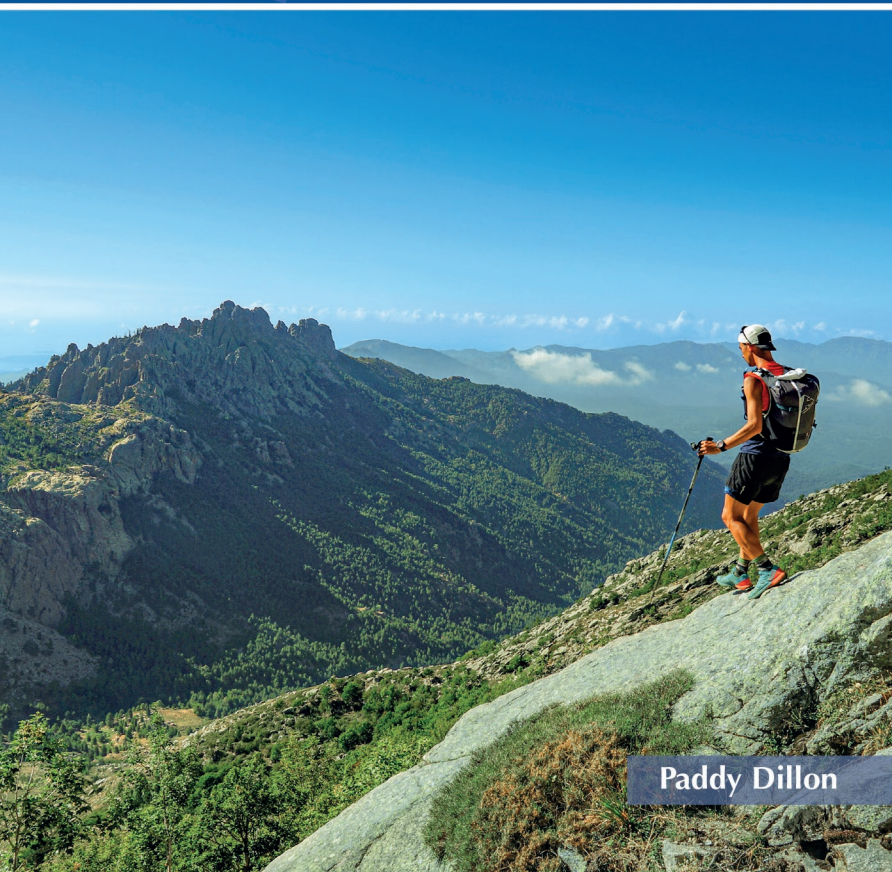


CICERONE

# TREKKING THE GR20 CORSICA

The High Level Route: Guidebook and map booklet



Paddy Dillon

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**THE HIGH LEVEL ROUTE: GUIDEBOOK AND MAP  
BOOKLET**

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BOOKLET**

**by Paddy Dillon**

**CICERONE**

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Front cover: Descending Monte Alcudina (Stage 14)

