

*LOS SILENCIOS*  
Nature and Culture











**Access by plane:**

Santiago de Chile to Córdoba - 1 hour  
Río de Janeiro to Córdoba - 3 and a half hours  
Buenos Aires to Córdoba - 1 hour fifteen minutes  
Ushuaia to Córdoba - 3 and three-quarter hours  
Buenos Aires to Santiago del Estero - 1 hour twenty minutes

**Access by car:**

From Buenos Aires 950 km. (10 hours)  
From Córdoba 240 km. (2 and a half hours)  
From Santiago del Estero 230 km. (2 hours)

**Access by bus:**

From Buenos Aires: 15 hours  
From Córdoba: 3 and a half hours



The *Los Silencios* reserve lies in the southern reaches of the Gran Chaco plains, the only arid subtropical forest on the planet. This vast forest, which we call the *Monte*, sweeps across the province of Santiago del Estero through northern Argentina, into much of Paraguay, Bolivia and southern Brazil.

Like many others, this ecosystem of wooded plains is now in danger due to indiscriminate woodcutting and the unceasing degradation of its habitat.

Buried deep in the heart of the continent, the *Monte Argentino* has been a land of mixed blood and cultural exchange since pre-Columbian times. These Andean and Amazonian peoples, subject to centuries of Spanish colonial rule and Moorish influences, whose lands were later crossed by English and French trains, were the true forerunners of globalization.

When the Spaniards arrived in 1550, the lush wooded plains stretching between the Dulce and Salado rivers were the most populated area in what is now the Argentine Republic. These early Europeans settled down there, turning the *Monte* into the birthplace of our first Creoles and elevating the status of the Quichua language into a common language still spoken today. The lands surrounding *Los Silencios* were, until the beginning of the 19th century, part of the Camino Real linking Upper Peru with Buenos Aires.







The *Los Silencios* reserve covers approximately 500 hectares in the Sumampa mountain range in the province of Santiago del Estero, just over 200 km north of Cordoba International Airport.

The area is a typical example of what is known as the Chaco hill country, or monte. In *Los Silencios*, one can still find a broad array of native flora and fauna: carob trees, *quebracho*, *chañar*, *molles*, *tintitaco* and many other native arboreal species are home to a great variety of mammals. Among the groves and pastures, puma, deer, wild boar and armadillos live alongside reptiles, turtles and multiple species of birds.

One area in the reserve, which is called *Parque*, or Park, has been specifically chosen and landscaped to welcome visitors because of its beauty and tranquility. A spread of 50 hectares on both sides of the stream features terraces and gardens, while a mesh of winding trails allows visitors to appreciate different views and scenarios typical of these mountainous areas.



