaying their scarlet interiors and rows of shining black seeds and we have used them successfully as decorations. Something like *Cistus ladanifer* grows in the glades, possibly *C. incanus*, and in and around oak scrub we have found the yellow daisies of *Senecio doricum* and a form of *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* with rather long stems—possibly *N. longispatus*. The stands of *Abies* are most impressive and these Spanish firs are a really wonderful sight in August when copious quantities of big purple cones are produced. To photograph them at close range I had to make a rather prickly climb and, although successful, my clothes got so covered in resin that it took weeks to remove. Beneath their shade grows a small Solomon's Seal, *Polygonatum* sp., and in clearings another paeony, *Paeonia coriacea*, equally splendid and distinguished from its neighbour lower down by its greater size and leathery leaves glaucous beneath. One might have thought that some hybridisation would take place between the two species but, although I have searched carefully, I could find no evidence of this. Rising behind the forest is a small conical peak which is worth climbing in spite of the effort involved.

boissieri, as pretty and alike to our own garden pest as to make no difference and a tiny yellow daisy, *Prolongoa pectinata*.

Back in the car again, the road enters a small gorge after a few miles where the escarpments look inviting. *Narcissus juncifolius* is found here in quantity. (In his *Keys to the Identification of Native and Naturalized Taxa of the Genus Narcissus L.*, Professor A. Fernandes proposes that *Narcissus requienii* is the correct name for *N. juncifolius*—Editor). Here also is *Gagea polymorpha* whose sprays of golden yellow stars, arising from some impenetrable crack, are best left alone. Easily found in the grass are numbers of *Ophrys tenthredinifera* and *O. lutea* var. *lutea*, the latter a very good form I understand and *Phlomis purpurea*, a grey sage with pink flowers, grows nearby. Above the escarpment is a deeply fissured limestone pavement with some unusual inhabitants. *Clematis cirrhosa*, rooting deep down into rich moist humus, trails over the rocks covered in a silvery spindthrift. A month or so earlier it bears hundreds of pendant creamy bells which, through rather bizarre looking, are most effective, such as when used to cover an old stump in an English garden. Numerous strap-like leaves with a median white line remind one of *Sternbergia* but are, in fact, those of *Lapiedra martinezii*, a singularly unexciting amaryllid that occasionally produces umbels of chocolate or paler brown flowers in July. I have never found *Sternbergia* in Southern Spain although I have searched for it, but it has been reliably reported at Archidona some fifty miles east of Ronda. Another oddity is *Biarum carratracense* which contrives to wedge its ovoid tubers into impossible positions in the crannies. The leaves are short and the ephemeral spadix appears only after the leaves have died down. This then vanishes and later a group of berries slowly emerge from the soil, not at all dissimilar to the two species of Mandrake also found in Andalucía.

Just prior to starting the descent into this gorge, a number of roads branch off left down to the remote villages in the upper watershed of the Rio Genal (Rio Seco). With outlandish names like Pujerra, Igualeja, Juzcar, Cartajima and Parauta, they sound diverting and, if one is prepared to spare the time and brave indifferent roads, they will be found to be so.

RONDA

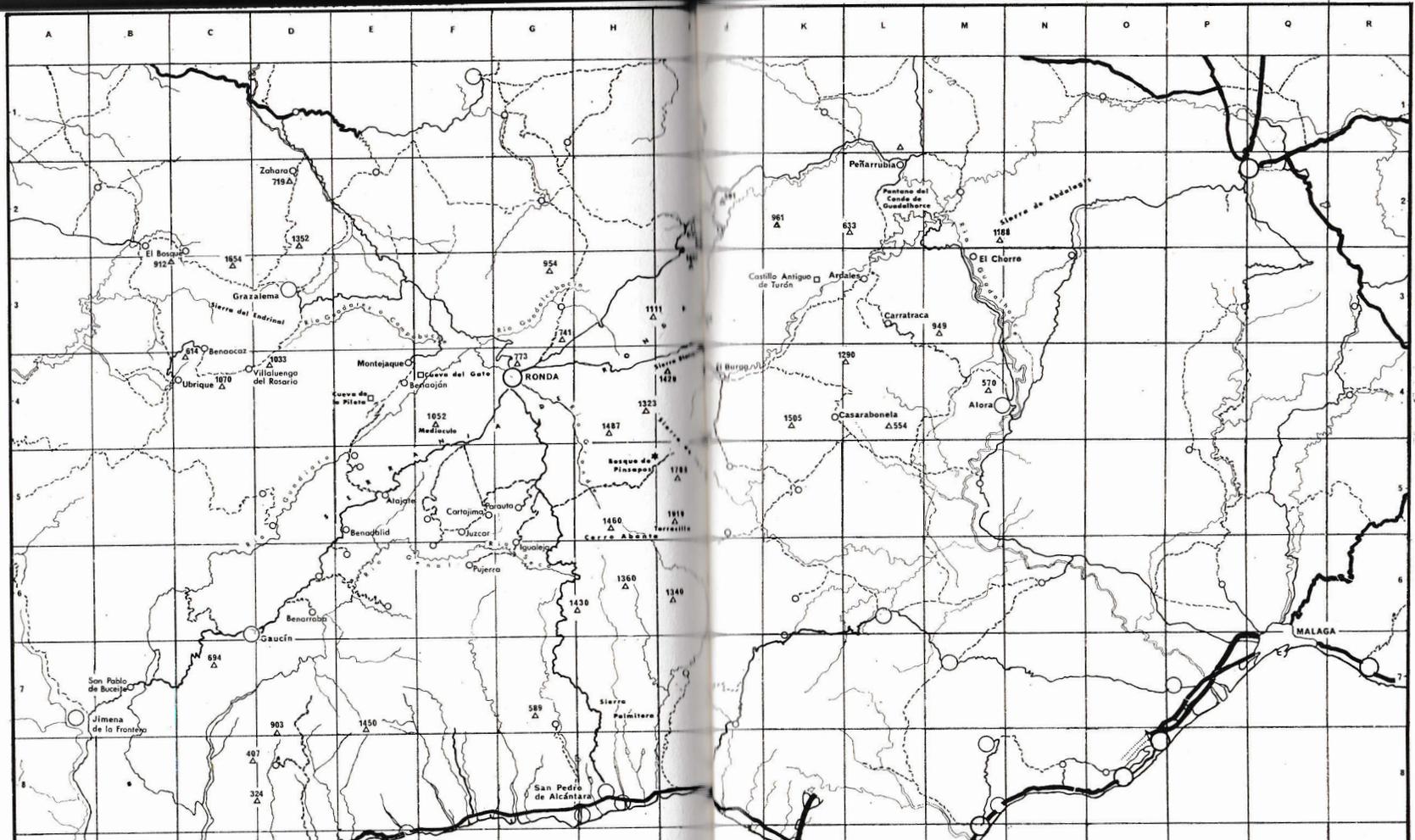
Rounding a bend the first glimpse of Ronda is from a distance of several miles when the town can be seen to be built on a long steeply sided ridge with its most famous feature, the great gorge, invisible from this angle. On my first visit in winter-time it poured all the way, yet Ronda was in sunshine; the dark storm clouds poised over the encircling mountains seemingly halted by some invisible power and this dispensation of nature seems to be of regular occurrence. I must say that Ronda captured my heart at first sight and, whilst it is hard to attribute anything tangible to account for this feeling, it was undoubtedly the fusion of its unique natural setting and the blend of graciousness and austerity, added to the cold mountain air, that led to it. It is one of the oldest towns in Spain and certainly one of the most beautiful of those built on a hilltop. Its inhabitants have been rebellious and at odds with the rest of the country for centuries. A

