

Garden Group Almond Blossom Walk – Wednesday 4th February



Due to the recent high winds, our planned visit to a member's garden on Cumbre del Sol had to be cancelled due to storm damage. With only a week to arrange an alternative, we discovered that the Vall del Pop U3A's Wednesday Walkers had arranged an Almond Blossom Walk on the 4th February, and their Group Leader, Gail Stewart, welcomed our group to the walk.

There were nearly 50 people on the walk although they were mainly from the Wednesday Wanderers. Many of our group members had other commitments on a Wednesday morning and could not attend, but those of us who could make it had a great day.



As can be seen from the photos, it was warm and sunny and thankfully without the strong winds which we had experienced recently.

The walk started from the car park of the Tourist Information Office in Jalon and we meandered our way along tracks taking us out of Jalon and along the valley towards Alcalali, passing vineyards and old Moorish villas (for sale!).





It didn't take long before we reached the almond orchards, which were in magnificent bloom and we soon had the opportunity to stop and take some pictures.



The path took us towards the foothills of the surrounding mountains and we were soon surrounded by almond orchards.



talking with many of the other walkers gave us the opportunity to find out quite a lot about the growing of almonds:

Almonds are not actually nuts but fruits coming from the same family as apricot, plum and cherry but without the fleshy outer covering. They are mainly grown around Mediterranean countries and North Africa, although there are a lot now grown in USA (California). In fact the largest production countries are USA and Spain.

There are two forms of the plant, one (often with white flowers)



produces sweet almonds,

and the other (often with pink flowers)



producing bitter almonds.

It is best not to eat bitter almonds raw because they are poisonous!

There are over 30 varieties of almonds and they are one of the oldest cultivated trees around, probably mainly because of the nutritious value of the nut.

After the bloom the petals drop. The leaves grow, soon the fuzzy grey-green “fruit” appears.



The hull is what you see and it continues to harden and grow. Around July it begins to split open. Between mid-August and late October (depending on the variety and growing conditions) the split widens which exposes the shell and this allows the nut to dry. The whole nut and stem finally separate and shortly before harvest, the hull opens completely. The almonds are ready to harvest.



Right before harvest the orchard is prepared by sweeping the ground to clear away debris.

The farmers then “pick” the fruit by shaking the trees! The sound of this is often heard by some of the Jalon residents! Alternatively, mechanical tree “shakers” are brought in to carefully shake the trees, which knock the nuts to the ground. The nuts are allowed to dry before they are collected. They are then transported to the huller where the nuts are removed from the outer casing (hulls). The nuts are then either transported for sale, whole, or taken for further processing i.e. to be shelled, blanched, chopped or ground.

Our journey took us further along the valley passing houses with a wonderful backdrop view of mountains and almond tree blossom.



We eventually arrived at one orchard that could epitomise the beauty of spring, and we all stopped to admire the view and take our cameras out again!



and yours truly could not resist taking another picture of the flower blossom!



Eventually the walk drew to a close as we passed by the almond orchards and into orange groves which tempted quite a number to indulge in some juicy refreshment!



Our objective (Alcalali) was in sight as we more briskly made our way towards another refreshment opportunity!



We had to travel a little distance along the main road before we entered the village to find the nearest bar which, was located near the church!



After recouping we headed back to Jalon, expectantly via a short cut that didn't materialise! Gail could find no way through!



So we had to return to the highway arriving safely back in Jalon, having enjoyed a great walk.