

Intro to Corsica's GR20 mountain path



Map courtesy of the PNRC, showing the major sentier links.

Introduction

This file of information is designed as a stepping off point and does not aim to replace the many excellent sites and guides available, but I hope that it will set you on the right track.

The GR20 long distance mountain footpath is a significant challenge except to the experienced walker. That does mean that you cannot do chunks of it as, but access to the path is not always easy, since it passes virtually no towns and follows the high ground along its 200 kms and the variation in height is over 10 000 metres. In any event, unless you are mountain runner, the path will take you about 15 days (stages) to do. But, be in no doubt - it's a stunning experience, even though it's reputed to be the most difficult high altitude path in Europe.

In winter (February to April), it can be crossed by experienced cross-country skiers with a high mountain guide and becomes known (in Corsican) as *L'Alta Strada*.

The GR20 also intersects with several other major paths, both in the north and the south of the island, called Sea and Mountain (Mare i Monte) Sea to Sea (Mare a Mare), notably the Mare e Monti (Calinzana to Cargese; 10 stages), Mare i Monte Sud (Porticcio to Propriano; 5 stages), Mare a Mare Nord (Cargese to Moriani; 12 stages), Mare a Mare Centre (Ghisonaccia to Ajaccio; 7 stages), Mare a Mare Sud (Propriano to Porto Vecchio; 5 stages) - this last does not cross the GR20. *Trekking in Corsica* is a walker's handbook by David Abram - the Rough Guide author. It is an excellent general guide; it serves as a guide to Corsica with a walker's emphasis and has detailed information and maps on many of the major walks.

The Maison du GR20 at the Gîte du GR20 in Calinzana is run by the [Parc Naturel Regional de La Corse](#) - and this is the place for information about the GR and all aspects of the Parc; you can get daily weather forecasts by phone (tel 04 95 62 87 78) - it's run from May till October by neighbour Dan, who works on the path and the refuges in the winter. Out of season, you need to contact the Park HQ in Ajaccio tel 04 95 51 79 00; fax 04 95 21 88 17 or by [email](#).

The Calinzana gîte d'étape communal has inexpensive accommodation and camping facilities. It's open from April-October. You can [email](#) or telephone your booking - 04 95 62 77 13, or fax it - 04 95 62 70 08.

Some of you walkers, may also be climbers: if you want info on 740 climbs in 56 areas of Corsica, then sign up (free) at [www.thecrag.com](#), Simon Dale's amazing site. It's many decades since I did any rock climbing, but this looks like a universal piton for climbers! Otherwise try the Corsican page at [coronn.com](#), an Italian site.

Accommodation

If you want information about accommodation along the GR20, Corsica Isula has prepared notes and listings of refuges, gîtes and hotels all the way from Calinzana to Conca. If you'd like a copy then you can download a one for free from the list on the Home Page of Corsica Isula.

Guide Books

If you would like a helpful guidebook, then I would suggest Corsica Mountains by Collomb, Walks in Corsica (covers not only the GR20, but also other walks; it's out of

print, by try Alibris); Landscapes of Corsica by Rochford; Trekking in Corsica by David Abram - the Rough Guide author. Gillian Price's book, Walking on Corsica: Long Distance and Short Walks gets very high marks. Then there's Klaus Wolfesperger's Corsica: The finest valley and mountain walks. For the GR20, there's paddy Dillon's Corsican High Level Route. For those who'd like to do a part of the GR20, then use the Lonely Planet Corsica, since it has a concise 15pp guide to the walk.

If you visit bookshops, you'll find others and some will be specialised in the region where you are. otherwise go to the local Tourist Office and they will almost certainly tell you what the best local guides are and will have some free ones too. There is another good book on the famous high mountain path, which appeared (in English) in 2001. Called *The Great Hike* - all stages of the GR20, it's by Bernard Biancarelli and translated by Jo Reeves. It is published by Albiana of Ajaccio and you should be able to get it in any bookshop in Corsica. If you can manage French, it's called [Le Grand Chemin](#). One of the walking guides I like in French is [Balades Nature en Corse](#), because not only does it have some good walks, but also one of the best available guides to Corsican wildlife. Another good guide in French is [La Traversée de la Corse](#) by Charles Pujos.

Albiana with the Regional Natural Park have also recently published a carto-guide of 26 walks in the centre of Corsica and it's available in both French and English versions. This excellent illustrated walkers' guide-map is available from the Corte Municipal Tourist Office at €5 by [email](#).

Mountain Guides & Organisers

Camina Mondì - the association Camina Mondì combines the outdoors with cultural activities. It aims to provide quality human contact and exchange. The president is a friend of mine, Claude Bellagamba, who combines teaching Corsican language & culture, with traditional singing and being a qualified mountain guide. He and others, such as another friend (the Treasurer, François-Philippe Barbalosi - a maths teacher/musician & singer), offer a range of mountain walks with cultural events (at about £350 a week excl flights. They will organise half day and day outings as well. Their website is temporarily suspended, but you can contact Claude direct on 04 95 61 77 36 - tell him I sent you!. There are more and more guides offering services, but this is one not to miss - you won't find it in the tour operators' brochures.