the remains of a Roman gate still standing where the modern road now enters. This part of the town is full of churches and fine old houses separated by winding narrow streets. The wrought iron grilles in the windows and a little balcony supported by wooden pillars in front of the largest church, are particularly attractive. In olden times this quarter could only be approached on the northern side by crossing the river on the single arched Roman bridge and then climbing up steep steps and cobbles. The great chasm, almost three hundred feet deep, is now spanned by a magnificent bridge built in 1793 by Aldehuela and, at one end, there is a small restaurant underneath where, from one's table, one can see the peregrines and choughs wheeling below the cliffs. A little way beyond the town hall one enters the Plaza de Toros with its famous bullring built at the end of the eighteenth century. Here the austere Rondeno school of bullfighting was evolved and the rules drawn up by the famous Pedro Romero. I think I have said enough to give an inkling of what a fabulous place Ronda is. There are several hotels and the Reina Victoria is especially well found. In the evening, a walk through the town and then into the gardens near the Victoria can be delightful; never have I seen such blooms on tree paeonies. From the iron balustrade on the edge of the line of crumbling sandstone cliffs, one looks right down on the silvery thread of the Rio Grande far beneath and straight across to the jagged peaks of the *sierra* silhouetted by the last rays of the setting sun and in whose dark shadows lies Grazalema, the last Andalusian stronghold of all.

The gorge is best seen from below and is accessible by way of a track leading down from the main road at the southern entrance to the town. It is a favourite haunt of *Iris planifolia* which is extremely common in this limestone region and a view from here in March, standing among the lovely blue iris, is unforgettable. The blend of pink almond blossom and blue skies is in complete harmony with the golden cliffs framing the foaming white torrent roaring down between them.

PANTANO DEL CONDE DE GUADALHORCE

Ronda makes a good base for exploring the district and a drive out along any of the converging roads can be exciting both botanically and scenic-wise. The direct way to Málaga passes through some wild country before climbing over the Sierra Blanquilla and then descending sharply to El Burgo, from whence it starts to deteriorate particularly in the vicinity of Casarabonela. Bold spirits should try the track down past the ruined castle of Turón to Ardales and the Pantano del Conde de Guadalhorce. This is quite a road, to say the least, but all seems worth while when the deep blue Pantano at least comes into sight. I don't think that this is a particularly good area botanically, although it is possible that new forms of jonquil daffodil might be found in the Sierra de Abdalagis; rather more, it is the perfect place to escape from modern life for a few days and enjoy complete solitude. It is possible to stay in the old town of Alora or at Carratraca. However, I have always camped beside the Pantano amongst the pines where the slopes are so steep that level sites are limited. Unfortunately, due to people's carelessness and the risk of fire, I have a feeling that the authorities may soon clamp down on this. Nevertheless, it is the most superb place and a swim in the



road about ten miles beyond Cuevas del Becerro. After an immense amount of wriggling, this road eventually leads to the ancient town of Peñarrubia where, centuries before, so the legend runs, a band of Scottish knights bearing the heart of Robert the Bruce were overwhelmed by the Moors after a desperate battle.

CUEVA DE LA PILETA AND MONTEJAQUE

Much the most interesting foray is to be made westwards towards Grazalema and Ubrique and the astonishing Cueva de la Pileta should also be seen. There is a long zig-zag descent into the valley of the Río Guadalquivir and a mauve crucifer, *Moricandia moricandioides*, may be seen growing in the dry walls of a cutting. Further down a Grape Hyacinth, probably *Muscari botryoides*, is fairly common as is, of course, the bluish Feather Hyacinth, *Muscari comosum*. Here too are hosts of small annuals like the pink and red *Fedia cornucopiae* and *Centaurea pullata*, which is very variable in the colour of its flowers, both pink and white forms being seen. After crossing the Río Guadalquivir, the road climbs through a side valley, beneath damp cliffs where both purple orchids and heaths are visible poking up out of deep grass, to the turning off to Montejaque. This leads through belts of cork forest where there are some wonderful colour effects created by intermingling an azure lupin, *Lupinus micranthus*, with copious flowers of red *Cistus crispus* and white *C. salviifolius*. Near the road I found a single specimen of a great nightshade, with grey leaves and sinister nodding purple flowers which I have not identified, as I could not bring myself to cut it for the press.

Plant hunting all over Southern Spain is made much more difficult by the voracity of the goats and the quicker that the numbers of this accursed animal are reduced throughout the Mediterranean, the sooner will the naturally adapted vegetation and forest have a chance to resume their former proportions. Re-afforestation is now being carried out on a big scale by the Spanish Government and, besides the great economic benefits that will occur from such schemes, there is every likelihood that the resulting conservation of moisture will have a gradually favourable effect on the climate. I make these points because it means that the plant hunter is often forced to risk life and limb to reach inaccessible places such as the ledges of rock faces to locate the really desirable plants.

A mile short of Montejaque the limestone strata is re-entered and an interesting flora grows in the cliffs of some sensational natural features. The strangest of these is a deep dark chasm that runs straight into the mountainside that must once have been the end of the Río Guadares (o Campobuche), but this now runs underground and re-appears gushing out of a cavern a mile away in the valley below.

In this place and roundabout Ubrique, a late flowering form of *Iris xiphium* will be found growing in the cliffs in company with a choice find, the rare *Ornithogalum reverchonii* carrying large white flowers on two-foot spikes. There are plenty of orchids like the Man Orchid, *Aceras anthropophorum*, and sub-alpine plants such as *Saxifraga boissieri* and creamy *Silene pseudovelutina*. Rather

flowers grows on the banks of the river but, of far more botanical interest, is the Red mistletoe, *Viscum cruciatum*, growing in a few old olive trees. This is a most interesting species whose range extends from the Levant along the north African littoral to Morocco and, as a native of Palestine, its name, though botanically apt, probably has a religious derivation. The usual host is the olive and literally hundreds of trees are infested at Chechaouën in the north of Morocco but it has also been reported on almond, poplar, hawthorn and oleander. My first knowledge of its existence as a rare native of Spain came about when I found it mentioned under the names of *tiñe* or *muérdago* in an old journal belonging to the Gibraltar Library. Subsequent enquiries at Gaucín where it had been seen were quite fruitless, nobody had ever heard of it. Some months later whilst driving over the high pass between Grazalema and Zahara, I spotted some tell-tale tufts in two olive trees. Closer inspection revealed a plant similar to the common mistletoe, *Viscum album*, except that the leaves were longer and more fleshy but there was nothing to indicate the colour of the berry. On a later visit in December which, incidentally, involved a drive of nearly 200 miles, I was delighted to find the plant in berry and subsequently spied others at Benaoján from the train. This is an exceedingly beautiful plant, the shining wine-red fruit contrasting perfectly with the light green foliage and its display, very naturally, aroused considerable comment back in Gibraltar. From enquiries made in the Ronda district it seems that this mistletoe is extremely rare, being normally cut out whenever observed and, during my frequent travels through the olive producing areas of Andalucía, I have never seen it. During my stay at Gibraltar I inserted many berries in the bark of wild olives on the Rock and when I left had noted only two or three certain successes; clearly nature knows best how to do this.

