Introduction

The walk starts and ends in Rabat (Malta). It comprises countryside views of fertile valleys surrounded by hills. The walk passes through dry farmed land as well as maquis. Beyond the hamlet of Bahrija, a detour takes you to Migra Ferha where the Normans landed in the 11th century to bring to an end the Arab rule in Malta. The walk meanders along coastal cliffs offering stunning views and a glimpse of the islet of Filfla. The site of a Bronze Age village, cliff farmhouses as well as Roman quarries, can also be seen along the way. Mtahleb’s chapel, built during the mid-17th century stands high above the cliff-farms and overlooks the fertile valley. The walk continues towards Fiddien valley from where it proceeds towards the finishing point at Rabat.

The text read in conjunction with the route map (found in the centre pages) enables you to follow the route more easily. The numbers in the text correspond to the numbers on the map.

How to get there

The starting point is at Rabat, more precisely at the Nigret roundabout (near the Busugrilla Housing Estate) at the western extremity of the town.

Public Transport

You can get there as follows;

✓ From Valletta, route buses 80 and 81 alighting at the Nigret roundabout.
✓ From Sliema, route bus 65 which stops at the Saqqajja terminus, close to Mdina and approximately 1.3 km away from the Nigret roundabout.
✓ From Bugibba, route bus 86 which also stops at Saqqajja terminus as above.

For the return journey the same route buses can be taken from the same place you have alighted prior to starting the walk. It is advisable to check bus timetables before you embark on the walk.

Own Transport

It is possible to use your own transport to reach the Nigret roundabout as the walk ends there too. It is suggested that you park your vehicle in the car park of the housing estate.

Length of the walk (excluding detours) is 13 km. Duration is approximately 4.5 to 5 hours.
The Walk

The walk starts at the Nigret roundabout, at the lower end of Vjal il-Haddiem. Turn left to follow the road sign to Fiddien.

The road passes by some farm buildings and eventually reaches the open countryside. You will soon reach a horse-drinking fountain at a road junction. Follow the Bahrija sign. A short downhill road flanked by a row of mature mulberry trees reaches a building carrying a marble commemorative tablet in Latin. It states; ‘This is a gauging chamber for the two 12 inch cast iron pipes taking water from a spring nearby on to the Sentini Reservoir.’ The replacement of old clay pipes with cast iron ones was considered a major project at the turn of the 20th century.

Next to this building there is a cobbled water-lane running along the watercourse and a picnic area recently provided as part of a project to rehabilitate the valley.
As you walk along the valley, you will come across steel mesh cages (gabions) filled with stones. These are used as soil retaining walls. To encourage the growth of flora, the top gabions contain soil in a degradable plastic bag. The idea is to emulate the typical Maltese rubble wall. The clump of young trees just behind the rubble wall in the picnic area is the white willow (Salix alba). Years ago willow branches were used for a hand musical instrument (Iz-Zafzafa) and in basketry. Further downstream, this valley runs into the Chadwick Lakes.

Walk a few paces beyond this picnic area to reach a road junction. Take the road on the right leading to Bahrija. (Note that the road on the left will be your return route of this walk from Mtahleb). The first part of the road to Bahrija is lined with Mulberry trees. On the right, you will soon notice the huge covered reservoir of is-Sentini. This collects spring water from the surrounding area. After chlorination, the water runs to Ta’ Qali Reservoir in Attard, practically following the same route as the aquaduct built in 1615 by Grandmaster Wignacourt. At the time, the aquaduct was a major engineering feat by which spring water flowed by gravity from this area all the way to Valletta some 15 kms away.
The road starts ascending, flanked by fields enclosed in rubble walls and a few farm buildings. On your right you can see fertile agricultural land and further down, Ta’ Koronja valley. No wonder the Knights tapped the abundant springs here to supply their new capital city, Valletta, with that precious commodity – water.

Beyond a farm livestock unit on the left and a few Aleppo pines, you reach a road junction. Take the road on the left and walk towards the hamlet of Baħrija.

On your left, you will see the tall radio antennae of the Wied Rini Maritime Coastal Station of the Civil Aviation Department. Walk along the main road to Baħrija hamlet until you reach a large square named Il-Misrah. In this square there are catering facilities, a small public garden with public toilet facilities and children’s play equipment. The name of the garden is “It-Tifla tal-Barnuza L-Ħamra” (Little Red Riding Hood) as indicated by the miniature cottage at the end of the garden.
Across the road from the garden a low rubble wall encloses a corbelled hut, underneath which there is an ancient underground rock tomb. This site is private. From here you can also see, to the North behind the new buildings, the old 16th century chapel of St. Martin the Bishop. Activities are organized in November to commemorate the feast of this local patron. These include a particular village fête where, rumour has it, one can find the best fattened turkeys on sale in anticipation of Christmas.

