



The Corsican High Level Route

Day 1

We fly from London to the Corsican capital of Ajaccio, normally using a charter service departing from London Gatwick Airport at approximately 06.30. On arrival in Ajaccio we are met by our private transport and transfer by road to the pretty town of Bavella high up in the Corsican hills. The Aiguilles de Bavella make an astonishing sight rising up behind the attractive white church tower. Local guide books claim that the road across the Bavella Pass is one of the most scenic on the island. It is certainly well used by the many locals who come up to the village to escape the summer heat of the coastal regions. Our accommodation for the night is in a comfortable gite in the village.

Day 2

From Bavella we begin our trek by heading towards the refuge at Asinau. Although the trek is supported for the most part by vehicular transfer of all our personal baggage, on this section we will need to carry all necessary overnight belongings to the refuge which is accessible only on foot. The path heads out through the ubiquitous Corsican maquis, the prickly knee high scrub which clings to much of the island. This section can be dry and warm so it is best to begin the walking as early as practicable. Compensation is provided by the backdrop of the spectacular and rocky Aiguilles de Bavella, a rock climbers mecca which attracts climbers from all over the island. Eventually the path enters a very pleasant pine and silver birch forest which provides welcome shade from the fierce heat of the Mediterranean sun. We follow an undulating route above the Asinau river until we are forced to drop down into the valley and cross this. A final steep climb brings us up to the Refuge Asinau at 1538m. This pleasant shelter serves cold beers and wine, and we can sit on the verandah and admire the rugged view down the valley towards the Aiguilles de Bavella.

Day 3

From Asinau refuge we climb steeply up towards the Bocca Stazonara (2025m). At this small notch we begin the final ascent to the summit of Monte Alcudina (2134m). This granite hill top provides some of the best views in Corsica and on a clear day we should be able to see both the east and west coasts of the island. Looking back south we can see the Aiguilles de Bavella and if we are lucky we may glimpse a Lammergeier soaring on thermals of warm air. We then drop down into the rocky Luvana valley and heads towards a point known as the Bocca di Luana (1805m). We then begin the long but fairly gradual descent to the small village of Bassettes, lying slightly off the main GR20, where we are re-united with our baggage and spend the night in a local gite. The Bergeries here serve up great Corsican specialities including locally produced charcuterie and cheeses, plus a great stew flavoured with local maquis herbs.

Day 4

From Bassettes we return to the GR20 and climb up to the Plateau de Coscione to Cozzano. We traverse the Bocca di l'Agnonu (1556m) and follow the rocky Arete a Monda to a point just before the refuge Usciolu before turning off the main trail and following a pleasant valley route to the delightful village of Cozzano, one of the highlights of the trek. Cozzano is a pretty village overlooking the Taravo River. We stay in a comfortable gite with hot showers and an excellent restaurant.

Day 5

We climb out of the village of Cozzano heading for the Boccadi Laparo where we rejoin the GR20 path. The views from here are outstanding and stretch right across the Golfe D'Ajaccio. We should reach this in time for a mid-morning capuccino at the little private hostelry situated here. We then follow a delightful route to the Refuge Prati and descend to the mountain road at Col de Verde where we stay at the excellent Refuge San Petru di Verdi.

Day 6

With a good weather forecast we can attempt the dramatic high level GR20 variant to reach the winter sports complex at E' Capannelle. This rugged track crosses remote and exposed terrain which affords magnificent mountain views and culminates at the summit of Monte Renoso (2352m) the highest peak in southern Corsica. In bad weather, or with an uncertain forecast, we will opt for the low level route, a delightful and easy path which crosses the open grasslands of the Plateau de Gialgone and passes through luxuriant stands of pine and beech. Our accommodation for the night is in the comfortable gite which is attached to the ski resort development.

Day 7 & 8

An easy day to the town of Vizzavona situated on the main road between Ajaccio and Corte. Vizzavona is roughly the mid way point on the GR20 and like many other trekkers we will take a rest day here. Over the years the town has cultivated its hill-station image, helped largely by the railway line which was constructed at the end of the nineteenth century. Today many tourists come up here to breathe the clear mountain air and take invigorating walks in the forest. Our comfortable hotel provides a welcome place to relax for the next couple of nights. For those looking for a diversion, it is possible to take the train from Vizzavona and spend the day on the beaches of Ajaccio before returning in the evening.

