

Churchyard Yews in Asturias, Spain

July 2012

The tradition of planting yews at sacred sites lives on in this part of northern Spain. Two areas were visited, (1) the north coast within a 30 mile radius of the seaside town of Ribadesella and (2) the Quiros and Teverga valleys south of Oviedo. In addition three villages on the AS112 east of Ujo are included.

Altitude is noted where sites are above 1000 ft.

The Asturian dialect is spoken here and the Tejo (Yew) is better known as the Texu or Teixu (pronounced teshoo).



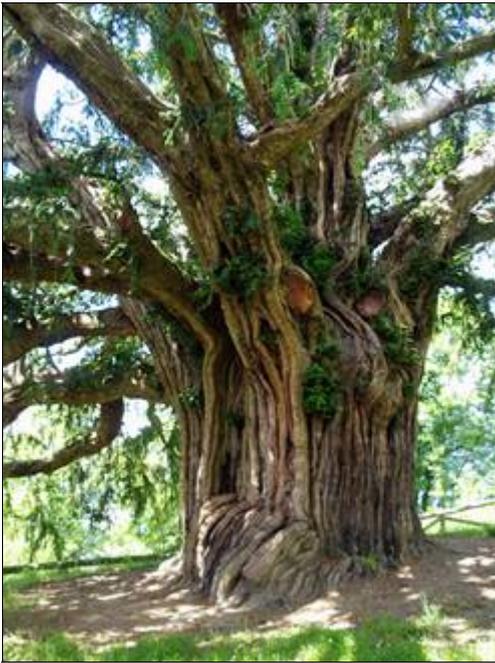
On the following pages we first visit two of the five yews in Asturias with Natural Monument status - at Bermiego and Santibáñez de la Fuente.

The remaining sites appear in alphabetical order:

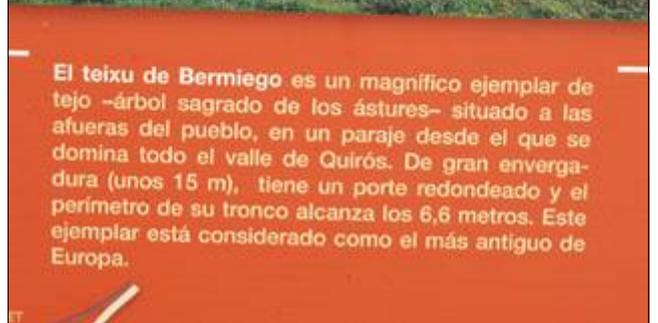
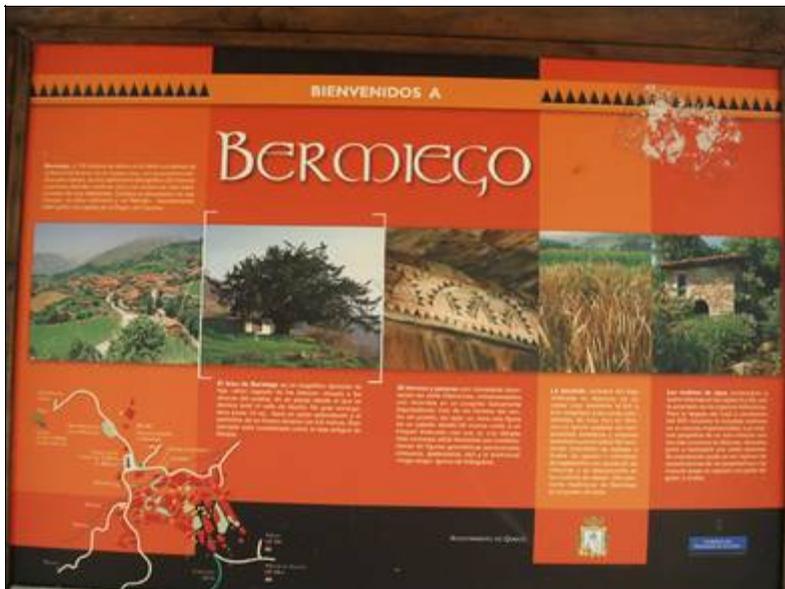
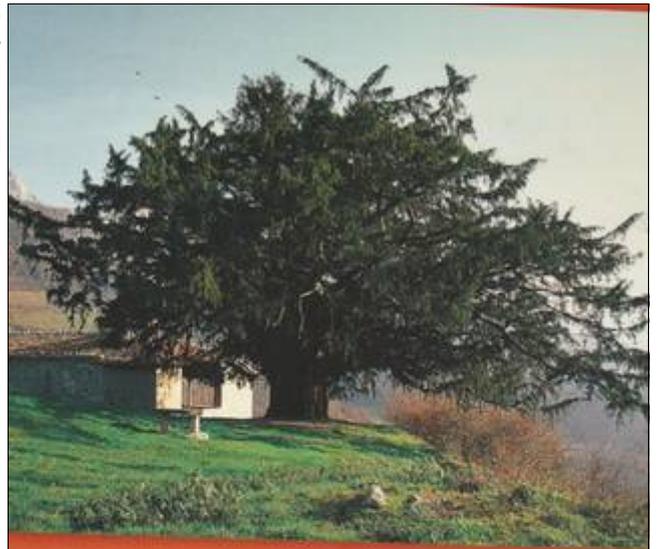
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BERMIEGO 2395 ft (730m)

