

## THE GERMANS AND THE LANDSCAPE OF THE *SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA*

**Manuel Mollá Ruiz-Gómez**

Department of Geography – Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Guadarrama Mountain range was practically unexplored and almost unknown, with the exception of Casiano de Prada's studies, and even feared by *madrileños*. Contrary to what occurred in Catalonia with Excursionist Society, this activity lacked followers in Madrid. Things changes radically and rapidly in the final quarter of the century, with the creation of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and the growth of hiking / trekking as fundamental element of the Institution's pedagogy. Together with the pedagogical development of excursions, there was a significant emphasis on natural sciences, and the *sierra* became and object of study for scientists such as Salvador Calderón, José Macpherson e Ignacio Bolívar, who turned the Guadarrama Mountain range into their research laboratory.

In a few years, the Guadarrama Mountain Range went from being a great unknown to become a symbol of the new ideas and scientific contributions that evolved from the aforementioned *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, from the Spanish Royal Society of Natural History and the National Museum of Natural Sciences. On one hand, the philosophical thought of Francisco Giner de los Ríos gradually defined the range's character as a representation of landscape that identifies Castile and Spain while granting hiking a spirit that reached farther than the simple pleasure of enjoying nature, so as to endow it with moral value and the regeneration of a national ideology that was devastated by the political trajectory of Spain and, especially by the loss of the Philippines and the last American colonies. The Guadarrama landscape achieved value as much from an aesthetic perspective as an ethical one. Giner de los Ríos wrote:

«In its most rigorous definition, landscape is the perspective of a natural territory; like the painting of a landscape is the representation of that perspective. At the least, however, one should reflect upon the diverse elements in which it's fitting to analyze the enjoyment we feel upon finding ourselves in the midst of nature, in open space, truly free (which is never the case in cities), one notes that this joy is not only visual, but also that all of our senses take part in it. The local

climate; the pressure of the springtime atmosphere upon our face, the odor of the flora, the noise of water, the leaves and the birds; the sense and the consciousness of the agility of our muscles, the well being that balances all the forces of our being, and, even the taste of the fruit, as prosaic as that might seem to the sensitivity of an affected and romantic esthetic... everything, sometimes more, sometimes less, contributes to the production in us of that state and the preparation of the second moment, the ideal moment, of free representations, that extend our enjoyment past the horizon of emotion.» (Giner de los Ríos, 1915, 36).

The appearance of new theories in the field of Natural Sciences, especially in geology and botanical research, allowed scientists such as the already mentioned Calderon, Macpherson, and Bolívar and their respective students, to find in the Guadarrama range the perfect laboratory for analysis and the application of these theories. In this way, in a few years very important studies will be developed regarding the age of the range, its lithological or botanical and even glaciological aspects, especially since the arrival of Hugo Obermaier.

Of course the educational and scientific activities were not the only factors that spurred the *guadarramista madrileños*, given that from a very early date there was also a sporting element in excursions, related basically to alpinism and winter sports, including hiking. As a result of this activity, which was carried out in a rather poorly organized manner at first, sporting organizations arose, such as *The Twelve Friends*, among whose founders are found such important practitioners of *guadarramismo* as Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós or the poet Enrique de Mesa, to name just two, and which later gave rise to the *Peñalara Royal Alpinist Society*, very linked to the institutionist circles and the scientist of the *National Museum of Natural Sciences*. The sporting activity was sponsored and stimulated by the members of *Peñalara*, who were always very connected to the ideas of Giner and the institutionists.

During recent years there has been an attempt to complete the panorama of excursions in the Guadarrama range in that period, with attention paid to those groups to which Bernaldo de Quirós referred in one of his articles:

«(...) and along the paths of the Sierra only rare and very limited groups circulated, with a very intimate and reserved character, such as the students of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, directed by Francisco Giner and Manuel B. Cossío; the group of the Society of Military Excursionists, headed by the then major José Ibáñez Marín; the naturalists from the Museum, with Ignacio Bolívar at their head, and the German group, guided by Carlos Coppel. From that date [1902], unforgettable for us, our group of five [Bernaldo, Enrique de Mesa, Enrique García Herreros, Luis Gorostizaga, and Enrique de la Vega] was one more, the most reduced, without doubt, but not the least enthusiastic.» (Bernaldo de Quirós, 1929, 236)

What was left was to know in greater detail the «group of Germans,» and their guide, Carlos Coppel, who could be found in the Sierra from the earliest times, at least from the beginning of the twentieth century, but it is reasonable to think that his sporting activity in the Sierra was prior to that date; on one hand, because Carlos Coppel arrived in Madrid during the eighteen sixties (where he founded a watch factory—25 and 27 Fuencarral St.—that

acquired great prestige) and, secondly, because there are new items referring to the sporting activities in which this German watchmaker participated that date from the press of the last years of the century:

«We publish a photograph of a group of German cyclists that recently visited this capital, who received a very warm reception.