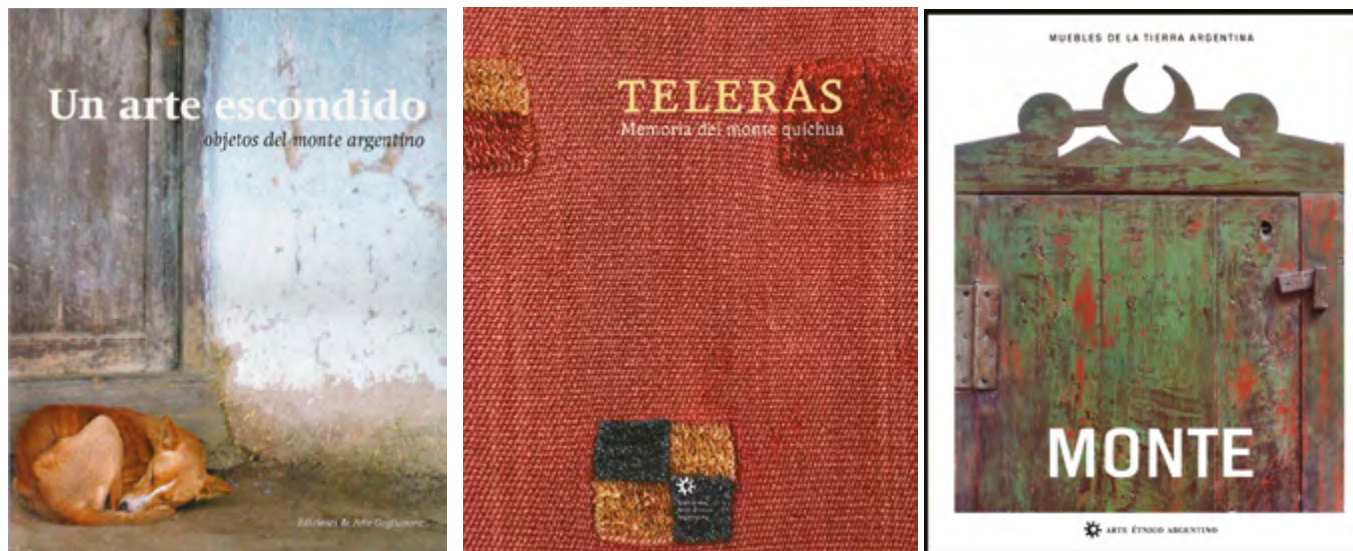


## An establishment with history

Work on *Los Silencios* reservation began in 2002, although Ricardo Paz, its owner and director, had by then already built a considerable career in the province of Santiago del Estero. Paz has been operating in the Argentine art market, including decoration and design, since 1982. He is an active proponent of the rural *Monte* culture in the province of Santiago del Estero, which has gained national and international prominence thanks to his work. Since then, he has traveled the province, in his capacity as both antiques dealer and designer, rescuing old pieces and creating new products together with local rural artisans. In Buenos Aires, he runs a section called the MONTE space in his gallery and workshop in Palermo Viejo, where he prepares orders for customers in Argentina and abroad.

Paz has carried out extensive research on the cultural history of the Monte Santiagueño, the subject of three books produced in Spanish and English: *Un arte escondido* (*A hidden art*), objects from the Argentine *monte*, published by Gaglianone in 1998; *Teleras*, a history of the *quichua monte*, published by Ediciones Arte Étnico Argentino in 2005 and *Monte*, pieces of furniture from the Argentine land, by the same publisher, in 2010.

In 1998, together with Andreina Bassetti de Rocca and Belén Carballo, Paz directed a project called A hidden art, actions for education, which was deployed in 600 rural schools in the province, and declared of national interest by the Argentine Ministry of Education.



In 2000, Paz and other partners founded the Adobe Civil Association, which has been working to improve the quality of life of rural populations in Santiago del Estero. Among its achievements are the installation of a loom school in the depths of the rural *monte*, and the formation of community work cooperatives to help locals export their wares directly without the need for intermediaries.

With the Girasol Foundation and later with The Company of Common Sense and its Argentine counterpart Caravana de Cuentos, Paz launched a project directed by the English artist and educator Inno Sorsy, focused on the comprehensive development of children and adolescents through work with stories from the oral tradition. This project has been supported in turn by organizations such as Thistle Trust, East West Trust and Fondation Tuyu, with input from local counterparts including Fundación Inicia and Fundación Naturaleza para el Futuro.

In collaboration with experts from the Fundación Naturaleza para el Futuro, Paz has led a drive to draw up inventories of native fauna and flora, and together with agronomists and water resources engineers from the INTA (National Institute of Agricultural Technology), they have planted nurseries as the springboard for a wide-ranging forestry recovery plan, including natural aquifers and rainwater harvesting. Paz has also undertaken studies into local cacti and grass species in the reserve.

In 2012, the *Los Silencios* reserve was awarded a subsidy from the Forestry Department of the Province of Santiago del Estero. The grant was made in the context of the National Program for the Conservation of Native Forests, and enabled a comprehensive management platform to be drawn up and coordinated by Dr. Marcelo Ferrero based on three pillars: education, sustainable production and conservation.

At the moment, in parallel with work on the sustainable production and conservation area, a team comprising Belén Carballo, Rosario Durini and Dolores Milberg is implementing the educational program in neighboring schools and teacher training institutes. Over 200 students and 30 teachers are benefiting each year from a range of different educational areas covered by the program.

All these actions are being supported by individual contributions as well as assistance from different organizations within the framework of a program called Project MONTE.







# Project MONTE

Project MONTE provides the structure for the development of the reserve’s social activity. With the surrounding land in a state of devastation, impoverished and given that there are no other sources of work, many locals have no option other than to emigrate. The problem is not only an ecological one, but also a social one.

The defining, and unique, feature of the *Los Silencios* reserve is that it is an ecological project which is sustained by the cultural output produced by the very same ecosystem it is trying to safeguard.

## Education

There are no public or private educational institutions in the area which offer programs aimed at fostering those particular skills geared to the use of local natural resources. Nor are there any institutions dedicated to investigating the possible lines of development for these resources, so that the local population has the option of not having to move elsewhere, and people can instead stay and work in the area where they grew up.

An education able to enhance the value of the area’s natural and cultural wealth and develop its resources is in need of teachers with a firm commitment to conservation, fully aware of the new educational paradigms. Because of this, the *Los Silencios* reserve is already undertaking activities with teachers as well as students from teacher training institutes in neighboring urban centers.