GRAZALEMA

Both Ubrique and Grazalema should be visited but, if time is short, the latter deserves priority in the plant hunting sense. A metalled road branches off two miles beyond the Montejaque turning and then contours through a very large forest of cork trees towards the striking limestone massif above Grazalema. The flora here is the typical Lusitanian one that is found on acid soils where there is an appreciable winter rainfall. There is however one rarity, a very dwarf form of *Narcissus bulbocodium* that, despite its greater size, bears a resemblance to *N. hedreanthus*. This is found growing on damp grassy slopes between the cork trees and is almost sessile in habit, one or two sulphur yellow flowers and dark green leaves being produced by each bulb. Just off the roadside, below the village, I found golden *Ophrys lutea* var. *lutea* and wonderful swarms of *Orchis mascula* var. *olbiensis* showing a great range in colour from white to deep pink; the latter is found all over the limestone region and extends right up to the summits. There is plenty of lush vegetation on the great cliff above the road. Here are the usual enormous umbellifers and a pretty violet stock, *Hesperis laciniata*, and, in vertical crannies, the yellow horned poppy, *Glaucium flavum*, and *Biscutella foliosa*, a slightly disappointing crucifer.

As might be expected, the villagers are a hardy friendly people whose

leggy, the finest specimens of this daffodil are found near the top, which may only be reached after a stiff climb. Here it flowers magnificently in a mixture of black humus and chippings with mosses, *Ceterach* fern and *Erysimum* for company. Just why this form exists so far south of its usual station in Portugal is anybody's guess. In cultivation my own plants have not yet done themselves full justice, but can one really expect such a thoroughbred to adapt itself so abruptly to the dismal Yorkshire moors? Distinguishing features are grey foliage, large solitary butter-yellow flowers with a bowl-shaped corona, reflexed perianth segments and an elusive, but distinctive, sweet scent. (This is now believed to be *Narcissus rupicola* subsp. *pedunculatus*—Editor).

I once descended by way of the steep rocky ridge overlooking the village and found several of the pitches rather more difficult than I had imagined. On some of these I literally rubbed noses with *Papaver rupifragum*, a dainty little orange poppy and, in deep shade, I found an annual bellflower, *Campanula specularioides* which covers a network of interlacing stems with countless tiny bells of a deep blue. On another occasion, when I was exploring the cliffs, I was much surprised to see a loose mistletoe berry and concluded that the source could only be a single densely foliated tree growing in the cliff face two hundred feet above. After a somewhat perilous climb, I reached my objective and found an ancient ivy heavily infested; this is most certainly unusual and a classic instance of the biter bit. The Spanish bluebell, *Endymion hispanicus*, is ubiquitous here and, in the screes, there were a few clumps of *Helleborus foetidus* and spiny half gnawed bushes of *Pyracantha coccinea*. In stony level ground there were many orchids and various woolly boraginous plants like *Solenanthes lanatus*, *Cynoglossum arundanum* and *C. clandestinum*; all bearing rather insignificant mauve or blue flowers.

The road from Grazalema to El Bosque is unfinished and in so dreadful a condition that I have never penetrated far along it but, due north, the high road to Zahara is perfectly negotiable and is a splendid example of the quixotism in the Spanish character, since there is no real justification for its construction whatsoever. There is a long long traverse that leads excitingly across a steep mountainside to a col, where there is a grand vista of the countryside and distant sierras. From this point there is a very rough path that follows the crest of a ridge leading eventually to a peak and a great forest of Spanish firs on its north-eastern flanks. The flora is restricted to prickly sub-shrubs like *Genista* and grey leafed species like *Artemisia* and *Teucrium polium*. Something like *Narcissus juncifolius* (*N. requienii*) but taller, is fairly common, especially below the pass and so is the glaucous montane form of *Fritillaria hispanica* that successfully conceals itself amongst the shrubs.

ZAHARA

The descent by way of a succession of steep hairpin bends is particularly pulse-quickening and, presently, the large olive groves above Zahara are reached. Besides the Red mistletoe that I have already mentioned finding, here can be found large colonies of *Himantoglossum longibracteatum* in March. This is surely the biggest and stateliest of European orchids; some of these here are almost two-

grandeur. After a few miles, one passes by some damp fields bordering the Rio Guadare where an interesting hybrid jonquil daffodil flowers during March in thick clay. Single golden flowers are produced at the end of a very long tube on stout four-inch stems; the leaves are a dark green, twisted and terete.

In the middle of the valley, above the small village of Villaluenga del Rosario, there is a line of ancient Moorish tombs of considerable size which are distinctly intriguing and it would be interesting to know more about them. Nearing Benaocaz there is more cork forest and I have never forgotten how, during a picnic lunch, I watched a goat climb up the trunk of a particularly large spreading tree and start feeding on the upper branches.

Benaocaz is distinctly scruffy and we were once driven from an intended camping site by the imprecations of a dreadful old man; however, we found a much better one and *Orchis italica* beside a friendly farm overlooking Ubrique. There are some fine rambles to be had in the wastes of the Sierra del Endrinal behind Benaocaz; and these will be found to be a test of fitness of both oneself and the soles of one's boots.

Ubrique lies in a deep hollow circled from the north-west through north to south-east by *sierras* rising almost four thousand feet. The town is quite delightful and, through a flourishing leather industry, its inhabitants are cheerful and prosperous in spite of their isolation. The main square is lined with orange trees and there is an ornate fountain but the chief glory is the tiling of the houses, especially the town hall where the entire frontage is covered by blue tiles with intricate designs. Ubrique possesses a serenity and way of life not often found these days and if I wanted complete rest and quiet in utter simplicity for a few weeks, this is where I would go.

RONDA TO GIBRALTAR

The inland route back to Gibraltar from Ronda is not a fast one but it does pass through some very mixed country like the pitiless wastes in the vicinity of Atajate and the beautiful orange groves near Jimena. During a climb up the *sierra* north of Atajate (P. Medioculo) one March I found a whole mountainside covered with *Iris planifolia* with, here and there, *Genista umbellata* and, on the summit, jonquil type daffodils and bluebells were growing in the crevices. Wild almonds flowering in cliffs above the road are a magnificent sight and, one February, I once saw a "tazetta" daffodil with yellow cupped flowers growing out of reach on a ledge.

Some of the little villages, like Benadalid and Benarraba, lying a small way off the main road possess an attractiveness all their own and a walk down to and around the latter, makes a nice break in the journey. The local honey is quite delicious and is gathered from hives made from hollowed out cork trunks. These are transported from site to site by donkey and, on first meeting one, I was quite unable to account for the strange phenomenon of the donkey that "buzzed."

GAUCIN

CHAPTER V

THE COSTA DEL SOL

San Pedro de Alcántara and El Angel—Istán—Marbella—Fuengirola and Torremolinos—Málaga—Málaga to Loja and Granada—Loja—Málaga to Granada via Alhama de Granada—Vélez—Málaga—Alhama de Granada—Pantano de los Bermejales—Nerja—Almuñécar—Motril—Calahonda—Motril to Granada.

The *Costa del Sol* stretches from Gibraltar to Motril but, for the majority of tourists, it means the rash of highly-developed resorts between Marbella and Málaga which, offering a blend of Brighton, Le Touquet, and sunshine, admirably fulfil their function of catering for the masses. These main resorts can also be very pleasant out of season, that is during April and September, and make a most convenient starting point for visiting some of the lesser-known and even more attractive areas to be described. There is accommodation to suit every pocket and it is all easily arranged through any reputable travel agency.