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### Updates to this Guide

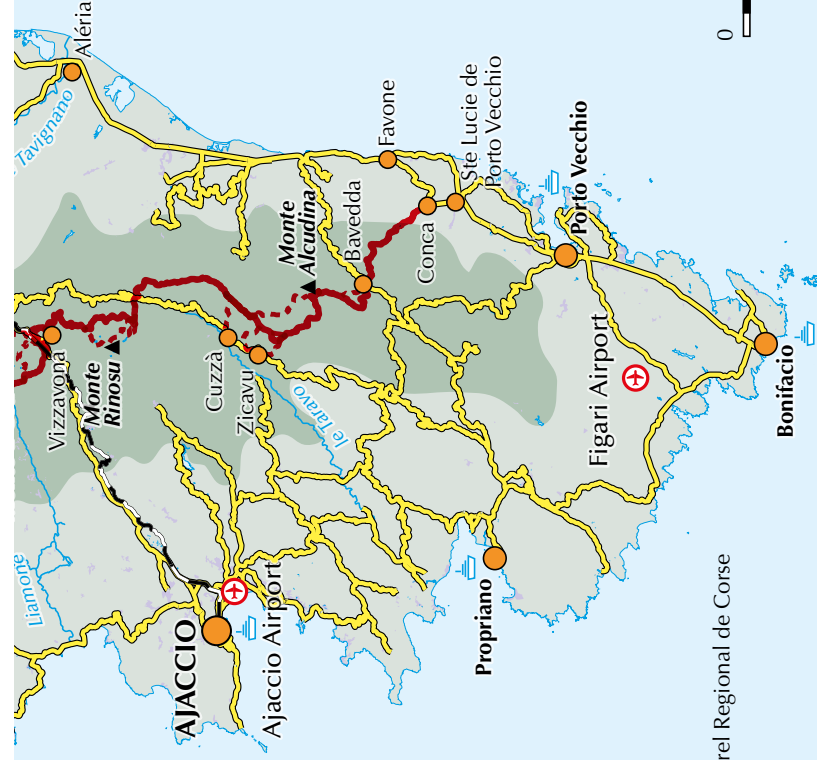
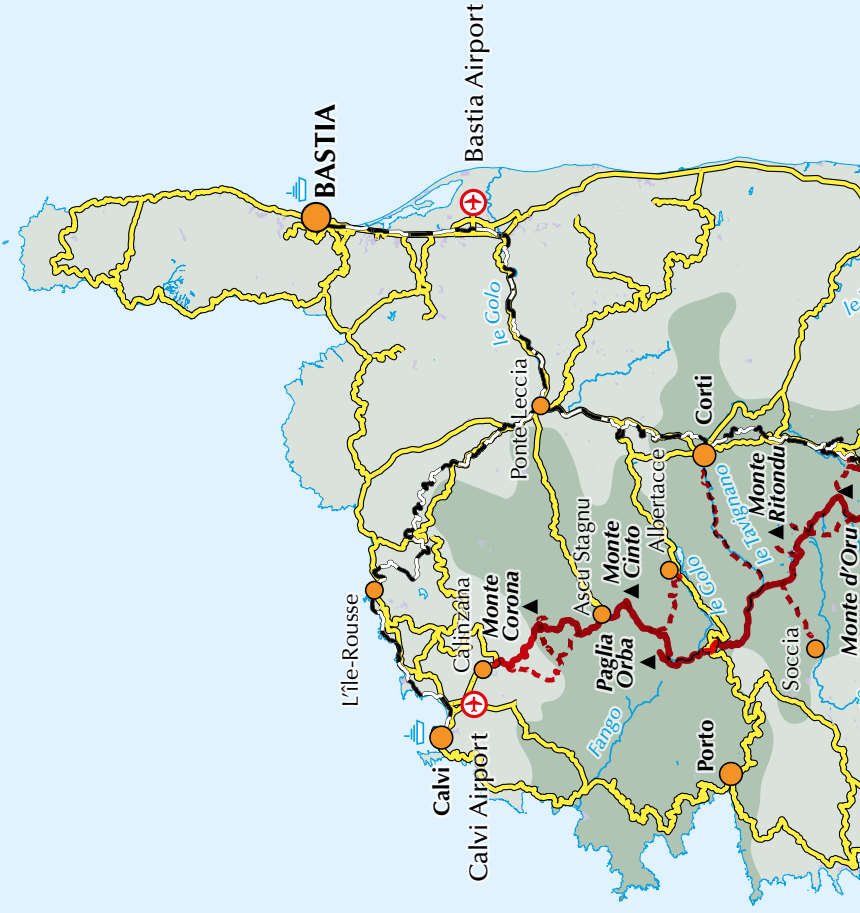
While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. This guidebook was researched and written during the Covid-19 pandemic. While we are not aware of any significant changes to routes or facilities at the time of printing, it is likely that the current situation will give rise to more changes than would usually be expected. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1067/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1067/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

### Note on mapping

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency. However, we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

# Corsica



Parc Naturel Régional de Corse  
(PNRC)























## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Stage	Start	Finish
1A (high-level)	Calinzana	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu
1B (low-level)	Calinzana	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu
2A (high-level)	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu	Refuge de Carozzu
2B (low-level)	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu	Refuge de Carozzu
3	Refuge de Carozzu	Ascu Stagnu
4	Ascu Stagnu	Auberge U Vallone
5	Auberge U Vallone	Hôtel Castel di Vergio
6	Hôtel Castel di Vergio	Refuge de Manganu
7	Refuge de Manganu	Refuge de Petra Piana
8A (low-level)	Refuge de Petra Piana	Refuge de l'Onda
8B (high-level)	Refuge de Petra Piana	Refuge de l'Onda
9A (low-level)	Refuge de l'Onda	Vizzavona
9B (high-level)	Refuge de l'Onda	Vizzavona
10	Vizzavona	Bergeries d'E Capanelle
11A (low-level)	Bergeries d'E Capanelle	Bocca di Verdi
11B (high-level)	Bergeries d'E Capanelle	Bocca di Verdi
12	Bocca di Verdi	Refuge d'Usciolu
13	Refuge d'Usciolu	Refuge de Matalza
14	Refuge to Matalza	Refuge d'Asinau
Alternative 13/14	Refuge d'Usciolu	Refuge d'Asinau
15A (low-level)	Refuge d'Asinau	Bavedda
15B (high-level)	Refuge d'Asinau	Bavedda
16	Bavedda	Conca
<b>Total – main route ('A' stages)</b>		