In honor of the the distinguished excursionists, the *madrileño* cyclists and the German colony have organized parties, which were given a dignified finale with a lunch that was served on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in the German embassy.

Baron von Seefried, the chargé of business affairs, represented the embassy in the name of Mr. von Radowitz, who is currently on vacation in La Granja.

The following day they continued their excursion, and were accompanied by a large number of Spanish cyclists to Aranjuez and Toledo.

Graciously impressed by the affectionate reception that Madrid offered them, the intrepid travelers charged the representative of the German Velocipedic Union, Carlos Coppel, with the task of publicizing through the press a testimony of their sincere gratitude.» (Cuenca, 1898, 115)

Contrary to what occurs with the excursionists and sporting groups in general that were associated with the *Peñalara* society or the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, neither Carlos Coppel nor the members of his group, mentioned by Bernaldo de Quirós, leave written evidence of their sporting activities, which leads one to imagine a group of pure sportsmen that use the Guadarrama as a place to practice the sport, but without the evaluations that the local excursionists, linked to the aforementioned societies, proffer upon the landscape of the Sierra. It is fitting to consider that, given the highly accepted sporting spirit of the members of Madrid's German colony, people like Bernaldo de Quirós find themselves in the need of transmitting the advantages of exercise in fresh air, while, at the same time, he and so many others demonstrate and explain to the *madrileños* what their mountain landscape is like and in what way it can be read and experienced.

This impression caused by Coppel's group is confirmed in a text written by Ignacio Bolívar, «At the Dawn of Alpinism,» in which he speaks of another of those German sports figures who left their mark in Guadarrama. In this case it is also a watchmaker (his establishment was at 12 Sevilla St.), Fernando Ganter, a native of Lenzkirch, in the Black Forest, whose company was acquired by the Mauer family, also watchmakers, who had established themselves at 15 Carrera de San Jerónimo (In 1919, still on this street, one finds advertisements of the watch company of the Widow of Alberto Maurer). Ignacio Bolívar, the provider of this information, does not state precisely in which years Ganter is linked to the Sierra. However, it seems that already from the eighteen eighties Ganter, as well as Coppel and Maurer practiced alpinism in Guadarrama. From one of the scarce texts of the journal *Peñalara* linked to the «Germans» it is possible, however, to discover that in 1899 (number 32 of the journal), two of them, Hausen and Ohsman, climbed to the *Yelmo* (the Helmet), possibly on one of the first ascents after the one that Casiano de Prado realized before 1862, the year of publication of the first part of his *Physical and Geological Description of the Province of Madrid*. In spite of the apparent commonality due to their origin and profession,

it seems that Ganter, according to what Bolívar describes, did not have much contact with the «group of Germans.» It is worth reproducing part of the text that Bolívar dedicates to Ganter because he presents an excellent description of the two forms of understanding mountain excursions.

«Don Fernando Ganter (...) was a man who was accustomed to the sports of alpinism that he continued to practice, making frequent expeditions to the sierra. A man of robust complexion and sanguine temperament, cheerful and expansive spirit, we soon established a friendship with him and practiced this sport in our sierra, for which reason his name should not be unknown or forgotten by the alpine societies and to that purpose these lines are dedicated. Because we, and even before us professor Mariano de la Paz Graells and the engineer Casiano de Prado, had covered the sierra in every sense, coming to know all its changes and hidden corners, experiencing, without a doubt, like us, in the excursions to which I refer, all the joys that the contemplation of nature offers and also all the fatigue that alpinism presents, but we did it with a personal goal motivated by the incentive of zoological, botanical or geological studies and with the hope, which was not lost, of arriving at the discovery of species or data that was new to science. This was not the case with Ganter, who made these excursions as pure sport, being, therefore, the pure type of alpinist. He knew all the paths and trails of the sierra, and even without them, when covered with snow, he knew how to guide himself to his destination, better equipped and provisioned than us, who lacked the appropriate clothing for the situation and the polished and suitable equipment, as is the custom today, and had only a simple pouch in which the room for provisions competed advantageously with hunting utensils, imposing upon us a forced sobriety, but one that we accepted with gusto in exchange for our not lacking the slightest detail of our entomological arsenal, composed of filters, sieves for ant-hills, flasks, pins, boxes, etc. Ganter, on the contrary, with his lucid and comfortable attire, had himself followed by a squire who thus created, although inversely, the immortal pair of Sancho and Don Quijote, since the squire was tall and thin like Cervantes's hero and was the carrier of a basket of provisions at whose edges one could spy the silver necks of bottles that were without doubt destined to favor the intake of provisions and celebrate the ascent to the high peaks of the sierra, from which, contemplating at his feet the immense plain that ends in the distance at the hills of Toledo and the foothills of the Gredos Sierra, and forgetting humanity's miseries while gazing at that incomparable panorama, attacked his provisions with appetite and gaiety without forgetting to douse them with repeated draughts, from which one can infer that they would enjoy the double view that Heine attributes to those who find happiness in liquor, thus assuring that their steps would not be so sure upon their return as they were in the ascent. The arrival of our alpinist at the Navacerrada inn, generally already upon his return from his excursion, was always a cause of great animation; he found us gloomy and tired from our trek, resting on the benches that extended the length of the kitchen walls, with our elbows resting on the table awaiting the simple garlic soup that we had ordered in order to reserve our provisions for the following days,