The general objectives of the Education Project are about strengthening the area’s cultural identity and promoting the need to look after its environmental heritage. This can be achieved by fostering confidence in the next generation, empowering young people by stimulating their creativity and boosting their confidence so that they can solve conflicts and undertake projects aimed at improving their own quality of life and that of the community as a whole.

The mid-term objective is to train those people who are committed to the vision of protecting rural know-how and who will be teaching at the field-school, or transmitting these values at the schools where they work.

## Sustainable production

The Reserve was created on the basis of artisan production inspired in local culture, which is what supports it today.

Crafting objects, furniture and textiles, whether antique or contemporary, is an activity typical of the area’s cultural tradition. Moreover, the sale of these items has enabled the purchase of the land where the reserve lies, being its main source of income as it has supported its development ever since it was founded in 2002.

Product design is based exclusively on local expertise and natural resources. The use of organic materials, craft work and production-on-demand, are all features that set Project MONTE goods apart from the competition, which is about industrial and serial production.

For more than 30 years, our pieces have distinguished themselves in the demanding markets of art, design and decoration, both in Buenos Aires and abroad, as evinced by numerous specialized publications.

Project MONTE is now planning for the medium-term, envisaging the construction and development of a Workshop-School which will also serve as an Information Center and Sales Showroom for the many agricultural and design products made in the area.

## Conservation

The main purpose of *Los Silencios* is to restore the area to its original state, conserving its native flora and fauna. Significant steps have already been taken in this direction, with the visit of several experts to the reserve to carry out research and inventory projects.

The degree of progress is clearly visible when one compares the current conditions of the reserve with its initial state in 2002, typified by severe degradation due to overgrazing, hunting and clearing.

In addition to restoring and protecting local flora and fauna, encouraging reforestation work and pasture management, the project is prioritizing the issue of water scarcity.







# Water: a scarce resource

Water management is a fundamental part of the project, since it impacts on its three development pillars: Education, Sustainable Production and Conservation.

In 2014, work began on the stream using only those materials available in the area, combining traditional knowledge with contemporary techniques.

Average rainfall in the reserve ranges between 400 to 500 millimeters per year, mostly concentrated in the spring and summer months. Considering that one millimeter of rain per hectare (10,000 m<sup>2</sup>) is equivalent to 10,000 liters of water, the objective is to “harvest” the rainwater and encourage people living in the area to replicate the techniques used.

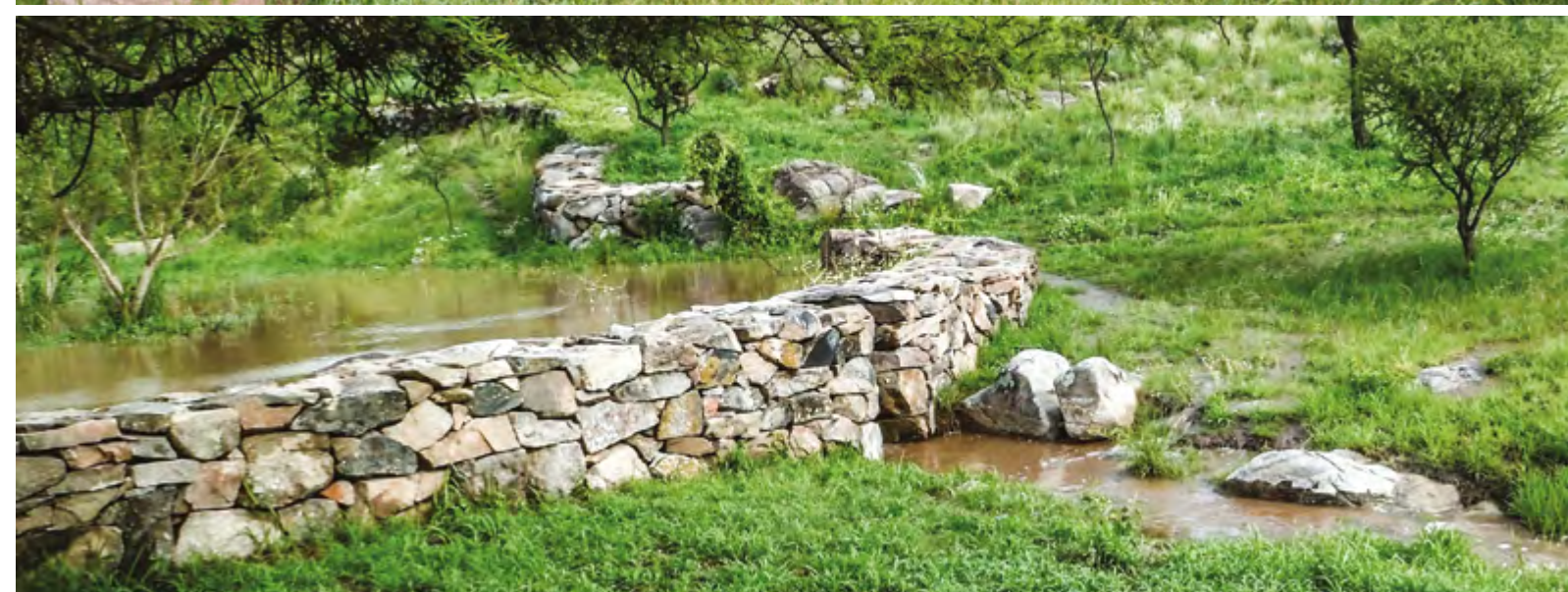
Five small dams have been built since the project began to collect summer rainwater, and another three are being planned. These dams fill up with water, making the most of the scarce and infrequent summer rains, as seen in the photographs. The rainwater which, before the dams were built, tended to disappear, whether by drainage, absorption or evaporation, is now collected, pumped out and transported by hoses to mobile or fixed tanks.