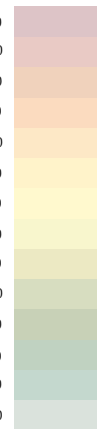
Distance	Total ascent	Total descent	Time	Page no.
12km (7½ miles)	1550m (5085ft)	235m (770ft)	7hr	58
20km (12½ miles)	1610m (5280ft)	295m (970ft)	8hr 30min	66
8km (5 miles)	750m (2460ft)	1050m (3445ft)	7hr	78
10.5km (6½ miles)	660m (2165ft)	960m (3150ft)	4hr 30min	84
5km (3 miles)	860m (2820ft)	710m (2330ft)	6hr	89
10km (6¼ miles)	1250m (4100ft)	1230m (4035ft)	8hr 30min	96
14km (8¾ miles)	850m (2790ft)	870m (2855ft)	6hr	109
16.5km (10¼ miles)	670m (2200ft)	475m (1560ft)	6hr	121
9km (5½ miles)	980m (3215ft)	740m (2430ft)	7hr	142
10.5km (6½ miles)	500m (1640ft)	910m (2985ft)	5hr	157
7km (4½ miles)	390m (1280ft)	800m (2625ft)	4hr 15min	163
11km (6¾ miles)	670m (2200ft)	1180m (3870ft)	6hr	172
12km (7½ miles)	990m (3250ft)	1500m (4920ft)	7hr 30min	181
14.5km (9 miles)	1000m (3280ft)	335m (1100ft)	5hr 30min	186
13km (8 miles)	320m (1050ft)	620m (2035ft)	4hr 30min	195
16km (10 miles)	815m (2675ft)	1110m (3640ft)	8hr	201
16.5km (10¼ miles)	1290m (4230ft)	830m (2725ft)	7hr 15min	208
11km (7 miles)	340m (1115ft)	640m (2100ft)	4hr 30min	220
10km (6¼ miles)	665m (2180ft)	545m (1790ft)	4hr 15min	235
17km (10½ miles)	1010m (3315ft)	1225m (4020ft)	7hr 15min	241
11km (6¾ miles)	380m (1245ft)	695m (2280ft)	4hr 45min	250
7.5km (4¾ miles)	550m (1805ft)	865m (2840ft)	4hr 15min	256
17.5km (11 miles)	700m (2295ft)	1670m (5480ft)	7hr	261
<b>189.5km (117¾ miles)</b>	<b>12,775m (41,915ft)</b>	<b>12,735m (41,780ft)</b>	<b>16 days</b>	

## Symbols used on route maps

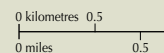
	route
	alternative route/short-cut
	start point
	finish point
	start/finish point
	route direction
	woodland
	urban areas
	station/railway
	peak
	building
	water feature
	viewpoint
	refreshments
	bus stop
	shop
	manned hut (camping and refreshments available unless otherwise stated)
	unmanned hut
	camping
	other accommodation

### Relief in metres

2600–2800  
2400–2600  
2200–2400  
2000–2200  
1800–2000  
1600–1800  
1400–1600  
1200–1400  
1000–1200  
800–1000  
600–800  
400–600  
200–400  
0–200



SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/1067/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1067/GPX).

*Looking back  
across Lavu di Ninu  
to the rocky peak  
of Capu a u Tozzu  
(Stage 6)*



## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### Emergency telephone numbers

Police (Gendarmerie) 17

Ambulance (Samu) 15

Fire (Pompiers) 18

European emergency number 112

PGHM (Peleton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne) Corti 04 95 61 13 95

VHF radio emergency Canal E on 161.300MHz

### Weather reports

*Corsica:* Weather forecasts, or 'meteos', can be obtained at refuges.

Alternatively, phone 08 99 71 02 20.

