

The **municipality of Polaciones** is a place that many people still have yet to **discover**. It's accessed through the winding **Estrecho de Peña Bejo**, also known as **Caos de Bejo**. At the top of this area, a valley protected by the **Peña Sagra** and **El Cordel mountain ranges** opens up; and the **Nansa River** passes through the middle of the valley as if it were its backbone. When its course reaches the **Estrecho de Peña Bejo**, it's dammed at the **La Cohilla reservoir**, one of the greatest engineering feats of the **20<sup>th</sup> century**.

The villages that make up Polaciones are: **Belmonte, Calcedo, Cotillos, La Laguna, Lombraña, Pejanda, Puente Pumar, Salceda, San Mamés, Santa Eulalia, Tresabuela** and **Uznayo**.

**What does Polaciones have to offer?** It has beautiful landscapes every season of the year, in which you can enjoy peaks over 2000 meters tall like the **Cuernón** or a forest of **beech trees** like the one in **Tresabuela**. You can explore this great natural area of **high ecological value** on foot, bicycle or even snowshoes. You'll be able to **live and experience long-preserved customs** like listening to the **rabel**, the **Zamarrones carnival** or the intricate way they **worked with wool**. And as a final experience, savor its excellent **cuisine**.

However, to see the **oldest remains in the area**, you need to go up to the dividing line between Polaciones and The Campoo – Cabuérniga Commonwealth. This is where the **Sejos – Cuquillo megalithic area** is located, one of the most important must-see places in Cantabria which we'll tell you more about later.

**Polaciones** was a link between the Cantabrian coast and the Castilian meseta. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, **Hernando Columbus**, son of Christopher Columbus, described the trail that connected **San Vicente de la Barquera with Medina de Rioseco and Toledo** in his book ***Cosmography***. At the **Piedrasluengas** mountain pass, the goods that came from San Vicente like **salted fish, linen and other fabrics**, ran into the **pilgrims** coming from **Santo Toribio de Liébana** and who were continuing their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela via the French Route. In the **north of Palencia**, part of this route is known as the **Camino Real de la Valdivia**.

There was a wave of **emigration to America** in the **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries**. Some people returned with large sums of money which they used to build grand homes in their native villages. That's one of the main reasons there are so many **baroque houses** in these villages, like the grand **Lombraña House**, the Viceroy's House in **San Mamés** or the **Colonels' Houses** in **Puente Pumar**.

Now, we'll **reveal** more details about the **ESSENTIAL** places you need to **EXPLORE**, and interesting facts that will make your visit more fun.



## ESSENTIALS

### ① LA CRUZ DE CABEZUELA LOOKOUT POINT

Going through the **Piedrasluengas mountain pass**, on the **CA – 281** road, is the **Cruz de Cabezuela** lookout point. From here you can see the **Picos de Europa** (Peaks of Europe), the **San Glorio mountain pass**, and mountain peaks like the **Bistruey** and **Peña Labra** to the left, which is shaped like a chimney.

The sights here are absolutely breathtaking.

In this same place you can find **The Meeting of the Purriego and the Lebaniego monument**. Both names are the demonyms of the inhabitants of Polaciones—**Purriegos**—and **Liébana**—**Lebaniegos**. The lookout is the meeting point between the two valleys and symbolizes the close relationship between their people. If you go visit it, we recommend you pay extra attention to their clothing, the umbrella on the back, and the ‘**albarcas**,’ which are wooden clogs that are typical in the north of Spain.

### ② SEJOS – CUQUILLO MEGALITHIC AREA

At the border of Polaciones and The Campoo – Cabuérniga Commonwealth is the **Sejos – Cuquillo megalithic area**, which is one of the most important in Cantabria. For about 2.5 kilometers, there are large **menhirs, mounds, landmarks and circular structures with slabs of rocks**. One of the most unique groups of these being 5 menhirs on which there are engravings. Nearby are the **Hitón and Cuquillo** standing stones, whose positioning suggests their purpose was to set territorial limits. It **was declared a Cultural Interest Asset under the Archaeological Area sub-category**.



You can **reach it on foot from either Uznayo or Puente Pumar**. The route is shorter from Uznayo, but from Puente Pumar, the return is amazing because you pass through the peat-filled area of **La Avellanosa hill**, where you can see a predominantly black landscape due to the peat.