Even if the water is not extracted to be stored, the amount retained by the dams delays its flow, allowing for a slower absorption rate which produces higher humidity levels, helping to make the surrounding area more fertile.

The final objective is to ensure that the moisture accumulated throughout the course of the stream fills up the soil’s absorption capacity so that the stream finally reappears and flows along the surface of the earth.



See: <http://learn.eartheasy.com/2010/07/simple-technology-restores-dried-up-rivers-watersheds/>  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32348749>









# Sustainability and other actions

## Agricultural and livestock projects

The reserve includes a sector for organic agriculture and other ecologically-sustainable projects. Although these activities are mostly for the local agricultural community, the idea is to later expand them to include a greater range of participants.

### Expanding beekeeping work

The bee-keeping program, which includes over 30 hives on the Reserve, is receiving advice for its expansion and growth from Coopsol, a community enterprise which is also one of the leading organic honey producers in the area. The program’s existing facilities currently house the equipment required to extract, fraction and package the honey as well as other local food products—*taro*, *chañar* and *mistol*—in line with Senasa phytosanitary regulations are being upgraded. The plan is to upgrade the facilities by bringing in the machinery and tools necessary to support a more demanding output level.

### Reintroduction of camelids

The original inhabitants of this region hunted guanacos and raised llamas. There is nothing to suggest that the latter could not be reintroduced for breeding purposes on the Reserve. The idea of reintroducing camelids as a way of managing pastures and preventing fires is part of an ongoing research project under way being carried out with support from local INTA (National Institute of Agricultural Technology) experts.

## Housing projects

The geographical boundaries of *Los Silencios* lie along neighboring dirt roads for about four kilometers as well as three kilometers of the blacktop provincial route 13, connecting the city of Ojo de Agua—which lies on national route 9—with the Sumampa sanctuary. The offer of ecological lots for real estate development, just 200 km from the international airport and city of Cordoba, with access to water and a guaranteed electricity supply, could provide a way to raise funds in the future. These lots could be accessed by trails running through the heart of the Park: the owners would be asked to sign a conduct code committing them to observe behavior in keeping with the main principles of the reserve, centered on the respect and care of nature. The architectural criterion of the houses to be built should also follow a code to be established in due course.

## Tourism-related projects

### Activities for visitors

The terraces and gardens surrounding the Visitor’s Center form a natural amphitheater, and the central square, or green, of the Park and its immediate facilities have been designed to welcome small groups of visitors with many different interests.

The entire reserve is criss-crossed by paths laid to meet specific landscaping criteria. Clearings, panoramic viewpoints, some strategically-located canopies where leaves and branches arch overhead, allow visitors to enjoy the experience of strolling through the hills and the Monte countryside. Walks and hikes are guided by experts with an in-depth knowledge of local traditions, trained to accurately describe fauna and flora.

### Hotel accommodation

There are some areas in the Park which were designed with a view to being ideal surroundings for a small inn. Some corners are being prepared for small adobe “hermitage huts” in the style of the local rural architecture and in complete harmony with the landscape. Located next to an old tree in a clearing, or on the slopes of a hill, simply furnished with a bed, table, and chair, as well as wood for a stove and water for basic needs, these hermitages are ideal for brief retreats in close contact with nature.