SAN PEDRO DE ALCANTARA AND EL ANGEL

So far we have penetrated no further eastwards than San Pedro de Alcántara and the turning to Ronda. Here there is a marble factory where the local stone is cut, ground and polished and it is an interesting process to watch. Just before the bridge over the Río Verde one should turn inland to El Angel. Here can be found a large picturesque old farmhouse surrounded by extensive citrus plantations which produce quite the most delicious grapefruit I have eaten anywhere. A white hoop-petticoat daffodil, *Narcissus cantabricus* subsp. *monophyllus*, is found flowering in the fields during February and, round the farm, the Judas trees, *Cercis siliquastrum*, plastered all over with pink pea flowers, are a magnificent sight a little later on.

ISTAN

A most delightful village, Istán, lies some ten miles up this valley which was the scene of a tragic battle between Crusaders and Moors, the former being massacred to a man. The road to Istán is of variable quality but a very pretty drive in February when the almond blossom is at its best. On the right is the Sierra Blanca which lies behind Marbella and may be easily ascended from the Ojén

and white tiles of a snowy mountain scene. This may seem rather out of place but, barely ten miles away, the tops of the Sierra de las Nieves are often snow-covered in January and February. It is not far down to the river, whose white pebbly bed winds up through some small gorges into the heart of the range and, if one follows its course, one may occasionally see the rare wild goat, *Caprus hispanica*. These rivers run swift and clear during the winter months and then, in the summer, turn into a mere trickle linking a succession of large pools where quite sizeable fish may be caught. They are invariably lined by thickets of oleander, *Nerium oleander*, probably the loveliest of all Mediterranean wild shrubs. High praise indeed, but few would dispute this after walking beside their sweet-scented pink flowers for a few miles. Many fine hybrids—white, red, yellow and doubles—have now been produced, especially by the Americans, and it has become one of the most valuable of all shrubs for sub-tropical climates. The leaves are poisonous so, when children are about, care is needed.

MARBELLA

Marbella is still most attractive, in spite of all the new essays in ferro-concrete. The old town at the back is quite intact and mostly unspoilt and a wander round the bustling little sidestreets with their gaudy shops is an amusing evening's exercise. The drive over the coastal range, through Ojén and Monda to Coin, is a lovely one during the spring months and a wide variety of flowers will be seen. Monda is famous historically for its great battle between the Antonine and Ptolemy factions in Roman times. Coin, a typical old Andalusian market town, is the centre of a rich agricultural area which, among many other products, grows the most succulent grapes I have ever eaten.

The road to Cartama, where there are ruins of a big castle frowning down from a hilltop, is poor but it is a quick route to Alora and the Garganta del Chorro, which make an exciting day's trip up from the coast. The valley of the Río Guadalhorce is very well cultivated and the plantations of lemons—and what a beautiful tree too in fruit—are very fine. The small jonquil daffodil, *Narcissus gaditanus*, is fairly common during January and February. There is a fair road from Coin to Málaga passing through the two Alhauríns and the pine covered slopes of the *sierra* near Alhaurín de la Torre are full of good plants in April. *Iris filifolia* and *Leucojum trichophyllum* are common and an unusual form of *Serapias pseudocordigera* with smoky grey bracts and a ruby red lip has been reported.

FUENGIROLA AND TORREMOLINOS

The drive along the coastal road from Marbella to Fuengirola is very pretty. Much of it runs through low pine covered hills where a number of attractive hotels have been built and their gardens are a glorious sight when the golden cascades of a mimosa, *Acacia longifolia*, are at their best. The coast is rather

MALAGA

Málaga is yet another of those southern cities with an old world charm that is almost Edwardian but, in this case, the fresh sea breezes have blown away much of the Andalusian *mañana* and turned the city into one of the most thriving and prosperous in the peninsula. Protected by a ring of mountains from the cold northerly winds, the winter climate is probably the finest of Europe; that this is so can be seen by the unusual exotics grown in the fine public gardens near the harbour. There are many sumptuous hotels, as comfortable as one could find anywhere and the number of dining out places is legion, but I would single out a meal in the old Moorish fortress of the Gibralfaro as something special to remember. The sea food is delicious and vies with that of other Mediterranean haunts of gourmets like La Coruña and Trieste.

The main shopping centre—Larios street—has pavements of marble and there are some first-class bargains to be made in many of the tastefully furnished shops. I have in mind a picture shop where old prints of Gibraltar and bull-fighting scenes may be had and the silversmiths, whose work in the heavy Spanish silver is quite exquisite. Behind Larios lies a labyrinth of tall buildings and narrow streets, small squares and a fascinating market, and the variety offered by some of the wineshops is so stupendous that even a Frenchman's mouth would water.

The cathedral, still needing a second tower for completion, is one of the great churches of Spain. A slow ambulation round the huge nave, to view the famous paintings and magnificent carvings in the central choir, leaves one silent and temporarily crushed by the sheer volume of human effort and piety that have been expended in its making. There are still many other unfinished churches in the country but this is nothing strange for they are so vast that some have taken two or three centuries to complete, as for example the cathedral at Toledo, the See of the Cardinal Primate of Spain. Throughout Andalucía, and maybe elsewhere, it is often difficult to get inside churches during normal hours but they are almost always open for early mass and this is the best time to see them. The gardens of Málaga are memorable, especially those of the old Alcazaba or the lovely villas abutting the coastal road to the east. Entering from the west a great avenue of evergreen figs, possibly *Ficus macrophylla*, provides an impenetrable leafy screen and shelter for the many booths set up during the *feria*. In such delightful surroundings the *feria*, at the end of August, is an experience that will never grow old. The processions during Holy Week at Easter are almost as sensational as those at Sevilla when the whole city seems to be taken over by the hooded *penitentes* in the startling colours of their different *cofrades*—the sinister figures of *Sepulchro*, dressed all in black, might be the Holy Inquisitors themselves.

MALAGA TO LOJA AND GRANADA

There are three interesting routes to Granada from Málaga, namely by way of Motril, Alhama de Granada and Loja; the last being the quickest and which

A short distance beyond Colmenar our road bifurcates to Antequera which may be reached in about an hour. Much of this stretch contours through rocky wastelands rich in orchids during April and May—among them such *Orchis* species as *O. italica*, *O. morio* subsp. *champagneuxii*, *O. mascula* and *O. tridentata*. Just before Antequera the road cuts round the curious massif of the Sierra del Torcal where there is a remarkable formation consisting of giant layers of rock piled on top of each other and this must be of considerable geological interest. Antequera itself is a fine old town where the Romans have clearly left their mark. There is a very well run *albergo* to stay in and, close by, there are many prehistoric remains and the mysterious covered galleries at the Cueva de Menga. This place has given its name to a toadflax, *Linaria anticaria*, described as a glaucous perennial with white flowers striped with blue, but I have never come across it.