A solid female yew with a girth of 22' 7" (688cm) at 3'. Above its fine fluted bole, at a height of 6/8ft, rise at least nine major branches.



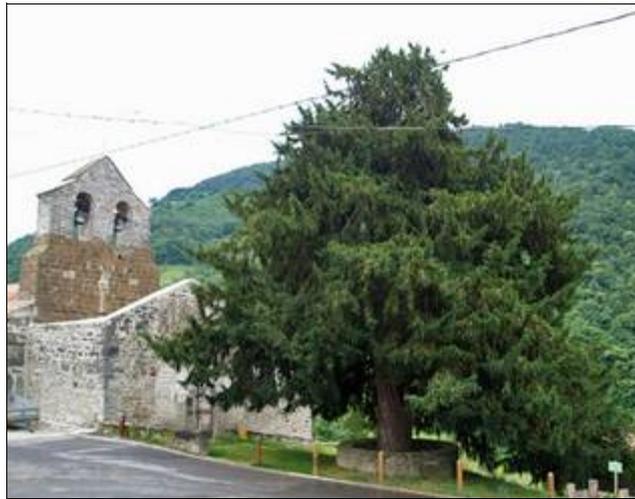
Because of its Natural Monument status the Bermiego Yew appears on signposts and information boards. Staff in the region's tourist information centres know about the tree and encourage visitors. The information board below describes it as "a magnificent example of yew - sacred tree of Asturias - situated outside of the village, in a position that dominates the whole valley of Quiros. Of large spread (some 15m), a circular trunk with a girth of 6.6m. This example is considered one of the oldest in Europe."



SANTIBÁÑEZ de la Fuente 1854ft (565m)



The female yew grows close to the church of Sant Juan de Rio. It is at the top of a steep slope and on one side branches dip well below the base of the tree. Girth was 12' 10" (391cm) at 1' and 12' 6" (381cm) at 3'.



ABAMIA



With a girth of 14' 3" (434cm) at 3', this female is the largest of three yews found here. It grows west of the church on raised ground.

Of the smaller yews, the tree growing NE had a girth of 10' 9" (328cm) at 3' and the tree growing NW a girth of 6' 2" (188cm).

ALESGA 1847ft (563m)

A male yew with a girth of 6' 9" (206cm) at 3' grows south of the church. Its fluted and twisted trunk supports many branches.