Day 9

Suitably refreshed we recommence our high level trek with the most demanding day so far, climbing at least 1400 metres during the course of our hike to Grotella. In the morning we drive for 20 minutes to the tiny village of Canaglia (720m) and from here we follow a pleasant path through forest and alongside the River Grotaccia. We pass by the small hut at Bergeries de Tola and may be able to buy local cheese and charcuteries from here. All the way along the river there are numerous deep plunge pools which offer excellent places to swim, making this one of the most enjoyable days of the trek so far. We pass the refuge at Petra Piana (1842m) and climb over the Bocca Muzzella (2206m) to reach the lakes at Rinoso and Melu. Our destination for the evening are the bergeries at Grotella, a small hamlet of stone-built shepherds cabins in the valley of the Restonica river. We camp here in a delightful location surrounded by jagged mountains, and the cool mountain air is laced with the subtle fragrance of juniper and alder bushes.

Day 10

To Bergeries de Vaccaghia (1621m). The bergeries are one of the last remaining working shepherds camps along this route and we should be able to buy locally made cheeses. Our route today follows a subsidiary route to the main GR20. From Grotelle, we walk up to the lake of Melo then to the lake of Capitello whose deep blue waters reflect the rocky mountains above. We cross the Brèche de Capitello to reach the refuge of Manganuand 30 minutes later following the GR20 path we reach the Bergeries de Vaccaghia.

Day 11

From Vaccaghia we rejoin the GR20 and trek along a pleasant valley to Lac de Nino (1743m) whose waters feed the Tavignano River. This photogenic lake is stocked with trout and we will probably see fishermen here who come up from Corte to spend a pleasant afternoon. We climb up to the Bocca a Rete (1883m) and follow a rocky, undulating path with good views towards Monte Cinto and Paglia Orba, Corsica's highest peaks. At the Bocca San Pedro (1452m) we descend down an easy zig zag path through the Foret de Valdu Niellu to our overnight stop at Vagio where we stay in a comfortable village hotel.

Day 12

From Vagio we follow the GR20 along the wonderful Golo river valley where there are numerous idyllic rock pools to bathe in. We pass the refuge of Ciottulu Mori (1991m) which clings to the rocky slopes of Paglia Orba (2525m), Corsica's second highest peak, and must be one of the most spectacularly sited refuges on the entire GR20. We can have lunch here amid unique red-granite ridges, after which we descend steeply down into the wooded Foggiale valley and there are a few short scrambles on this section of the route. We cross the Ravine de Paglia Orba and climb up to the Bergeries at Vallone where an enterprising shepherd has set up a small lodge. We camp here and can enjoy the most authentic Corsican cuisine including home made charcuterie and ewe's cheese. The main speciality is wonderful wild boar stew!

Day 13

The last day of the trek is also the most spectacular and involves a certain amount of tricky ground. We climb past the Refuge Tighjettu and ascend rocky slabs, heading towards the Bocca Minuta (2218m). At the crest of this small pass we can survey the wild and rocky Cirque de Solitude, a tremendous amphitheatre of rock slabs which we have to cross using a variety of chains and steel ladders. There is a certain degree of exposure here so a sure head for heights is required, but the fearsome reputation of the Cirque is unwarranted as the scrambling is, one the whole, fairly easy. Ninety minutes should see us across the Cirque and climbing up to the Col Perdu (2183m). A steep rocky descent then leads us down to the remains of Refuge D'Altore which burnt down some years ago. We continue more easily down

through pleasant open grazing lands and enter the pine forests of the Stranciaccone Valley which leads to the large village of Asco Stagnu. Our private transport will be waiting for us here and after a celebratory beer or two in the local hotel we drive around the island to our hotel in Ajaccio.

Day 14

Free in Ajaccio. We have a full day which can be used for last minute souvenir hunting or simply relaxing one of Ajaccios many fine, sandy beaches.

Day 15

The morning will be free. In the afternoon we drive to the airport for our flight home.