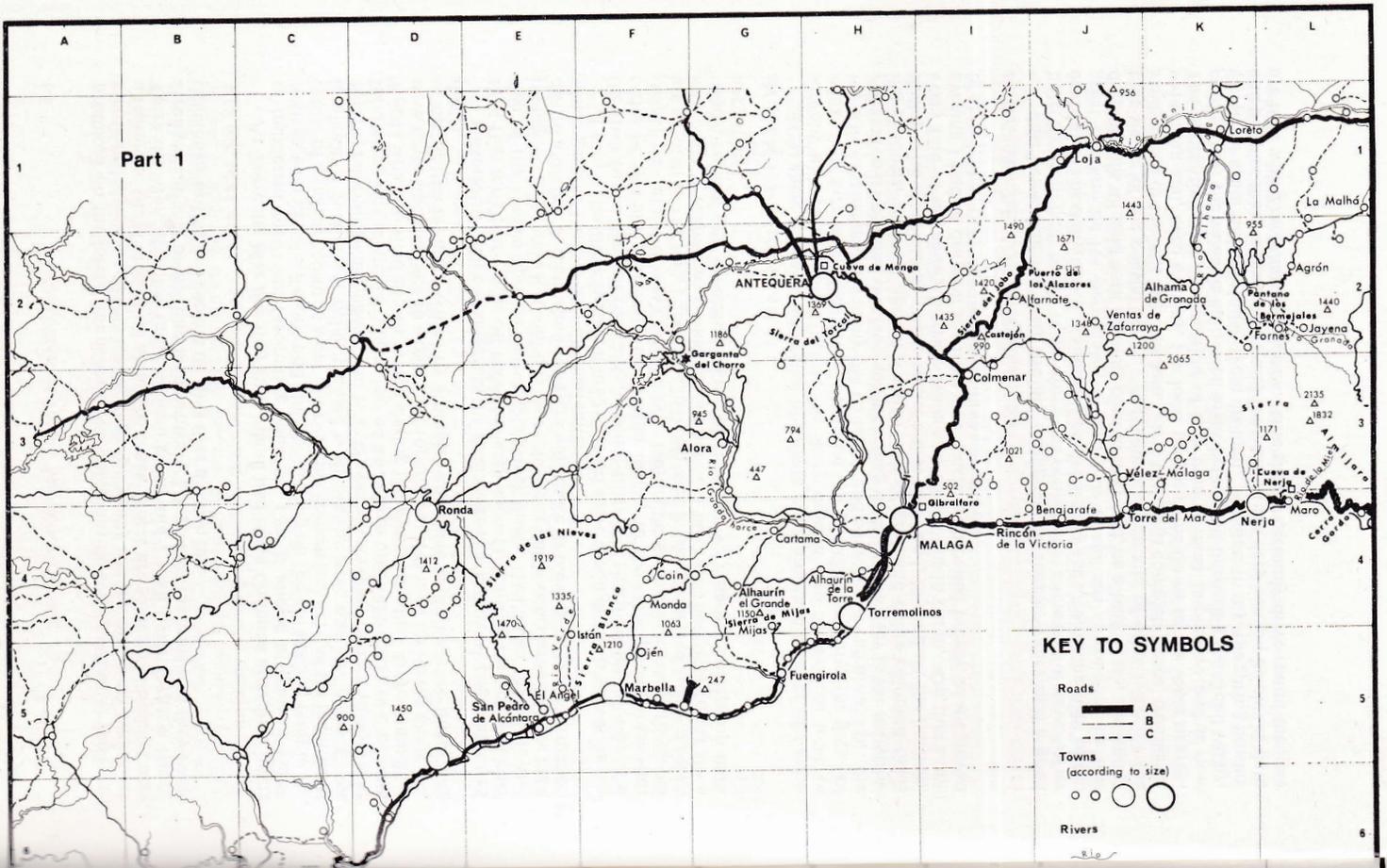
Back again near Colmenar the Granada road winds along below the Sierra del Jobo, past the great rocky pinnacle of Castejón that may be climbed from its southern flanks, to the upland plains in the vicinity of Alfarnate. There is a good stopping place below the Puerto de los Alazores where quite a few good plants may be found during April and May. *Paeonia broteroi* grows amongst sages and rosemary on the rocky hillside; a few blue spikes of *Iris xiphium* rise here and there and, right by the roadside, are large colonies of the large black and gold *Ophrys lutea* var. *lutea* and an intensely dark velvet form of *Linaria tristis*. Just below the Puerto, on the other side, there is a great limestone face where something attractive can usually be found on the more accessible ledges. In early May there are yellow cushions of *Anthyllis cytisoides*, violet *Hesperis laciniata* and a fragrant Grape Hyacinth with dark blue bells edged with white.

LOJA

It is a long and fast downhill run to Loja through a landscape of olives and almonds; the combination of grey foliage, pink blossom and red earth being a particularly happy one. The Spanish iris is very common in the fields, as is too that parasitic curse of the pea family, *Orobancha crenata*, whose red, yellow or white spikes can be spied poking up everywhere amongst the beans which are such an important staple of local diet.

In so strategic a position Loja was once a place of considerable importance, especially to the Moors in Granada but those days are past. Although the area round the old castle is interesting, a walk down to the gorge of the Rio Genil below is rather more exciting. I was once foolish enough to drive from Jaén to Loja by way of Baena and Priego de Córdoba (where there are some rather unique festivities during Holy Week). The less said about the last section of the road the better but at least perseverance was rewarded near Priego by the discovery of a lovely white form of *Iris planifolia* that I have never seen anywhere else.

It is a fast straight run from Loja to Granada following the wide fertile valley of the Rio Genil which is so highly cultivated for olives and wheat, that there is little room left for wild flowers. The common broom, *Cytisus scoparius*, is a picture by the roadside in one or two places. Once during a picnic, above a



KEY TO SYMBOLS

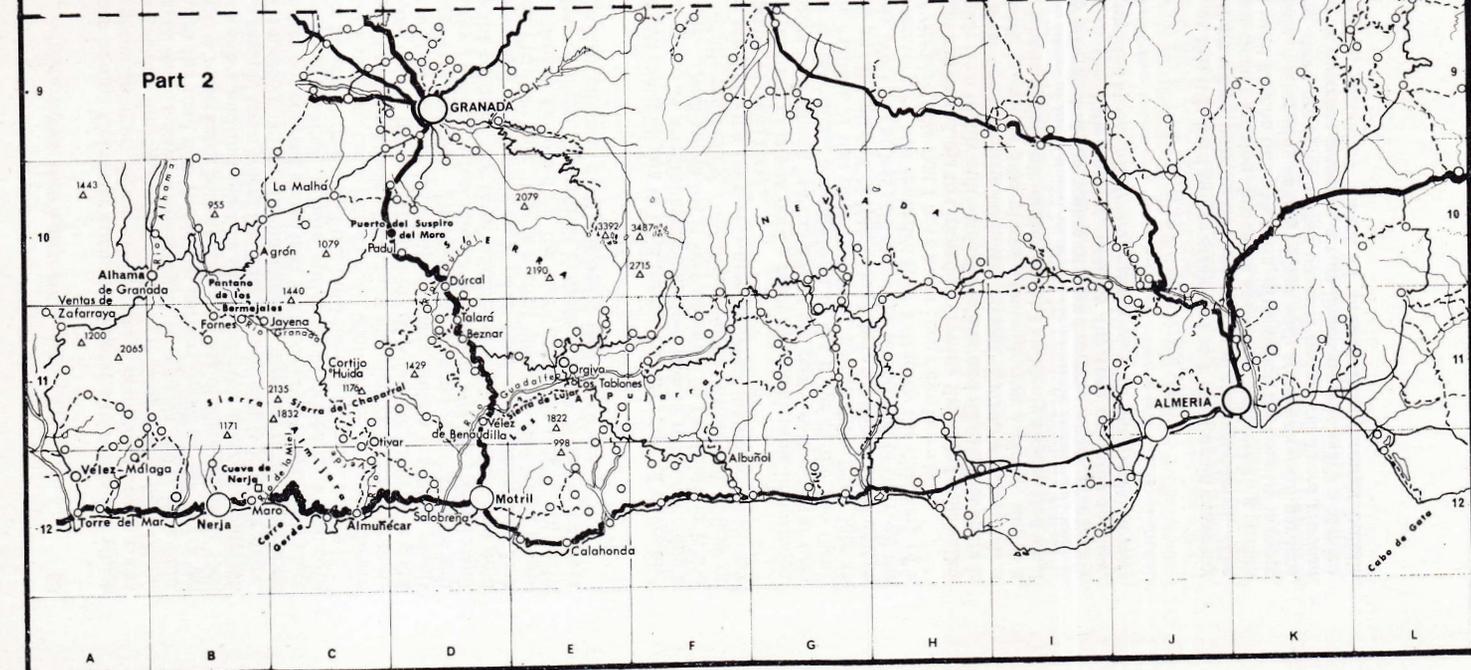
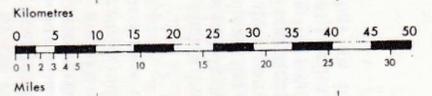
Roads
 ——— A
 ——— B
 - - - - C

