

Córcholis Takes to the Tracks



In 1902, a young man by the name of Córcholis visited the Sierra Almagrera. He first went to the power station just along the coast from Villaricos and then, on his return to the village, went to el Arteal by rail. His boyish excitement about the journey makes me think that it was the first time that he had ever travelled on rails. This is a translation of his published account.

These good friends (Siret and Flores) had put at our disposal a specially adapted wagon¹ to transport us to el Arteal. It is difficult for me to give an idea of my delight at the novelty of the rail journey. Imagine a toy, a child's idea of a railway, two parallel rails, so tiny and narrow that they seemed to snuggle right into the mountain's side. On them a wagon, with just a platform and two wooden benches with backs, having just enough room for six people. So, six of us settled on them; Flores, Polo, Bellod, Bachiller, Vigil and myself.



Passenger carrying wagons. Taken from Sierra Almagrera y Herrerías. Bolea

A strapping lad pushed the small wagon and we began to glide smoothly on the rails. Delighted by the originality of the vehicle, we start clapping like children with a new toy. We had only gone a few metres when our driver warned us to keep our arms tucked in. We entered a small, narrow tunnel. Really more of a borehole made by ants than a tunnel for transporting mineral, with only the marks made by pickaxes to show that it was indeed man-made.



Tunnel exit in the grounds of the necropolis.

At speed we skirted the Almanzora and then the Rambla de Muleria with its reed beds and drifts of rock rose, at intervals almost touching the trailing tendrils of the melons and the golden ears of millet. Occasionally, a

long line of wagons, laden with ore and pulled by a mule, brought our express to a stop. We were forced to step down and move our wagon to the side in order to give way for it. Once the cross over was made, we put our wagon back on the rails, and were again pushed by the strapping youth.

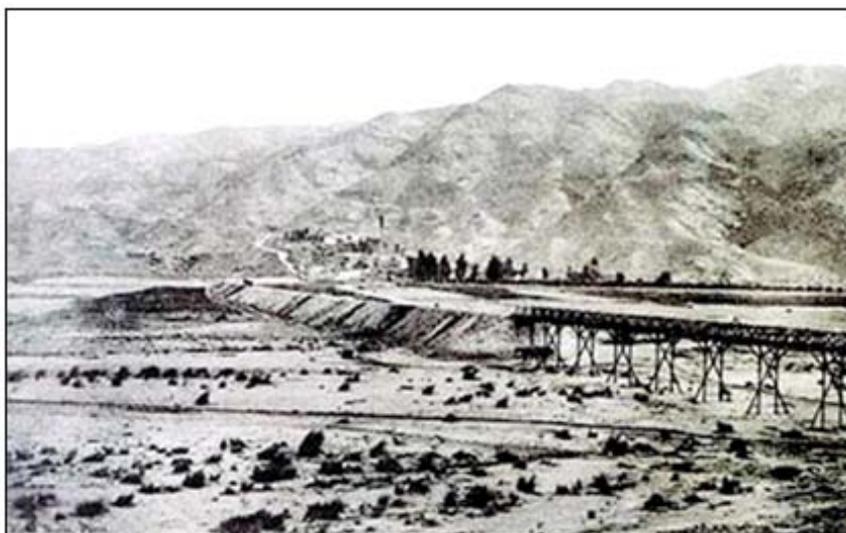
We stopped just below Siret's house, of which we had a quick tour, leaving convinced that nothing could be as simple and as exquisite as that little chalet. Surrounded by tropical plants, covered in morning glory and bellflowers, its overhanging vines seemed to be guarding over an extravagant grotto.



Siret's house today.

Close by, Carlos Brandt was waiting for us with another friend. Their wagon was coupled to ours and we continued the journey through tunnels. Gazing from our ambulant observatory at the las Herrerías installations, their chimneys wreathed in black smoke, the workshops and warehouses darkened by iron, a hue which dominates the entire landscape, and finally, the great mounds of the mine workings, which seem to have been thrown there by the earth itself in order to show the riches that lie beneath.

We escaped from the narrow darkness of the final tunnel and crossed over the bridge which straddles the rambla and there caught sight of el Arteal nestling in the foothills of the slatey mountains. About a hundred metres further on we came to a halt, went down a ramp, and were then within easy walking distance of our destination.



View of the bridge over the rambla and el Arteal.

Note ¹. The wagon that Córcholis travelled on was a converted brake wagon. The tipper part was removed and replaced with a wooden platform on which the high-backed seats were mounted. What Córcholis called the driver was the brakeman. Ordinary wagons were also converted and could be coupled behind the brake wagon as can be seen in the photograph on page 1 taken on the day that the line opened.

Brake wagon.