Vehicle access is restricted to only those with council permission.

### ③ LA COHILLA RESERVOIR

The **Nansa River** is one of the **most used** rivers by man in Cantabria. Its waters have been used to make **mills and iron foundries** run. However it's during the **postwar period** that it's course is most modified due to the construction of **dams, artificial canals** and **mini-power plants**.

Construction of the **La Cohilla Reservoir** began in **1943**. The challenge was building the **highest vault** in Spain, with a **height of 116 meters** and 282 meters across at the crown. The dam was filled for the first time in **1951**.


 At the top of the reservoir, there's a **lookout point** with stunning views of Estrecho de Peña Bejo. Geologically, it's a fascinating area since the mountainside is directly from the **Triassic Period 250 million years ago!**

#### ④ THE CARNIVAL OF LOS ZAMARRONES

Los **Zamarrones** is a very old tradition with **Pagan origins** that represents **fertility**, the expulsion of **evil spirits** and the preparation for the arrival of a **new season**. The main characters are the **black and white 'zamarrones.'** On their **journey** around the villages of Polaciones, the **white zamarrones** jump with a **hazel rod** to grab everyone's attention. Tied to the end of the rod, is a **piece of cloth or a sack** called a "**zamárgano**," which is wet with water or mud to **splash the single women with**. This tradition is called "**Sabaneo**." Then, while accompanied by a **troupe reciting in verse**, the zamarrones dramatize and event that occurred in the valley.

The **clothing** of the white **zamarrón** is very striking: a shirt and white pants, black or brown leg warmers, a Manila shawl tied at the waist, a tie, silk sashes, and the most spectacular, the **hat**. It's made of straw but lined with white cloth and **decorated with flowers, silk ribbons, and jewels**.

However, the black **zamarrón** is dressed in **tattered and sooty clothes**.

 It's celebrated on a different day every year, because despite its Pagan origin, it's been Christianized and now it coincides with the **first Saturday after Ash Wednesday**.

#### ⑤ THE VILLAGES: 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

In the **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries**, a number of people **emigrated to America** in search of wealth. A few achieved their goal and returned to their **native villages with money**. That's the main reason why if you go around the villages in the area, you'll see religious buildings and **huge houses**, the majority of which were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Next we'll suggest some buildings of interest:

- **Puente Pumar:** The Superior Colonels' House, The Intermediate Colonels' House, and next to the church is the parsonage known as Coronela or the bishop's house. To find out more about them, you can go up to the lookout point in Puente Pumar, where there's panoramic views of the village and an information panel.
- **San Mamés:** the Montes-Caloca House and the Fuente Antigua House.

- **Lombraña:** the grand Lombraña House, which is also known as the La Cotera House or the Damas House. It's one of the most attention-grabbing because it has a two-toned façade. It's been declared an Inventoried Asset.
- **Tresabuela:** San Ignacio de Loyola church from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was promoted by the Rábago family.

A prominent member of the Rábago family was **Francisco Rábago y Noriega**, who was known as Father Rábago. He was **Fernando VI's confessor** and the driving force behind the **creation of the Bishopric of Santander**.

## 6 THE RABEL OR THE BANDURRIA

The **rabel**, or the **bandurria** as it's called in Polaciones, is an **instrument** with a rich **cultural history**. In the **1980s** it almost disappeared, but thanks to people in **Campoo and Polaciones** who still knew how to play it, the tradition was **revived**. The **bandurria** was an instrument that was played in **kitchens** when everyone gathered in the **Hilas or Jilas** (meetings among neighbors to make yarn from wool), especially during the cold winters.

If you want to **listen** to this instrument accompanied by **ballads**, you should come to two festivals: **El Encuentru**, which takes place on the Saturday closest to St. John's day, and the **Rabel Competition** in Pejanda, on the last Saturday in **August**.

The rabel, or **bandurria**, is a **wooden** instrument with **two strings** and **stringed bow** which makes noise when you rub them together. The strings on the bandurria and the bow were traditionally made with **hair from a horse's tail**!



**Pedro Madrid**, a rabel player and professor at the Torrelavega Folklore School, was born in Tresabuela. He played the rabel for the **soundtrack** of Mario Camus' film "**Los Santos Inocentes**" ("**The Holy Innocents**").

