

Seles



Town:

Abadiño.

Location:

As the seles are spread over a wide area of the Urkiola Natural Park, visitors are recommended to go first to the Park's Toki Alai Interpretation Centre, located on the slope of Mt. Saibigain, close to the Urkiola mountain pass.

Opening hours:

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., weekends only.
Telephone: 94-681.41.55

Other places of interest nearby:

The Interpretation Centre houses a permanent exhibition on the Urkiola Natural Park as a whole. Publications are on sale at the Centre, which also offers visitors additional information.

In his History of Vizcaya, Juan Ramón Iturriza says that, in his time, towards the end of the 18th century, there were enormous numbers of seles in the province. Today, two hundred years later, although many of them remain in place, they are practically unknown to us.

A sel is a circular piece usually of pasture land with a stone set at the centre. There are two types of sel, for winter and for summer. The former are generally found close to river beds and the latter sited high up on hillsides or close to mountain peaks.

Size was also a defining factor, as well as siting and seasonal use. The winter seles were larger, some 494 metres in diameter, and the summer ones noticeably smaller, at 240 metres in diameter. With very few exceptions, these measurements apply to virtually all seles throughout the period they are mentioned in records, running from the Middle Ages to the 19th century.

Although, theoretically, a sel could be sited just about anywhere, the number of cattle allowed to graze on each one was fixed. It is said that for every 24 head of cattle, one winter sel and 2 summer ones were required, which means that the surface area available per head in winter and summer was about 8,500 square metres.

While the summer seles in cattle-breeding zones seemed to have been free grazing areas, the winter seles had other functions to fulfil, including that of providing shelter for the cattle. In the Encartaciones area of the province, many seles were in fact covered by low trees that provided shelter in harsh winter weather.

The seles were also known as *cortas*, *bordas* or *sarobes* and have given rise to a host of place-names in the province whose origins are still recognisable today.

Most of the winter seles, sited on river banks, were laid out in the 16th century. Originally used as grazing land, their function gradually changed to crop growing, mostly maize. The smaller seles, however, kept their original function much longer. Some have even survived to the present day, especially in some mountain areas, notably Urkiola, where just a few years ago a dozen were recorded.

The remains of many seles can still be identified in Gorbea, Oiz, Sollube and in much of the Encartaciones area. All of them are wooded areas dotted with circular plots of open land that still proclaim their original condition of seles or, to give them their Basque name, *kortas*.

At one time, seles were communally owned but for private use, but privately owned seles are increasingly being located. They either belonged to the Church - owner of an important series of seles in Cenarruza - or to private individuals. Some seles are actually located on private land.



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