Towns
 (according to size)
 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Rivers
 ~~~~~

Mountains  
 (height in metres)  
 Δ 1496

Map drawn by  
 A. P. Hamilton © 1969



produced on the lateral branches of its enormous flowering stems. I have not mentioned *Agave americana* whose huge spiky grey rosettes and giant scapes are a feature of the landscape all along the coast. There are some good beaches near Torre del Mar, ideal for the afternoon *siesta* and I shall never forget a happy arrangement with some fishermen, whereby I produced the wine and they some deliciously tasting fish cooked on spits over a beach fire.

#### VELEZ-MALAGA

At Torre del Mar one may turn inland and reach Granada after four hours of indifferent roads but fascinating country. One is almost at once in Vélez-Málaga with its ruined castle and church standing on the hill behind, built in the centre of a rich agricultural area. There is an excellent market and the main street is almost a boulevard, being planted with orange trees and the pinky Crepe Myrtle, *Lagerstroemia indica*. This is a very beautiful region of deep valleys, pine forests and tiny scattered villages tucked away high up on the flanks of the Sierra Tejeda which is often snow covered during the winter months. Unfortunately, I have never had the time to explore it properly but it is high up on my short list, as the district is rarely visited by strangers and there could be some interesting plants.

Historically Vélez-Málaga has its niche through the naval engagement of 1704 that took place close off shore between some 50 ships of the line on either side of the Franco-Spanish and Anglo-Dutch fleets. Although the battle was bloody no ships were lost and this inconclusive result is considered to have been due to a decline in tactics and too rigid adherence to the line-of-battle formation which gave no latitude to individual initiative.

From Vélez there is then a long sinuous drive through citrus groves beside the river to the head of the valley, whence there is a sharp ascent, by way of a series of splendid traverses and hairpin bends, to the conspicuous horse-shoe shaped pass at the Ventas de Zafarraya. During the spring these southerly slopes are a riot of colour and, finer than anything, were golden carpets of *Leucanthemum macrotum*, a yellow daisy which I had not seen before. The *ventas* (inns) are a windy, forlorn and desolate looking place whose very name conjures up dark happenings.

#### ALHAMA DE GRANADA

Next there follows a few miles of upland plain and then a range of barren scrubby hills to be crossed before the sharp descent into the ancient town of Alhama de Granada. This place is built on top of a cliff bordering the gorge of the Rio Alhama and has many old buildings and churches. I can always picture Alhama as it appeared one November evening when the town lay in the lengthening shadows, outlined against a patchwork of grey and ochre coloured fields dusted with a sprinkling of the winter's first snow and, beyond on the horizon, every fold of the snowy Sierra Nevada was etched out in detail. On that same evening I had to draw off the road and watch, with baited breath, as a caravan

to Fornes and then up beside the crystal clear Rio Granada to Jayena. I have never penetrated south into the Sierra Almijara, a region of cool streams and pine forests but hope one day to do so on the back of the ideal vehicle, a donkey. The remaining thirty miles to Granada are rather bare uplands and not particularly exciting but, here and there, are six foot groups of the great silvery thistle *Onopordon tauricum*. Near Agrón I found an attractive dwarf mignonette, *Reseda phyteuma*, and *Moricandia arvensis* is common in the cliffs above La Malhá, a rather untidy place where there are salt springs.