## EXPLORING

Polaciones is perfect if you love hiking. There are old roads, menhirs and mountains like Peña Sagra just waiting to be explored, provided that you're in good physical shape.

Next, we'll tell you about a few of them:

### 1 EL POTRO TRAIL

This trail is part of the **route that connected the coast with the Castilian meseta**. There are **several alternatives** depending on the place you choose to start from. We recommend **connecting the municipalities of Polaciones and Tudanca** by starting in **Pejanda** and finishing in **Tudanca**, or **viceversa**. It's a **linear route** and given its length and incline, we recommend taking two cars and leaving one at each point.

From **Pejanda**, follow the road to **Callecedo**, where you take the **path** that goes to the **left** towards Peña Sagra. You'll **climb uphill for 6 kilometers** until you reach **El Potro lookout point** where your mouth will probably drop once you see the **amazing panoramic views** of **La Cohilla Reservoir, Tudanca** and mountains like **La Concilla, Peña Labra** and **Tres Mares Peak**. The trail then goes downhill to a junction called **Collado de Abeyán** (it's also known as "Joza Abellán" or "Jozalabellán"). It forks into two paths that lead to San Sebastián de Garabadal and La Lastra. To continue the trail, take the path to **La Lastra** and from there, **Tudanca**.



Technical information and recommendations:

- ▶ **Starts and ends:** Pejanda - Tudanca
- ▶ **Length:** 14 km
- ▶ **Duration:** 5h
- ▶ **Level:** moderate
- ▶ **Type of track:** linear
- ▶ **Incline:** It depends on the starting point. Consult the track
- ▶ **Type of path:** road and path
- ▶ **Signpost:** partial
- ▶ **Drinking water:** a fountain in Tudanca



Notes:

1. We recommend downloading the track of the route on your phone and check the weather forecast beforehand.
2. Wear good hiking shoes and take a walking stick.
3. Only leave your footprints on the ground: throw any trash you accumulate into the correct bin when you return.
4. Live in harmony with the environment: observe animals from a distance and respect the plants. If you walk quietly you may find some pleasant surprises.



[Download more information and track HERE](#)

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## SEJOS – CUQUILLO MEGALITHIC AREA FROM PUENTE PUMAR

The **Sejos – Cuquillo megalithic area** is a group of **menhirs, mounds and circular structures with slabs of rocks** from the Neolithic period. It's located on the **border of Polaciones and The Campoo – Cabuérniga Commonwealth**. We suggest **setting off from Puente Pumar** if you plan to visit. At the exit **towards Uznayo**, you'll see a **path on the left next to a barn**. The path goes uphill until you reach a fence that separates the **Saja and Nansa valleys**. You'll notice a **diagonal boulder**. It's the menhir known as **Jincá Rock** or "El Hitón." Up ahead, enclosed within a shabby **wooden fence** are the **Sejos Menhirs**. They are a group of 5 stone slabs—two of them **engraved with signs**—almost 3 meters long which could have been part of a cromlech monument.

To return, go back to Jincá Rock and go back around the side of **La Concilla**, the cone-shaped mountain that's on the right. The route will take you to Los Escajos meadow and from there to the **peat-filled Avellanosa hill**, which is a surprisingly black landscape. It's a fairly visible trail that will take you **back to Puente Pumar**. During **rutting** season, it's fairly easy to listen to the deer challenging each other.

**\*\*If you want to go up to Sejos taking an easier route, you can set off from Uznayo.**



Technical information and recommendations:

- ▶ **Starts and ends:** Puente Pumar
- ▶ **Length:** 16 km
- ▶ **Duration:** 6h
- ▶ **Level:** moderate
- ▶ **Type of track:** circular
- ▶ **Incline:** +725 m. /-725 m.
- ▶ **Type of path:** forest road and path
- ▶ **Signpost:** no signs
- ▶ **Drinking water:** a fountain in Puente Pumar



Notes:

1. We recommend downloading the track of the route on your phone and check the weather forecast beforehand.
2. Wear good hiking shoes and take a walking stick.
3. Only leave your footprints on the ground: throw any trash you accumulate into the correct bin when you return.
4. Live in harmony with the environment: observe animals from a distance and respect the plants. If you walk quietly you may find some pleasant surprises.



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