and with the prospect of spending the night in that posture because of the servants' refusal to provide us with beds. Ganter, without aforethought, and without hesitation faced with those denials, taking advantage of his prestige among the innkeepers, entered their very rooms, turning the entire house upside down, and soon appeared dragging pallets and mattresses that, aided by us, he extended along the floor of the adjoining room, where in a round bed, conquered at such a cost, given that it is to be assumed that such plunder was not to be achieved without protest, our path traveled bodies rested, gaining new vigor, that we definitely needed, for the following day.» (BOLÍVAR, 1922, 61-62)

A lucid and well written comparison of forms of being in the mountain and understanding it, as well as a humoristic homage to the first Guadarrama alpinist, according to his words. With no criticism meant toward Ganter, in reality Bolívar ennobles the spirit of the scientific, curious and austere hiker, an offspring, also, of the Ginerian spirit that Ganter obviously lacked. For the latter the Sierra is a place in which to practice one's favorite sport, surely without differentiating it from any other mountain. The fatigue and the physical exercise were repaid with good food and better drink, whether in Guadarrama, the Pyrenees or the Alps, if we pay attention to the Bolívar's words. The botanist, however, would subscribe to the words of Eduardo Martínez de Pisón:

«The Guadarrama Sierra is a territory, but it is also an idea, it is a legacy of cliffs, pine groves, oak groves and fields and, at the same time, a cultural heritage. Those cultural currents have given rise to a deep appreciation of the mountain, the stream, the snow, the field or the town, values that coexist with other less disinterested processes, typical of the growing and dominant city that lies at its feet: in the face of that bustle, the Sierra is still calm. The Guadarrama Sierra can not be explained without this complementary view. To go on an excursion is also to locate the quality that belongs to the mountain, its nest of silence.» (Martínez de Pisón, 2007, 178)

Perhaps, therefore, one might say that the group of German hikers was the least guadarramist of all, or more sporting than guadarramist, the initiators of a tendency that would grow rapidly over the ensuing years, toward values in which the pure state of the sport, competition, would count more than anything, and would leave as a minority, although always present, the followers of Giner de los Ríos, who do not cease to value all that, over more than a century and a quarter, they have been learning about Guadarrama. Today more than ever the Sierra, all the sierras, have become full of those «snobists» that Bernaldo de Quirós detested, or the Fernández Navarro's «druggists.» But there will always also remain a way of observing and understanding the Sierra that conserve intact that spirit that made Bernaldo de Quirós, during his voyage of exile through the lands of France, The Dominican Republic, and Mexico carry a trunk full of well classified rocks from Guadarrama. It is for that reason that it seems most fitting to conclude the text with another of the paragraphs extracted from Martínez Pisón's already mentioned work that reflects in a very few words so many years of the history of the Sierra:

«Peñalara is the great gift of Guadarrama. It is the capital complement of the combination of valuable fragments that constitute the entirety. And that cliff that forms the peak of the Sierra is also a cultural landscape: it is in the evaluations, it is present in writers' pages and the canvases of first rate painters, it has given rise to studies, to books, to teaching, to mountain climbers who live a cultivated activity on their path to the top, to nature lovers who have achieved in its conservation a highly civilized level. Peñalara is at the same time a mountain and an accumulative symbol.» (Martínez de Pisón, 2007, 180)