#### NERJA

It is now time to return to the coast and resume our way towards Motril. The seaboard between Málaga and Motril is one of the warmest parts of Europe and well endowed by nature with deep alluvial soil and a copious water supply from the mountains. Such specialised early crops as tomatoes, potatoes and beans are grown and, wherever there is space, there are great plantations of sugar cane—the chief producing areas of the latter being at Nerja, Salobreña and Motril. Nerja is a pretty little town built right down on the cliff edge, where there are the remains of yet another Moorish castle. There are now some new hotels which will very soon popularise this place. Nearby is the famous cave, the Cueva de Nerja, discovered only very recently and which has now been opened to the public in a most natural and sensible way. It is certainly nature in one of her more magnificent moods and nothing I have seen in France, or elsewhere in Europe, is as fine. The lighting is discreet, the music subdued and suitable, and the sheer size of the water sculptured formations and the incongruity of their weird and lifelike shapes, is sufficient to stimulate the duller amongst us to wonderment.

There is a curious area of limestone pavements close by, similar to that found in the Causse country of France where there is a distinctive vegetation composed mainly of xerophytic plants. The large bulbs of the Sea Squill, *Urginea maritima*, are particularly common but the unexciting raceme of small white flowers, produced during the late summer, belies their promise. Clumps of *Inula viscosa* produce a succession of yellow daisies throughout the summer and, as it gets hotter, the leaves hang curled up and flaccid. Most of the other small shrubs are obnoxious ones like *Ephedra fragilis*, *Cneorum tricoccon*, and even *Osyris alba* has little real beauty. Only a little colour is introduced by tiny marigolds and a rose coloured bindweed, *Convolvulus sericeus*. A most remarkable piece of construction near here is the three-tiered aqueduct that carries the irrigation water across a great chasm near Maro. Just before this village there is a stretch of roadside and fields where *Asclepias curassavica* has naturalised itself. A native of tropical America, this unexpected exotic may be easily recognised by the umbels of orange-red flowers on two foot woody stems. Between Maro and the coast *Genista umbellata* is fairly common, its rush-like foliage carrying terminal rounded heads of yellow flowers in April. More desirable is the thorny *Lavatera maritima* which here has a procumbent habit and pale mauve flowers with dark purple centres and purple veins.

Here, for the first time, occurs another delicate little rock rose, *Helianthemum aegyptiacum*, with blush pink flowers; it is also found in Morocco.

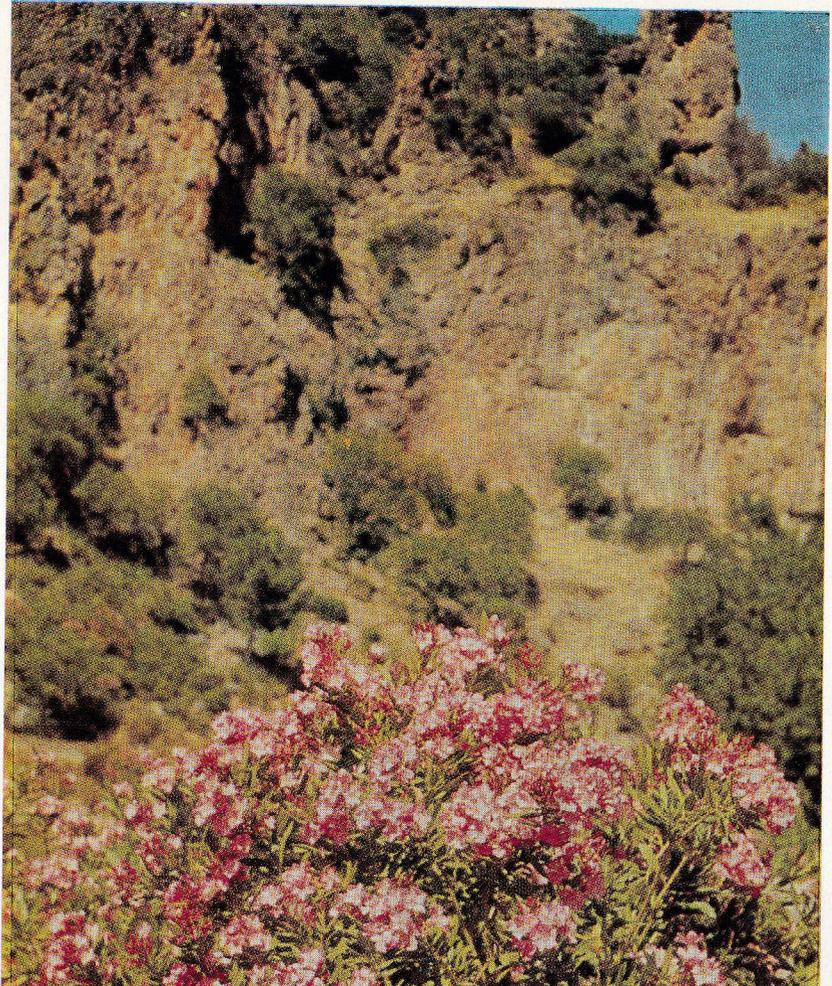
At the Cerro Gordo there is a well appointed restaurant where one can enjoy a good meal and a unique panorama, for this is probably the finest piece of accessible high coastline in the peninsula.

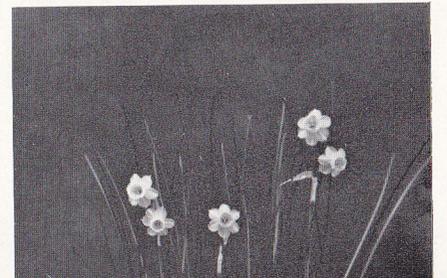
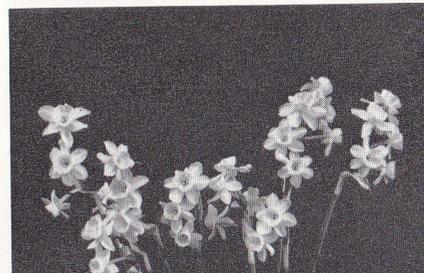
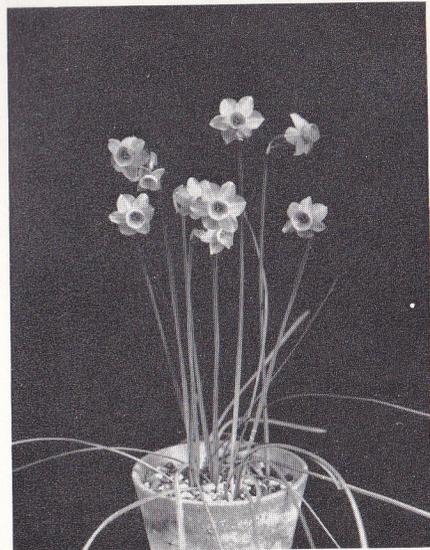
#### ALMUNECAR

Almuñécar started its existence as a Phœnician settlement named Sexi (there is now a good hotel of that name) subsequently becoming a Moorish fortress until captured by the Catholic Kings in 1489. It is well protected from all directions except the south and in this shelter flourish fine specimens of eucalyptus, plane trees and the majestic Norfolk Island Pine, *Araucaria heterophylla* (syn. *A. excelsa*), whose stately candelabra-like habit is unmistakable. Perhaps the most astonishing botanical curiosity here is the big orchard of Custard Apples which is visible from the road near the river. This tree, *Annona reticulata*, is really a tropical species coming from Central America.

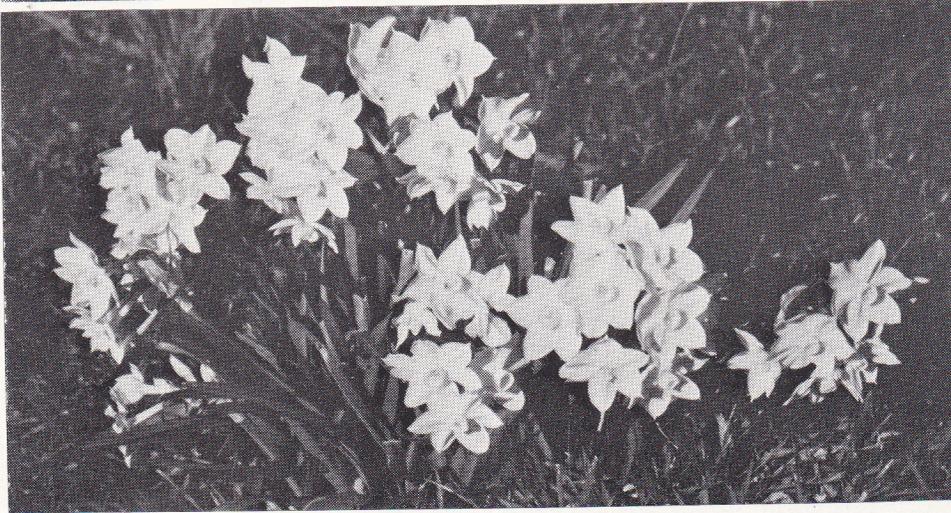
There is a beautiful drive up the luscious valley of the Rio Verde and then up and over the Sierra del Chaparral to Granada. However, the middle section of this road, where it runs through the pine forests near Cortijo Huida, is unmetalled and near impassable during the rainy season. I once stopped beyond Otivar where there is reputed to be a sizeable Mango tree and then walked through some fields and up through the terraces on the steep side of the valley. Everything was incredibly green as there is no lack of water and there was a very wide range of plants including orchids like the white *Cephalanthera longifolia*, pink *Epipactis helleborine* and the Bee orchid, *Ophrys apifera*. There is a steep climb of at least three thousand feet to reach the crest of the Sierra del Chaparral and the view is simply quite breathtaking. This is particularly so when travelling in the reverse direction and one turns the corner and there is the cobalt Mediterranean and its sparkling coastline, literally at one's feet. The middle slopes are the home of such yellow flowering leguminous shrubs as *Ononis speciosa*, *Genista spartioides* and *Adenocarpus decorticans* with the Tangier Pea, *Lathyrus tingitanus*, gorgeously rampant. The summit area of the sierra is a much eroded limestone plateau covered with *maquis* and pines. There is one exciting passage where the road has to make a long traverse and descent down across the steep cliffs of an escarpment, which it tunnels through in several places to achieve this. Probably the best time to come here is the end of April when the two paeony species, *Paeonia broteroi* and *P. coriacea*, will just be coming into flower and the handsome rusty gold foxglove, *Digitalis obscura* subsp. *laciniata* and *Narcissus gaditanus* will be at about their best. Other natives are *Lithospermum fruticosum* with intense blue flowers, but a rather weedy form due perhaps to the attention of the goats, and several spurges of which *Euphorbia characias* and *E. rigida* were the best. The lily family are represented by *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis* and the Spanish fritillary.

Two or three miles out of Almuñécar there is a little sandy bay with a good

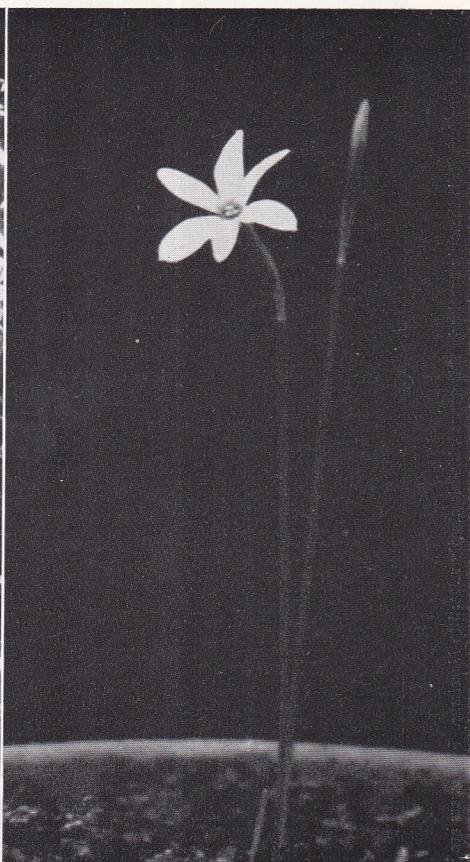








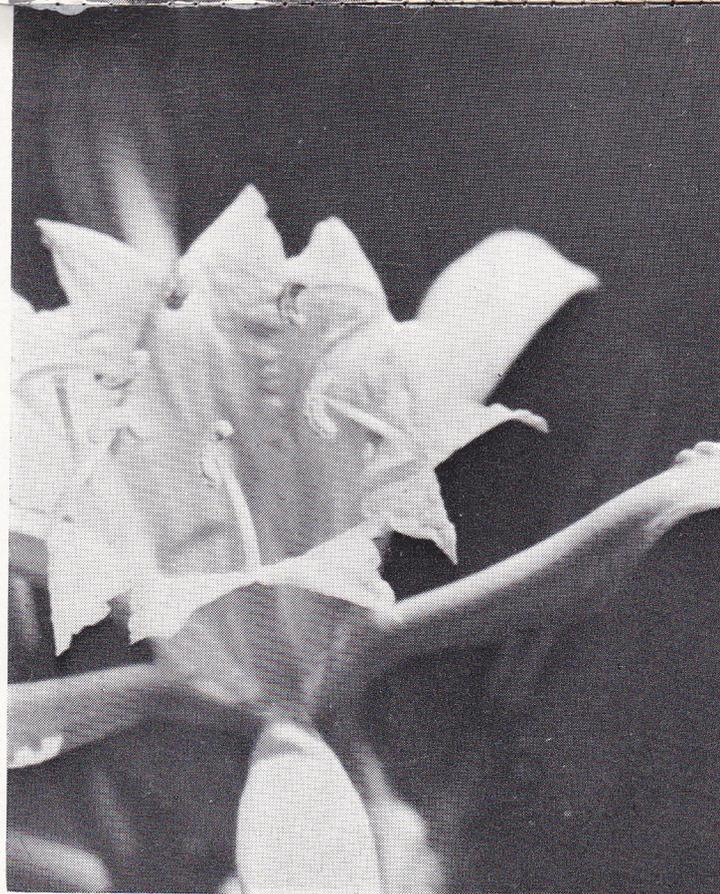
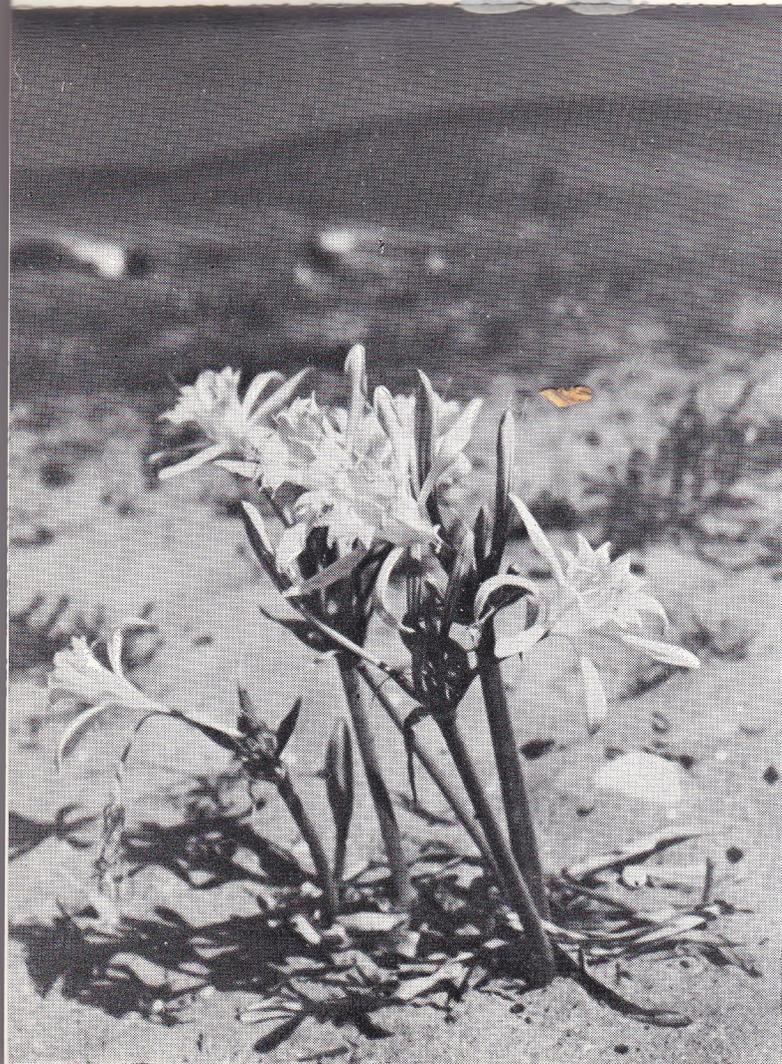
The paper-white narcissus, *N. papyraceus*, is prolific in Andalucía at Christmas time. (Above)—An unfamiliar sight to northern European eyes is the paper-white growing wild by the thousand. This species is very catholic in its taste of soils. It will grow happily in the limestone scree of the west side of Gibraltar which faces the oncoming depressions from the Atlantic (top right): it flourishes equally well in the glutinous blue clay of the nearby mainland (lower right.)



*Narcissus serotinus* is a species that is strikingly different from the majority of narcissi in that its corona is virtually negligible. Further, it flowers in the autumn (September-October) and produces small white upward facing star-shaped blossoms. It hybridizes with *Tapinanthus humilis* (page 93) to produce the plant known as "Carregnoa dubia."



Terrestrial orchids are very plentiful in Andalucia, particularly the genus *Ophrys*. The Bee orchid, *O. apifera*, (above) a plant of sunny localities, has a red-brown lip with a distinctive pattern enclosing a light red patch: its sepals are pale pink with a green central line. The Limodore, *Limodorum abortivum*, (right) is a striking but not beautiful orchid of open woodland. Its sepals are off-white and the lip is patterned in violet.



The Sea Daffodil, *Pancratium maritimum*, is a spectacular plant of sandy beaches in Andalucia (left). Throughout the rainy months the plant is characterised by a fan-shaped tuft of glaucous leaves. When these have withered, the plant flowers without leaves in late summer and produces large white trumpets with an intriguing arrangement of stamens (above).