Through small irrigated fields. You may see large pumpkins stacked on roofs of farmhouses. Pumpkins are harvested in late summer. These are taken to the vegetable market, a few at a time, according to demand, until the next harvest is due. Pumpkins are stored on the roof to protect them from field-mice. Ignore the narrow downhill lane you soon meet on your left and follow the right turning in the road past an old farm with long stone water spouts on its roof. Then follow the first left path, which abruptly descends into the valley. Soon a wide asphalted steep track takes you to a cluster of canes. This path leads you under a canopy of canes and over the stream bed.

Continue along the main road flanking the garden. Beyond the Primary School, the road starts going slightly downhill until a road junction is reached. Turn left into a country road passing
Once over the stream bed, turn right following the path running alongside, but slightly above, the stream bed for approximately 200 metres until the path turns uphill to your left. In wet conditions watch your step. Note the wetland flora of the streambed. Towering above is the Il-Qlejgha rocky outcrop behind which is the site of a Bronze Age village.

The Bronze Age people probably came from a region in the South of Italy after the decline of the Temple people. The Bronze Age covers the period from 2500 BC to 800 BC. Settlers established small, well-defended hilltop villages of simple hovels, to meet the conditions prevailing at the time. Archaeological finds from the area yielded pottery fragments of earthenware utensils bearing a Calabrian influence. Probably, the Baḥrija Phase saw its inhabitants as livestock breeders or herdsmen, rather than farmers. It is easier to defend livestock by protecting it in the fortified village than protecting the crops in the open fields below. Raising livestock in this area was economically viable due to the presence of nearby springs, valleys carrying flowing waters and lush vegetation. The sheer cliffs rising from the sea also offered protection to the village.
Once the path reaches a junction just beneath the rocky outcrop, the walk continues to the left. However if you wish to catch a glimpse of the site of a Bronze Age village, turn temporarily to the right following the footpath for about 100 metres. The narrow path passes through a cleft in the rocky outcrop and slopes slightly down to another path at a lower level. To your right you can see a number of caves ensconced in the rocks and having their entrances walled up by rough hewn stones. At path level, large boulders can still be seen forming part of the rubble walls, probably forming part of the village protective wall. Beyond the gateways the land is private. Retrace your steps to point.
Walk uphill for a few metres where you can enjoy a good view of the islet of Filfla beyond the cliffs. The path continues uphill and passes a weathered rockface on your right studded with caper plants (*Capparis spinosa*). On the left, across the valley, the Bahrija hamlet stands out on the ridge. A few more metres ahead and a solitary villa on the left is reached. The path now develops into an asphalted countryside road. Walk past this building, on the asphalted road, with the Tal-Vigarju Cliffs on your right.

Proceed further and soon, on your right, you pass by a solitary farm building perched on the edge of the cliffs. On the left, there are a number of dry-farmed fields reclaimed some twenty years ago by Government and tenanted to farmers. At the next junction, walk straight on enabling you to walk closer to the cliffs. **4** The road to the left also leads to Mtaħleb but through a route away from the cliffs. This hamlet will be seen at a later stage of this walk.
The road continues on for a few metres up to a Y junction. Both roads lead to the same path but the one on the right is suggested for a good bird’s eye view of the intensely cultivated terraced fields. The walk continues its winding way along a stretch of rocky landscape. In spring this is a veritable rock garden, adorned with low-growing, hardy plants and shrubs including the wild thyme (\textit{Thymus capitatus}) which beekeepers look to, for the production of choice honey. This is a typical garigue habitat. The path soon meets the elbow of an asphalted road. Turn left.

At this point, if you wish to take a detour and are prepared to tackle the steep return walk to this point, you can turn to your right down the asphalted road to reach the spectacular viewpoint of Mi\~gra Fer\~ha. The road winds downhill for about 1.5 kms flanked by a mixture of tall trees of Aleppo Pines (\textit{Pinus halepensis}), Acacias (\textit{Acaciia saligna} and \textit{A. cyclopis}) Eucalypts (\textit{Eucalyptus sp.}), and the hardy Tamarix (\textit{Tamarix africana}, \textit{T. gallica}, \textit{T. articulata}). Through the trees you can catch a glimpse of Filfla, now a marine nature reserve.
At the end of the asphalted road and before the car park is reached, there is a gorge, which runs down to the sea. According to tradition this was the place where Count Roger the Norman and his army landed in 1090 when he brought to an end the Arab rule over Malta. The close proximity to the old capital city, Mdina, made it easier for Count Roger to surprise the Arab garrison. The small mouth of the gorge reaching the sea level is called Migra Ferha (traditionally held to mean the joyous arrival).