ANDRIN

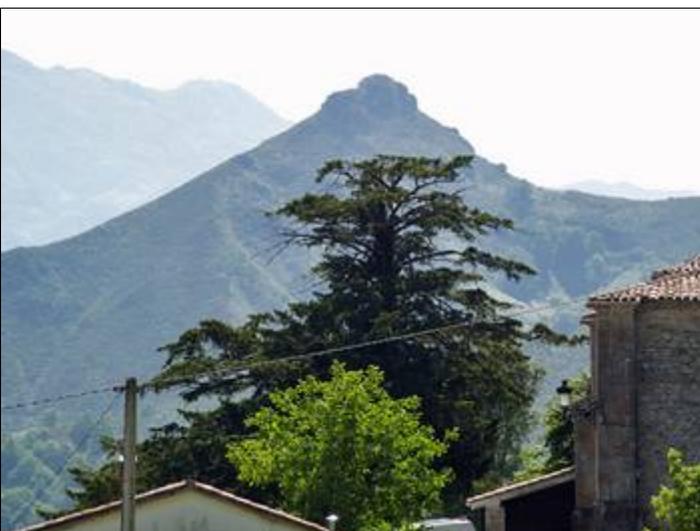
A female yew with a girth of 7' 9" (236cm) at 3' grows on the south side of the church.



ARANGAS

1197ft (365m)

A female yew SW of the church, on the edge of a steep drop to the road below. It retains its large girth of 16' 7" (505cm) at 3' to a height of between 15 and 20 feet. Even on this bright summer day the tree was buffeted by gale force winds.



BARRIO

2559ft (780m)

A small girthed female yew (4' 2" at 3') south of the church at the west end.



This was one of two sites at which an elaborate stone structure had been constructed at the foot of the tree. Its purpose is not known. The second example shown below is at La Focella.



CARAVIA

Two young yews, male and female, grow outside of the church at Upper Caravia.

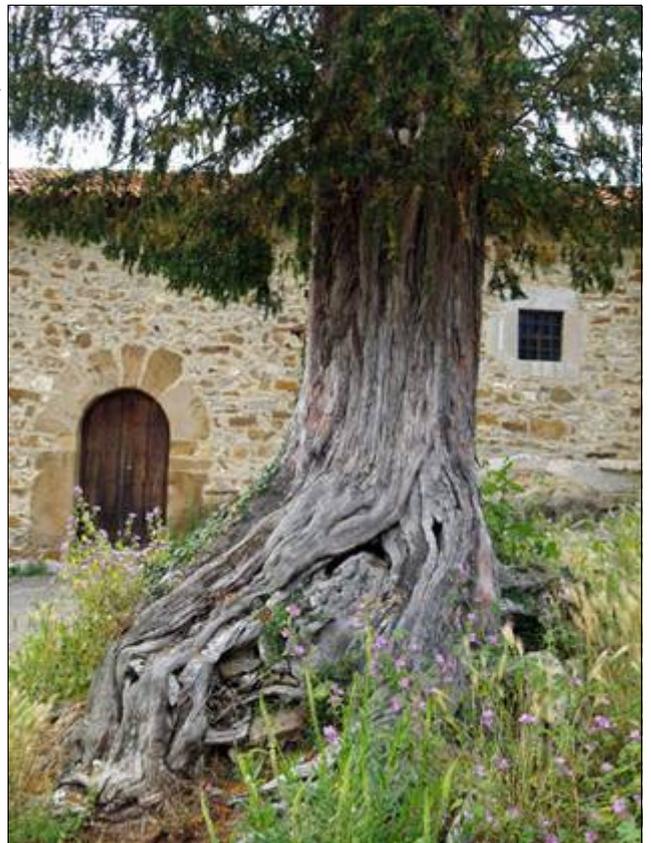
In the churchyard at Lower Caravia is a female yew with a girth of 8' 10" (269cm) above the bulging base. The fine fluted specimen grows NW of the church.



CASARES

1509ft (460m)

The church was built in 1749, suggesting an age of 260+ for the tree. It is female with a girth of 7' 7" (231cm) at 1' above a spreading root. Its poor health has led to the planting of a replacement in an adjacent garden. See p14.