## Research projects

### Research into archaeological heritage

Tacanas (stone mortars) and pictographs found in caves and on burial mounds, tell us of the presence of humans many thousands of years ago, well before the arrival of the white man.

Were they Sanavirones, Comechingones, Tonocotés or other tribes?

The anthropologist Carlos Martínez Sarasola is drawing up a detailed report about the original peoples living in the area where *Los Silencios* is located today, based on a survey of the many archaeological remains found in the hills.

### Residences for scientists and artists

The Park’s design includes a proposal to create a residential area equipped with modern conveniences, as well as workshops and a hall designed to host a range of diverse artistic activities.

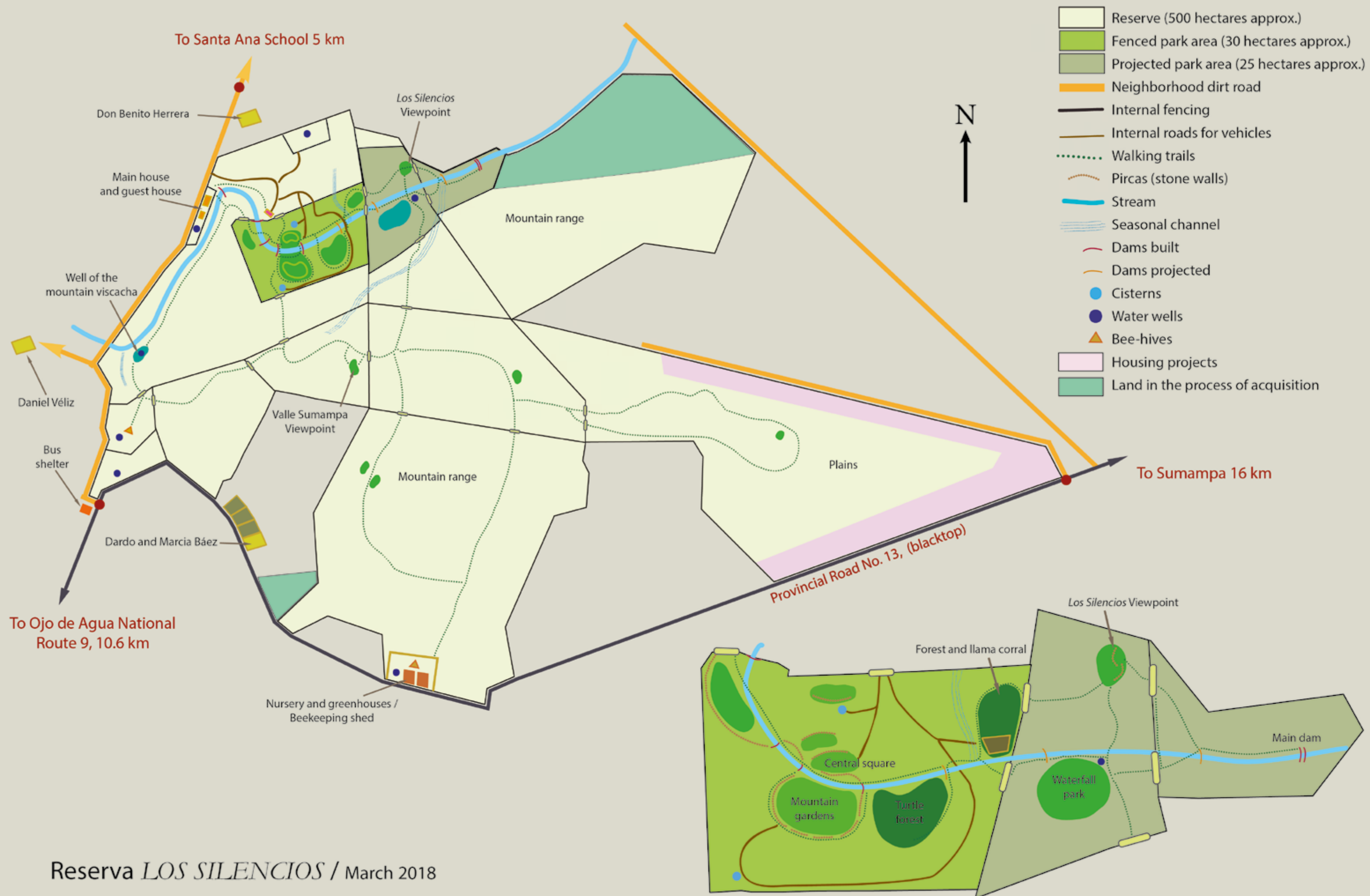
















proyctomonte@ricardopaz.com  
whatsapp +54 911 6411 1850