The road ends in a car park perched on the cliffs from where daring shore fisherman throw long fishing lines. You may see the cane fish traps as well as floating lines towed away in the open sea by small rafts carrying a sail (mrejkba). Avoid walking close to the cliff edge due to occasional sudden gusts of wind as well as the continuous erosion of the cliff face. This is a spot to feast one’s eyes on the blue Mediterranean sea below as well as the surrounding cliffs. The detour ends here. Retrace your steps slowly uphill until you reach point 6.
Proceeding along the country road, you pass by a solitary farm on your right. The cliffs overlooking the sea are on your right. On the verge of the cliffs there is a solitary building. This was one of the buildings used by tuna fishermen in Malta up to the beginning of the last century to store their fishing tackle and to spot the shoals of tuna below. These buildings were also used by the British services as part of their coastal defence system. Stretches of garigue flank the road on both sides. The winding road soon passes by a cluster of farmhouses on your right.

When the road starts narrowing, you should see on your left old Roman quarries still carrying the signs of the preparatory chisel work needed to quarry blocks of stone. Although situated on private land, they can be easily seen from the road which flanks them.
As the road veers away from the cliff edge, lush deep valleys can be seen below. The presence of a number of springs makes for more intensive farming activity.

Soon you will see across the wide valley, the chapel of Mtaħleb hamlet perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the valley. Look towards the chapel, you can the simple abodes of farmers nestling in the cliff faces. In fact, quite a few farms in the cliff face make use of caves as an integral part of their living space.

A close scrutiny of the cliff faces, will reveal several openings indicating caves and dug outs still in use as storage spaces or for livestock. Although the farmhouses and chapel stand on a private estate, the chapel is open to the public for religious functions.

Large numbers of round bright green shrubs called spurges, some as high as 1.5 metres, can be found along the cliff sides and edges. In our islands, one finds four spurges, one of which is endemic to Malta (*Euphorbia melitensis*).
Mtahleb Chapel
The chapel, dedicated to the Nativity of our Lady, is one of a number of chapels, known as ‘Juspatronati’. Such chapels were built by noblemen, the Knights and rich gentry, on their estates or as part of their palaces, as their own private chapels. The chapels are financially provided for by means of a foundation. The church authorities used to grant them the ‘Juspatronatus’ or the right to nominate the rector. This chapel, which is a juspatronatus of the noble D’Amico Inguanez family, whose family seat is at Mdina, is accessible to the public for prayers and for divine service. The chapel, constructed in 1656 stands on the site of two earlier chapels built on the same foundations. It was enlarged to its present state and its steeple rebuilt after a storm damage, during the late part of the past century.
The road continues along the edge of the cliff, and proceeds through a rocky area until a T junction is met. Turn left. The winding road is again flanked by a plain with a predominance of the tuberous rooted plant, the Asphodel (Asphodelus sp.).

A large squat building surrounded by a high perimeter wall looms into view. Walk towards this building and, just before you reach the perimeter wall, take the narrow road to the right. Walk the few metres down this road until you reach a portal indicating private ownership of the whole estate behind it. The coat of arms of the Maltese noble family which owns this private estate can be seen on the top of the portal. Next to the portal, on your left and hugging the rock face, there is a mile-stone. This was one of many installed during Victorian times in the countryside, to indicate the distance in miles, from that spot to Valletta. This was a measure to prevent horse driven cabs from overcharging transport fares to British Military personnel stationed in the area. Was this system the forerunner of the taxi-metre?
Retrace your steps to the squat building, turn right and continue walking for a few metres until a narrow road on the right leads to the Chapel. From the church parvis one gets a stunning bird’s eye view of the countryside below as well as a peep of the simple abodes nestling in the rock face below. The chapel, the fertile valley below, the farms sheltering under the cliffs, the rich macquis and a solitary clump of a date palm provides countless opportunities for the photography enthusiast.

You should walk back to the main road and turn right.
Ahead are a number of wind operated water mills towering above irrigated fields, while on the right there are stretches of garigue. Soon the road starts going slightly downhill, past some farm buildings. The walk continues straight on downhill.

Continue walking and soon, you pass over an iron grill stretching across the road. This is a water culvert to collect precious water runoff from the asphalted road into an underground reservoir to be used for irrigation purposes. The road passes through a small cluster of farmhouses and continues downhill. A side road on your right is soon reached. It indicates the way to Dingli Cliffs. Continuing along the main road, you should meet a row of tall Eucalyptus trees flanking the road. They are growing along a ditch which actually is the beginning of a valley, Wied il-Buzbiez (Valley of Fennel).