FELECHOSA

2155 ft (657m)

A non-churchyard yew inside a circular wall, growing a short distance from a bar named after the tree. It has a straight trunk, a pyramidal crown and a girth of 7' (214cm) at 2'.



GOBIENDES

The yew grows 5m from a house at the edge of the churchyard. Branches facing the building have been removed leading to decay on that side of the tree. Girth was 7' (214cm) at 3'.



LA FOCILLA

3556ft (1084m)

A male yew with a girth of 7' 7" (231cm), located at the highest point of the village on a Grand Route leading into the mountains, and 30m from the church. See p5.



LAS ARENAS

This is the largest of 3 yews in the churchyard, girthing 8' 10" (269cm) at 3'. It is found on the north side of the church.



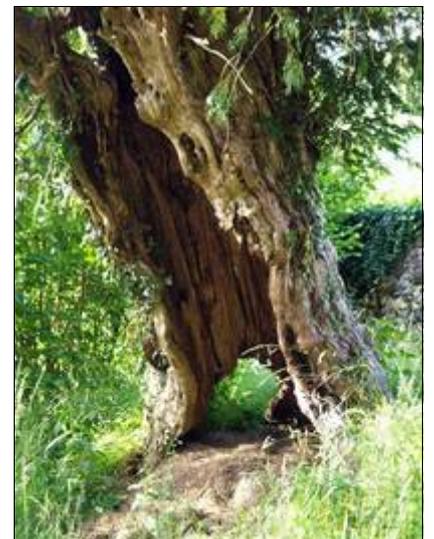
MELUERDA

Three yews now grow in a privately owned garden, next door to a bar named after the yew tree - the Bar Texu. On the opposite side of the road stands the small chapel for which they were originally planted (below right). The largest of the three is female with a girth of 10' 4" (315cm).



MIER

This male yew has probably measured above 20ft (610cm) in the past. It grows high above the road and west of the church. It is the only tree we saw showing this sort of decay, reducing the tree to a fragment of the original. As seen so often in Britain, the hollow space was being used to store decaying grasses.



OCEÑO 1738ft (530m)

Two male yews grow at the east end of the church. The largest, SE, had a girth of 12' 8" (386cm). On top of a massive bulge at the base of the tree was this fine example of *Laetiporus sulphureus*. More could be seen in other parts of its hollowing trunk.



The tree NE, seen below, girthed 10' 9" (328cm) at 3'. It has a slightly twisted solid bole, retaining its girth for a height of about 15'. Both trees appear to have been pollarded at this height.



Two young yews (left) had been planted on the south side of the church, while yews growing in nearby fields had been left in situ.



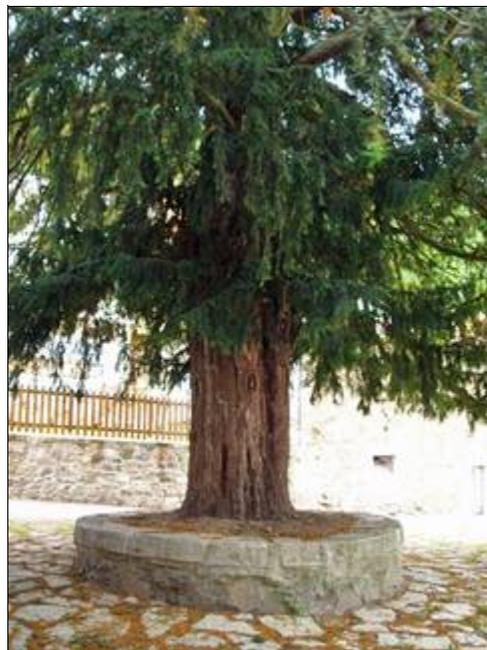
PÁRAMO

830m

2723ft

The male yew grows only a few feet from the church verandah. Its thick dark foliage makes it an identifiable landmark from a great distance.

Girth was 12' (366cm) at 3'.



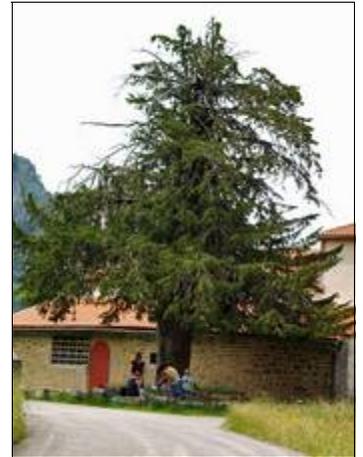
PEDROVEYA

1804ft (550m)

An old yew, a stump and a new planting.



About a third of its trunk was dead and axe marks show failed attempts to cut into the dead section. The male tree girthed 10' 9" (328cm) at 3' and had meagre, but healthy foliage. It grows inside a substantial raised space with a stone wall and room for the tree to expand. The church is on a popular walk - the Ruta de las Xanas, and has provided picnic tables and seats around the living tree.



It has also made a yew stump, of similar girth to the living tree, into a picnic table, while the recent planting on the west side of the church maintains the tradition of yews at this site.



PERUEÑA

1683ft (513m)

The male yew marks the site of a church ruin. The tree has a fluted, twisted bole, with branching above a height of about 12'. It was one of the most vigorously healthy yews we saw. Girth was 7' 11" (241cm) at 3'.



St MARTÍN del Mar

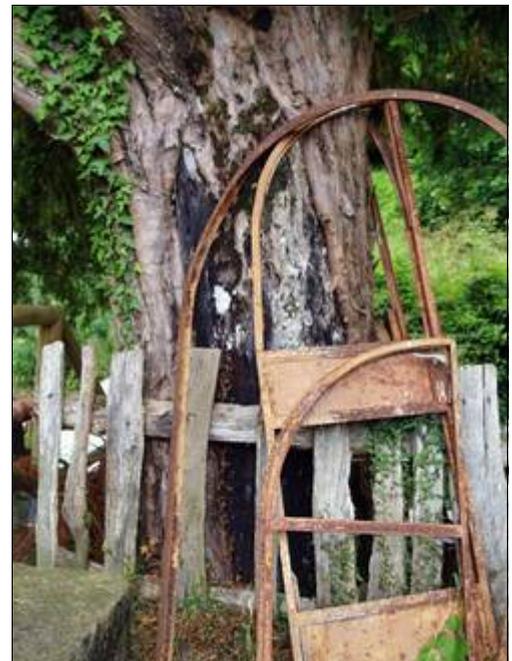
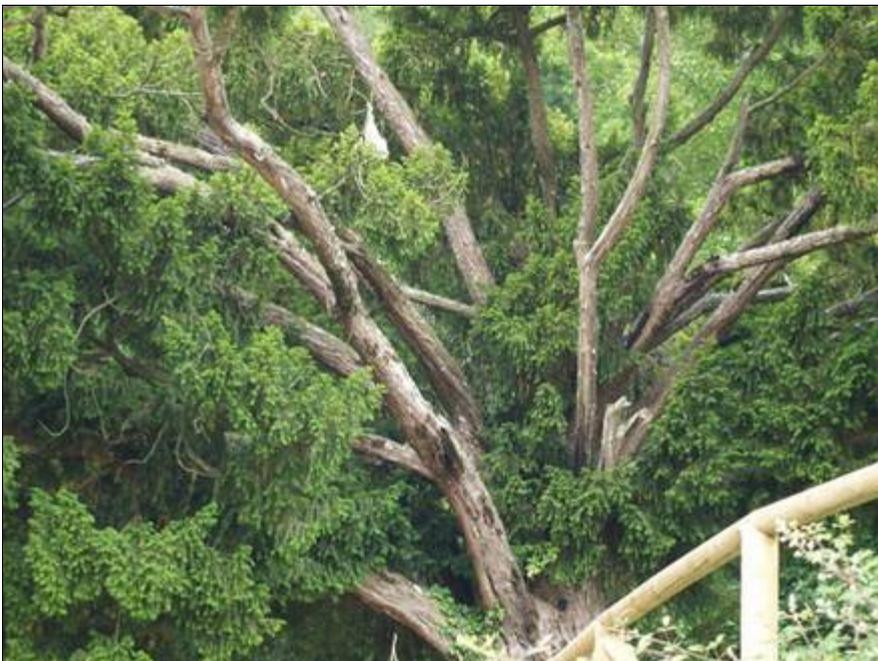
A female yew at the west end of the church, girthing 11' 5" (348cm) above its swollen root.



