

SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: [HTTPS://DX.DOI.ORG/10.12795/REA.2023.I45.06](https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2023.i45.06)

Toponymy, history and dunes: the lost place of La Barrosa of Doñana

José Carlos Muñoz-Reinoso

reinoso@us.es  0000-0003-3634-9477

*Universidad de Sevilla. Departamento de Biología Vegetal y Ecología,
Facultad de Biología. Apdo. 1095. 41080 Sevilla, España.*

KEYWORDS

Barrosa
Written sources
Cartographic sources
Geomorphology
Toponymy
Archaeological site

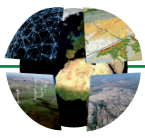
Place names are an important source of landscape information (Fagúndez & Izco, 2016). Each toponym contains information about the place it designates, both in its meaning and in its context, origin, and evolution (Rodríguez de Castro et al., 2017). A relevant proportion of toponyms are coined from natural features of the landscape; these names can persist long after those features have changed or disappeared. In contrast, in sparsely populated areas, such as Doñana, toponyms and microtoponyms (small place names) can easily be lost.

This paper focuses on the microtoponym of La Barrosa as a case study. A place on the coast of Doñana (SW Spain) that was visited by King Philip IV before his famous hunting day to the ancient pond of Santa Olalla (Espinosa, 1624). However, while the pond has continued to attract the attention of researchers for various reasons, both the existence and disappearance of La Barrosa and its toponym have gone completely unnoticed.

As a name, *la barrosa* is a hydronym, i.e., a toponym related to hydrography. It comes from the pre-Roman term *barrum* (Fiera, 1992), which means mud and the suffix of abundance *-osa* (Nebot, 1982; Santamarta, 1986). According to the RAE Dictionary (RAE, 2020), *barrosa* would be a place or land that has mud or that produces it easily, while *barro* (mud, clay) would be a mass resulting from the mixture of earth and water, and a mouldable clayey material that hardens by firing, which is used in pottery and ceramics.

Taking these premises into account, the aims of this work were 1) to document the existence of a place called La Barrosa on the ancient coast of Doñana, 2) to locate it spatially, 3) to hypothesize about the origin of the name and the causes of its disappearance in its landscape and geomorphological context, and 4) to describe its uses over time. To do this, records of La Barrosa have been sought in written and historical cartographic sources and have been put in relation to the geomorphological and archaeological knowledge of the territory.

The information that gave rise to this research is Espinosa's account (1624) of Philip IV's visit to Doñana, in which the name of La Barrosa appears. From there, records on La Barrosa have been sought in the archives of the General Archive of the Casa de Medina Sidonia Foundation (AGFCMS) and in the documentary collection compiled by Anasagasti & Rodríguez (2006) for the study of Niebla and its land in the late Middle Ages. The research of Granados (1987), Castrillo (2000) and García (2014) have also been useful for the identification of some interesting docketts. On the other hand, cartography available on the coast of Huelva and Doñana in the National Geographic Information Centre of the National Geographic Institute and in the Digital Catalogue of



Historical Cartography of the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA) has been studied, and the works of Cortés (2019) and Posada (2020) have been reviewed, which have studied the maps of Doñana and its surroundings from the 16th-19th centuries and from the 14th-18th centuries respectively.

Two 15th century sentences (Anasagasti & Rodríguez, 2006), Espinosa's report (1624) and Francisco Fernández de Sandobal's description of the coast in 1743 provide the spatial information that allows us to approximate the location of La Barrosa. Of these, the most imprecise are the 15th century sentences, while the others refer to elements that have been present in the Doñana landscape for more than 400 years, such as the Doñana Palace and Torre Carboneros.

The two 15th century sentences describe the same boundary to separate the ancient pasturelands that made up Doñana (Dehesas of El Carrizal and La Figuera). This boundary, which today would be within the National Park's El Puntal estate, ran from Madre de las Marismas down to Estero del Carbón, and from there to the coast where Charco de La Barrosa was located. The Estero del Carbón is also a lost toponym, although it appears curiously on two 18th-century maps linked to the lawsuits over the old Doñana salt pans; the estero (an old saltmarsh channel) is said to be located some 3.5 km southeast of the Doñana Palace.

Espinosa's account (1624) indicates that "el sitio de la Barrosa" was located one league from the Casas (Palace) de Doñana and seems to be the point on the coast closest to them. According to the RAE dictionary (2020), the league was an itinerary measure which was the distance covered in one hour, and which in the old Spanish system was equivalent to 5572,7 m.

The 1743 description of the coast refers to the presence of mud of two qualities at the site of El Guerrero, suggesting that this and La Barrosa could be the same place, and indicating that it was half a French league (20 to one degree) northwest of Torre de Carboneros (2777,77 m). These three spatial references converge in an area of approximate coordinates 29 S 7236 E 40924 N.

Different hypotheses can be put forward to explain the uniqueness of La Barrosa and the presence of mud on the ancient coast of Doñana, although the site has probably undergone a complex palaeoenvironmental evolution. La Barrosa could have its origin in an ancient watercourse with a marine connection that drained the *Lacus Ligustinus* (Zazo et al., 1994), or was the result of an ancient drainage towards the sea from an ancient coastal lagoon located in the back dune (later the Santa Olalla pond), like the ancient drainage of the Las Madres lagoon, also on the coast of Huelva, or the "sangradouros" of the Brazilian coast of Rio Grande do Sul (Figueiredo & Calliari, 2004, 2005).

The disappearance of La Barrosa must have occurred between 1624, when Espinosa refers to it, and 1661, when it is not referred to in a new boundary between the pasturelands. This would be related to the mobilisation of the dunes and the progradation of the coast, which agrees with the statement by Borja et al. (1999), who point out that the deposits of this dune system began at the beginning of the 17th century, when the dunes were being formed, which was associated with the formation of beach ridges that progressed after the construction of the watchtowers. Previously, between the end of the 15th century and the first quarter of the 17th century, the Charco de la Barrosa must have been buried by the sands, as Espinosa (1624) only refers to the beach of La Barrosa and not to the Charco. So first the Charco and then the beach of La Barrosa must have disappeared because of two pulses of dune formation that have been dated by Costas et al. (2012) and Goy et al. (2022).

La Barrosa went from being an important landmark (15th century) to a fishing settlement (1624), disappearing before the 18th century due to the mobilisation of the dunes and changes in the coastline. In his description of the coast in 1743, Fernández de Sandobal refers to the existence of three sites (one of them El Guerrero) with potter's kilns buried in the sands, bricks, thick-handled pitchers and old silver and copper coins. One of the sites near Torre de Salabar may correspond to the Roman site of Las Naves described by Ponsich (1988), suggesting that a Roman settlement may also have existed at La Barrosa-El Guerrero.

In any case, archaeological and geomorphological studies are needed to allow a detailed chronological dating of its occupation, as well as its sedimentary phases, to properly understand its origin and evolution. Therefore, the results presented here are a good basis for future studies on landscape changes at different scales, from geomorphological units and the emergence of new ecosystems to the human history associated with these changes.