Montagne in Libertà (www.montagne-corse.com) - is an Ajaccio based operator that can organise the serious stuff on the GR 20 or easy day walks - with or without your bags carried. You can trek in the north, south or centre of the island. For the more serious stuff, you bivouac in shepherds' huts, otherwise it's comfortable hotels. An excellent site of an organisation run by Jean Angelini.

Corsicatrek (membres.lycos.fr/corsicatrek) - Michel Jossen is an artist, who has developed a passion for the Corsican mountains (and is a qualified guide). He does some packaged walks and can organise them to your specific requirements, with or without portage.

Walking organised from UK (www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk) - a UK tour operator that offers two Corsican products: a self-guided inn-to-inn walk and a led

trek of the GR 20.

Organised walking tours (www.valac.nl/corsica-walking.htm) - here's another walking company: they do the Mare e Monte S (7 days), Mare e Monte N (14 days), Vizzavona-Corte (7 days) as well as the GR20 (8 or 14 days).

A Muntagnera (www.amuntagnera.com) - here's another guide company with various offers, both for groups and individuals.

GR20 for Americans (www.waynesue.com) - Black Hole Adventures are run by Wayne Martin & Sue Gygax. They organise accompanied walks of the GR20.

Corsica Rando Evasion (www.corsica-rando-evasion.com) - Franck and his team offer a range of guided walking trips of various lengths and levels in several parts of Corsica - concentrated in the centre and the north. Check them out.

Mountain Guides - (perso.club-internet.fr/asniolu/fr/cg_001.html) - the *Compagnie Régionale des Accompagnateurs en Montagnes de la Corse* is an association of 36 professional mountain guides run from Calacuccia in the high plateau of the Niolo by Paul-André Aquaviva. Their site lists a wide range of mountain treks, from 5-14 days including the complete GR20.

More Guides (<http://www.le-gr20.com/index.php?c=p1>) - guides with planned escorted tours, this outfit is based in Ajaccio.

Here's some more names - of guides in the Alta Rocca: Laurent Guidicelli (06 21 54 40 64); Corse Odysée (04 95 78 64 05); Jean-Paul Quilici (04 95 78 63 33); A Muntagnola (04 95 78 65 19); Corsica Madness (04 95 78 61 76).

Altre Cime (www.altre-cime.com) - this association of high mountain guides offers walks in different parts of Corsica (and South America in partnership with an Argentine association). They do 'chunks' of the GR20. The president of Altre Cime is Robert Cervioni. the site gives a range of hikes and a gallery of photos.

In Terra Corsa - mountain activities (perso.wanadoo.fr/in.terra.corsa/) - as well as mountain walking, these people do rafting, canyoning, canoeing, climbing, mountain biking. Jean-Christophe Bastiani's operation is run from Ponte Leccia, easily accessed from many parts of Corsica - although it's in the north of the island. All their 'products' come in periods from half a day upwards and can be done in combination. Their activities are accessible to anyone who is reasonably fit, with or without experience. All equipment is supplied. They will put together special products provided there is a group, including for company events. It's one of the most professionally organised companies in the business. They have now introduced *Tyrotrekking* (though they don't describe it on the website!) - you walk & climb for about twenty minutes from the start point and then with *six tyroliennes* you whizz down wires over amazing scenery.

Cimes et Sommets (www.cimes-et-sommets.net/gr20/gr20bienvenue.html) - this is a very concise and well organised guide to the GR20, preparation and execution - with photos; it's part of a big mountain site, but nonetheless worse for that.

GR20 Walkers' Web Sites

There are many walkers who have reported their trip - in many languages. If you type GR20 into google, you'll get 26 000 references and even if you ask for ones in English, you'll get 3 500!

So here's a short selection.

GR 20 - 1 (perso.wanadoo.fr/eric.ravenet/corse.htm) - another personal site describing the high mountain path with excellent illustrative photographs, with descriptions of each stage.

GR20 - 2 (www.gr20.fr.st) - this is a good and full site with details of the GR20, what you'll need to do it and detailed descriptions of each part of the stunning walk.

GR20 - 3 (croac.chez.tiscali.fr//corse1024.htm) - this one has good photos of the mountains - and beaches as well.

GR20 - 4 (yann.rigaud.free.fr/gr20/accueil_gr20.htm) - Yann Rigaud has a good site, both with a guide to the stages and photos.

GR20 - 5

(<http://wilkens.dyndns.org/~wilkens/galleries/Photo%20albums/Corsica%202003/>) - an excellent site for photos.

GR20 - 6 (<http://trekkers.tripod.com/francais/corsica/gr20/index.htm>) - another excellent photo site.

GR20 - 5 (<http://www.gr20.free.fr/>) - this site has a commented trip and super pix.

GR20 - 6 (<http://rando-gr20.chez.tiscali.fr/>) - another commented trip.

GR20 - 7 (<http://www.troel.net/gr20/>) - Arnaud Troël's site with a good description of the stages & photos.

GR20 Films

There is an amusing French film (on DVD) called [Les Randonneurs](#) and set on the GR20 was made two or three years ago. A lot of locals were extras.

GR20 Fra li Monti is not yet available, but something to watch out for is this documentary on the 15 stages of the GR20 by René Siacci of the TV channel FR3 Corse. It is destined for the future digital TV channel, it will soon be available on DVD.