TORCE

2723ft (830m)

The male yew grows south of the church. Removal of its top has resulted in many lateral branches, especially on the south side, where they stretch over the road. Thick foliage unusually grows only at the extremities of the branches. On the day of the visit old metal window frames and other materials were propped against the tree. Girth was 8' 4" (254cm) at 3'.

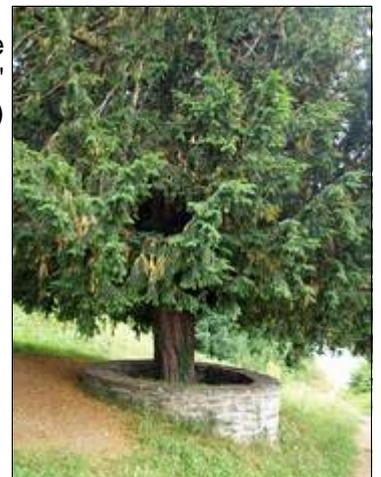


VEGA

1496ft (456m)



The male yew grows inside a large circular wall. Girth recorded was 8' 4" (254cm) at 3' and 7' 11" (241cm) at 5'.



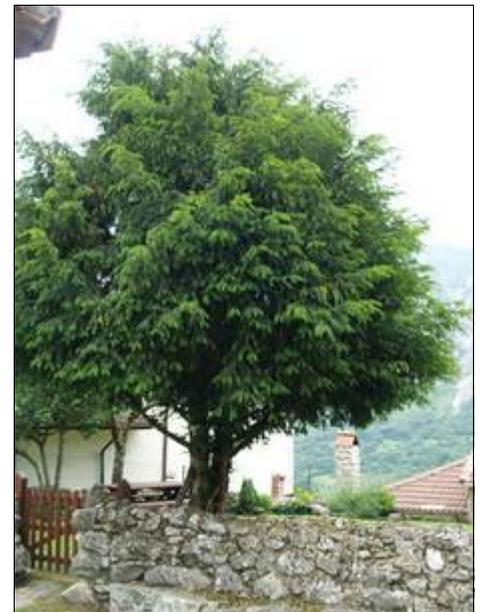
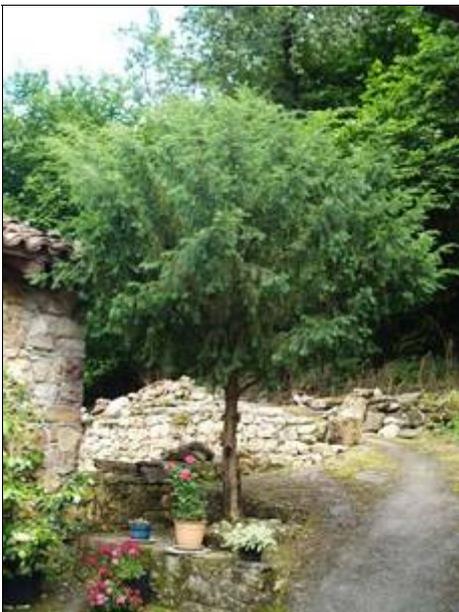
VIDIAGO

The yew, girthing 10' 11" (333cm) at 3', grows in the road at the east end of the church. It appears to have been pollarded at 8/10ft, and all but one of the vertical branches now appears dead. Small amounts of foliage are seen on the thin, lower branches.



Some garden yews

When asking for directions to the church we were taken on several occasions by proud owners to see yews planted in their gardens. The examples below are from Barrio (left) Casares (centre) and Perueña (right).



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