



## The Pyrenees – Aneto and Ordesa

**A challenging trek that combines the ascent of the Pyrenees highest peak with the spectacular Ordesa Gorge**

### Introduction

Running the length of the border between France and Spain, the Pyrenean landscape is full of great charm and diversity. Although the region does not possess the array of glaciers and snow capped peaks which can be found in the Western Alps, it has a much wilder and rugged character and is undoubtedly a place for the mountain connoisseur. On the northern side of the range, soft velvety pastures carpet the tranquil valleys, and medieval French villages complement a landscape which has changed little in the past five hundred years. This side of the range is heavily forested and receives considerable rainfall, even in the generally dry summer months. On the southern flanks of the chain, the intense Mediterranean sun parches much of the landscape and has created a network of sierras - dry rocky ridges - which run down to the badlands of the Ebro basin in Northern Spain. It is believed that wolves and bears still inhabit the remotest valleys on this side of the range. Much of the Pyrenees has been favoured with a system of mountain refuges located in spectacular situations and at convenient intervals, making it possible to walk from refuge to refuge without the need to carry camping equipment, bedding or even much food. Our walk has been devised to take advantage of these refuges.

### Trip Outline

This is first and foremost a backpacking trip. It is important to understand that we provide no support for load carrying or baggage transfer at any point during this walk (with the exception of a transfer of your stay-behind bag from Bagnères to Gavarnie). Therefore you must be comfortable with carrying a rucksack which might weigh as much as 10 kgs on many days of the walk (although judicious and ruthless packing can reduce this amount). However, because we do not need to descend to the valley each evening, we are able to spend successive nights staying at spectacular high mountain refuges and we will be relatively free to adjust our itinerary to fit in with the prevailing weather conditions and trip members' personal fitness. We will be able to walk high and, what's more, stay up high, removing the need to make long descents down into the valley each evening, only to have to re-ascend the following morning.

### Itinerary

#### Day 1 Toulouse – Bagnères de Luchon

Assemble at Toulouse airport arrivals hall where our guide will be waiting to meet you with vehicle transport. International flights are not included within the trip price advertised in the brochure, but we can arrange these for you with any one of a number of airlines, depending on your preferred departure point. We then drive to the pretty town of Bagnères de Luchon where we spend our first night.

#### Day 2 Renclusa Refuge

Today we make the short transfer to the start of our trek at the Abri de Hospice de France. After a steep climb we pass the beautifully situated Refuge de Benasque that sits beside several small lakes in which the Pic de Sauvegaarde reflects. From here we find ourselves climbing the Portillon de Benasque, a high pass that takes us into the Spanish Pyrenees. We make our way down to the valley floor on the Spanish side before climbing up to the Renclusa Refuge, our base for climbing Aneto, and our bed for the night.

#### Day 3 Climb Pic d'Aneto (3403m)

Today we will summit Pic d'Aneto, weather depending. The highest mountain in the Pyrenees also holds the largest Pyrenean Glacier. The Aneto Glacier is a major source of the Garonne, the great French river that waters the

vineyards of Bordeaux, and this we shall traverse the glacier during our ascent. We start the day by climbing steeply up to the crest of the Portillon Ridge before reaching the glacier. On the glacier we will be wearing crampons and carrying ice axes. The glacier is relatively flat and there are no seracs although there are a few crevasses. It being the tallest, Pic d'Aneto is a popular climb and we will not be alone. A pre-dawn start will have us on the summit for around 10am where we will witness the immense views across the curving valleys and their glistening tarns that give way to a distant and inspiring backdrop of ridges and spires. The approach to the summit is equally stunning, a relatively exposed granite ridge that poses no real difficulty, provides an airy crossing and a satisfactory finale to the ascent. The valley around the foot of the Aneto holds some lovely scenery, those who prefer not to climb the peak can spend the day exploring this very picturesque area. We return to the Renclusa Refuge where we spend the night.

#### **Day 4                Estos Valley to Viados Refuge**

This morning we take a short transfer to the bottom of the Estos Valley. The Estos Valley is a huge, stunning glacial valley. At first we follow the torrent that is the Rio de Estos before crossing the river and trekking through its wooded valley sides. As we progress up the valley we find ourselves in open meadows rewarding us with fine views and photo opportunities including a spectacular view of the Galantes Gorge. As we cross the Rio de Gias that comes thundering down the valley sides we reach the Estos Refuge. From here we start climbing to the Puerto de Gistian (2500m) where we cross into the Valle de Anescruzes. We follow the valley down to Viados, a pleasant spot where a number of rivers meet, and where we are staying for the night.

#### **Day 5                Early transfer to Pineta – then walk to Goriz**

We make an early transfer to the lodge at Pineta where we climb up to the Col de Anisclo, a steep climb of over 1000m. From here we enter the National Park of the Ordesa Gorge and Mont Perdido and follow the contours round to the Refuge Goriz where we'll spend the night. The Refuge is spectacularly situated in a high cirque above the immense Ordesa gorge, sometimes described as Europe's Grand Canyon.

#### **Day 6                Goriz to Gavarnie**

From Goriz we ascend to the Breche de Roland, the vast chasm in the wall of the cirque de Gavarnie. Legend has it that the hero Roland, the nephew of the great Charlemagne, attempted to break his sword on the rock rather than have it fall into the hands of the 'Saracen' army in 788; but instead of the sword breaking, the rock wall split, thus enabling Roland to escape. Geological fact is more prosaic. Standing at the crest of the Breche, we can look back across the Spanish Pyrenees and the plains of Spain before descending down the very steep rock side of cirque de Gavarnie. We then follow the wooded valley along riverside that takes us down to the village of Gavarnie and our hotel accommodation - a chance for showers, cold beers and a proper bed! In the evening we can look forward to eating out in one of the cosy village restaurants.

#### **Day 7                Return to the UK**

Today we transfer to Toulouse to catch our flights back home.