Note on the right a large stone marker with the letters GR carved on its face. GR stands for King George (of England) in Latin.
The marker indicates that the field is government property (then the colonial government). The road is now flanked on both sides by fertile fields, many of which are irrigated offering a wide range of vegetables.

Walk along the main road. A few metres beyond the left turning to L-Andrijiet, there is a second left turning to Fiddien. Turn left here. As you walk towards Fiddien Bridge, note the row of tall poplar trees (*Populus alba*) on your left. A chainlink fence is seen on the edge of the watercourse as you approach the Fiddien bridge junction. Note a large Pecan nut tree (*Carja oliveaformis*) behind the fence next to the Fiddien Bridge. The walk now comes back to the picnic area, the same site visited at the beginning of the walk. Keep going uphill following the road sign to Rabat. On the left, there is another row of Mulberry trees, which ends in a Y-junction.

At this junction, a horse water
A horse drinking fountain can still be seen, a silent reminder of the times when environmentally friendly carriages and carts plied our roads. The walk continues uphill towards Rabat along Tal-Qlejgha road until the starting point at the Busugrilla Housing Estate. Nearby is the historic town of Rabat. Should you wish to visit the area again a stroll through the quaint streets of Rabat is recommended. You can also visit Mdina, one of Malta’s main attractions.
Tips for the road

The route is suitable for hikes and pedal bikes. Only when crossing the Bahrija valley [between points 2 & 3] one is advised to dismount and proceed on foot.

The local weather forecast should be checked before setting off as there is hardly any shelter from adverse weather conditions along the route. A raincoat can come in handy in inclement weather.

Allow enough time to complete the walk in broad daylight. Make allowances for time required for resting, taking of photographs and observing nature.

It is advisable to wear appropriate footwear and a hat. A packed lunch and a bottle of water are also recommended.

Always follow the designated route. Short cuts are to be avoided as many fields are privately owned.

Some rubble walls are marked with blotches of white paint and may also carry the letters RTO. These markings indicate private property.

As part of the walk includes a stretch of cliffs, avoid leaving the footpath to walk closer to the cliff edge for safety reasons. Rock erosion as well as sudden gusts of winds are real dangers. Safe view points along the route are indicated.

In some valleys and gorges, mobile phone reception may be poor or none at all.

Respect the fragility of the countryside. Do not climb over rubble walls or throw stones in valleys or over cliffs. Do not take souvenirs from historical sites or from the countryside. Do not disturb animals, plants or their natural habitats. Leave only your footprints behind you and nothing else.

Be culturally sensitive and respect local customs. Take photographs but respect the privacy and dignity of others. Ask permission before photographing people.

Bird trapping and hunting are practised in the countryside. There are, however, strict regulations determining areas where such activities are permitted and times of year where no such activities are allowed.
Facilities

At Rabat, one can find all facilities one would expect to find in a town, i.e. catering facilities, public phone booths, banks and public conveniences, local council offices, the district health clinic and Police Station.

At Bahrija hamlet, there are only a few catering facilities and a public phone booth. Between Bahrija and the finishing point at Rabat there are no such facilities.

Useful telephone numbers.

- Emergency & rescue 112
- Ambulance 196
- Rabat Police Station 2145 4554
- Malta Tourism Authority 2291 5800
- Rabat Health Centre 2145 9082/3
- Rabat Local Council office 2145 5000
- Telephone enquiries 1182
**Bahrija Walk**

Explore fertile valleys in the areas of Bahrija, Mtaħleb and Fiddien and observe traditional agricultural operations. Walk along coastal cliffs and enjoy the stunning views as well as a glimpse of the islet of Filfla. Discover a Bronze Age village, farmhouses built in the cliff face and old Roman quarries.

**Other walks in the series**

**Girgenti Walk**

Passing through Buskett - Għar il-Kbir - Girgenti Valley Siġġiewi - Il-Maqluba – Qrendi

**Dwejra Lines Walk**

Passing through Mġarr - Binġemma - Dwejra Lines Speranza Valley - Mosta.

**Marfa Ridge Walk**

Passing through Għadira - Marfa Ridge - Ponta ta’ l-ċarax Daħlet ix-Xmajjar - Ir-Ramla Tat-Torri - Armier Bay Marfa - Paradise Bay - Ras il-Qammiegħ - Red Tower

**Tas-Silġ Walk**

Passing through Marsaskala - St. Thomas Bay - Tal-Munxar Xrobb il-Għajn - Delimara - Tas-Silġ - Marsaxlokk.

The project is being launched in 2002, the World Tourism Organisation’s International Year of Eco-Tourism.

**PRICE**

Lm1

Malta Countryside Walks is a partnership project of: