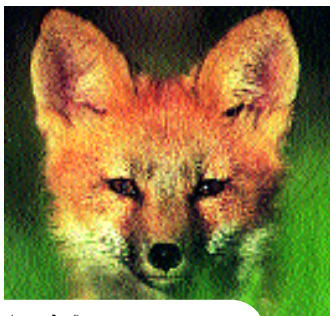




The white of the limestone rocks contrasts with the green of the meadows, forests and plantations.

Urkiola stands at the centre of the mountains on the Cantabrian-Mediterranean watershed. The Nature Reserve takes its name from the pass running through it from north to south, and from the Sanctuary (of San Antonio or Urkiola) standing on the summit, the geographic centre of the area. Etymologically speaking, Urkiola comes from "urkia", the Basque name for the birch tree so easily found in the area. The land belongs mainly to Bizkaia, but also to Alava.

The Nature Reserve basically comprises a series of massifs and enormous limestone rocks, with deep gullies and valleys between each one, including: Aramatz, Eskubaratz, Anboto-Alluitz and Arangio. The white of the limestone, and its pronounced relief (particularly



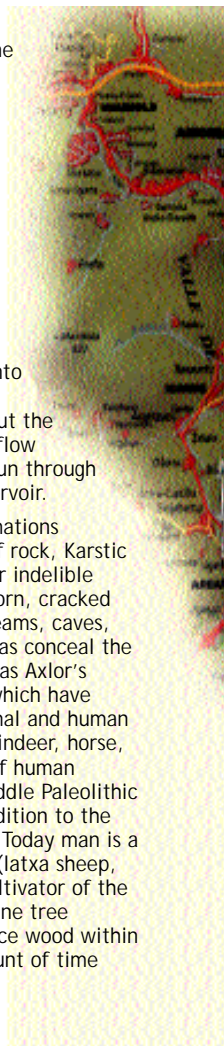
A red fox

obvious in mount Anboto, 1,328 m in height, and easily identifiable from a distance) give the area its character and

are an essential part of the landscape. This mountainous area (commonly referred to as the Duranguesado), is flanked on the one side by the Durango-Altxondo valleys, and on the other by those of Arratia and Otxandio. To the south-east is the small Aramaio valley in the province of Alava.

Most of the waters flow into the Bay of Biscay via the Arratia-Ibaizabal rivers; but the Otxandio valley sends its flow southwards after having run through the dam on Urrúnaga reservoir.

As in other mountain formations constituted by this kind of rock, Karstic phenomena have left their indelible mark on the mountain: worn, cracked rocks, underground streams, caves, etc. Many of these areas conceal the prehistoric sites, such as Axlor's "coat" or Bolinkoba, which have provided so many animal and human remains (cave bear, reindeer, horse, the remains of teeth of human forebears from the middle Paleolithic period in Axlor), in addition to the tools used by hunters. Today man is a shepherd on this land (latxa sheep, mares, cows) and a cultivator of the forest. Although the pine tree plantations that produce wood within a relatively short amount of time



TO KEEP YOURSELF BUSY

There are guided tours of the Reserve. Find out more about them at the Information Centre.

Activities:

Hill-walking, mountain-biking and mountaineering excursions. The Reserve's Information Centre will tell you more about all of the available activities, the most attractive routes, the most interesting areas, etc.

Birdwatching

Different species of bird can be

seen in various areas of the Reserve: **peregrine falcons, griffon vultures.**

Potholing:

You can go underground and discover the marvels of the different caves and caverns hidden beneath the reserve. Find out more at the Tourist Office in Durango.

Durango Tourist Office
Tel.: 94.603.00.30

Organised activities:

Different companies organise

active tourism activities in and around this Nature Reserve. Ask about them!

Abseiling, rock-climbing, potholing, archery, hill-walking, mountaineering, orienteering, mountain-biking... all there for you to make the most of them.

NATURLAN 94.430.46.57

KIRIK 94.491.17.46

TROKA 94.432.04.45

Potholing:

ESPELEO AVENTURA

94.416.02.96



A view of Urkiola pass.

occupy an important part of the surface, there are still a number of vast natural beech forests such as those of Arangio, Eskubaratz or Urkiolamendi.

The Cantabrian holm oak, well represented in this area, is to be found on dry, stony hillsides such as those accompanying us on the way up Urkiola pass from Mañaria. There is even the occasional *Limodorum abortivum* orchid, rare in the Basque Country and exceptional this far north.

Highly interesting rupicolous flora sends its roots down into the rocky cracks and fissures. Given their enormous variety, we will only mention three typical mountain species: the Pyrenean colombine, *Anemone pavoniana* and *Androsace villosa*. There are also little enclaves of incipient peat bogs, where the

water flows very slowly, soaking into the ground, thereby creating a home for plants exclusive to this medium and which are rarely found in the Basque Country, such as *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *Rhynchospora alba*.

The fauna is also remarkable. Urkiola saw the killing around the mid-19th century of what was considered to be the last bear in the Basque mountains, although there are doubts as to whether it really was wild or whether it had escaped from captivity. Birds are well represented by a variety of outstanding species, both rupicolous (griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, peregrine falcon, Alpine dunnock, rock thrush) and forest species, particularly birds of prey (goshawk, sparrowhawk, European honey buzzard, hobby, European short-toed eagle, etc.). Among the carnivorous mammals are the marten, the polecat and the wild cat.

In the area around the Alto de Urkiola stands the "Toki Alai" farmhouse and information centre with its permanent exhibition of the natural and cultural characteristics of the Reserve. We strongly recommend a visit to this centre in order to get a better understanding of the landscape.

URKIOLA

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Classification	<i>Nature Reserve</i>
Municipalities	<i>Dima, Durango, Izurza, Mañaria, Atxondo, Abadiño and Aramaio.</i>
Area covered	<i>5,955 ha.</i>
Height	<i>Varies from the summit of Anboto (1,330 m) to Uzkuleta stream (240 m).</i>
How to get there	<i>From Bilbao and Donostia-San Sebastián by the A-68, or by the N-634 to Durango, and from there the BI-623.</i> <i>From Vitoria-Gasteiz by the N-240 to Legutiano, and from there the A-623 via Otxandio to Urkiola pass.</i>
Information	<i>Toki-Alai farmhouse.</i> <i>Tel. : 94.681.41.55</i>

NOT TO BE MISSED...



ULLIBARRI GAMBOA RESERVE

An ideal spot for a day-trip and very busy during summer, this reserve has areas in which to swim and practice water sports. The surrounding views are magnificent.



Otxandio

This village has a long tradition of agriculture and stockbreeding and is home to one of the most interesting examples of Baroque architecture in Bizkaia, the church of Santa Marina. It also has a delightful Casa Consistorial (Town Hall).



URKIOLA SANCTUARY

Built in honour of San Antonio Abad and San Antonio de Padua, this is a place of pilgrimage to which many religious processions are made. Work was started on the current building in 1898, but it still conserves the original Baroque bell tower.



Durango

The old part of this town has a medieval layout, not to mention an excellent selection of historic and artistic buildings.



El orrio

This noble town stands out for the elegance of its architecture. Obvious examples of this are the majestic houses and the church of Santa María de la Concepción, with its magnificent Renaissance bell tower.