The website is [meteofrance.com/previsions-meteo-france/corse/13](http://meteofrance.com/previsions-meteo-france/corse/13)

**Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.**

*Most of the climb from Bonifatu is forested,  
but there are occasional views (Stage 1B)*

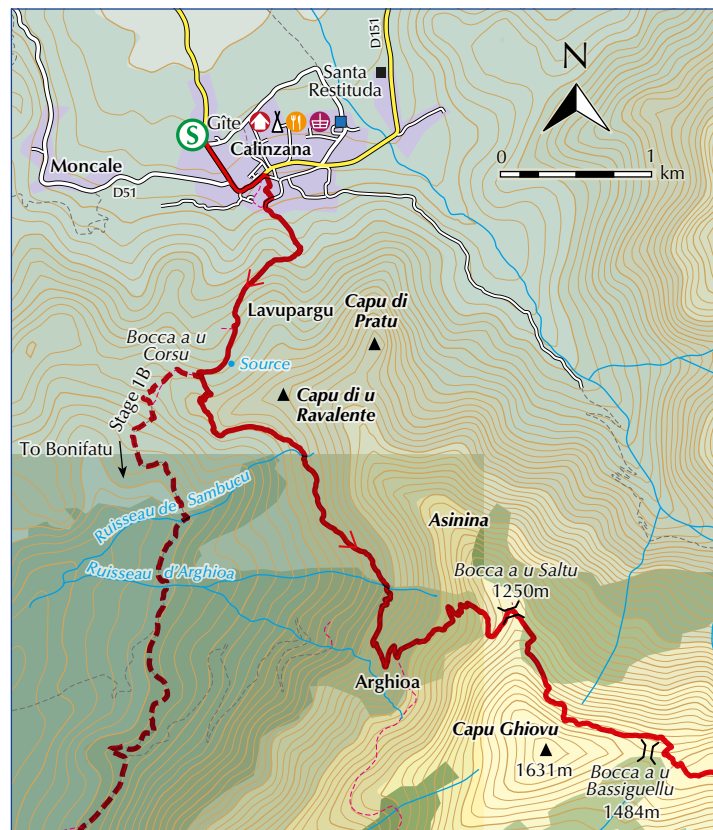
## STAGE 1A

*Calinzana to Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu (high-level)*

<b>Start</b>	Calinzana
<b>Finish</b>	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu
<b>Distance</b>	12km (7½ miles)
<b>Total ascent</b>	1550m (5085ft)
<b>Total descent</b>	235m (770ft)
<b>Time</b>	7hr
<b>Terrain</b>	Mixed, including steep slopes of maquis, forest and rocky mountainsides. This is a tough day's trek because of the relentless ascent, and scrambling is required at times. Take it slow and steady, as some trekkers overtax themselves and finish the day exhausted and dehydrated.
<b>Maps</b>	IGN 4149 OT and 4250 OT
<b>Food and drink</b>	All necessary last-minute food and fuel supplies are available in Calinzana. There are a couple of streams on the ascent, but they dry up in the summer. A cabin near the site of the Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu serves meals and sells provisions.
<b>Shelter</b>	Shade is available in isolated stands of forest along the way. There is a drystone windbreak shelter on Bocca a u Saltu. The higher parts are exposed in wind and rain.

The first day on the GR20 is a shock to the system. Trekkers leave Calinzana with everything on their back, probably in hot weather, with a question mark over the availability of water along the way. Learn which plants in the maquis are the thorniest! Lizards scuttle for cover with every few footfalls. The ascent is unrelenting – uphill all the way, climbing higher than anywhere in Britain, then climbing further, scrambling across a rocky mountainside. Carefully ration your water and hope that it will last. When the burnt-out remains of the refuge are finally reached, take the accommodation and services as you find them, knowing that there is nowhere else within reach. This day is a fine introduction to the rigours and the delights of the GR20 – it's your baptism of fire!

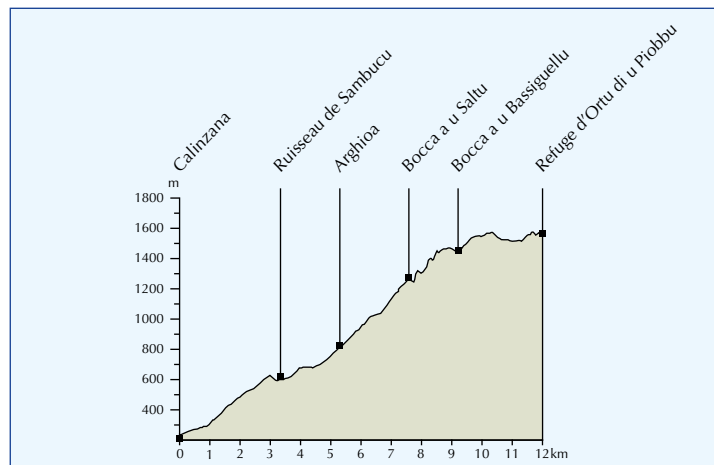
## STAGE 1A – CALINZANA TO REFUGE D'ORTU DI U PIOBBU (HIGH-LEVEL)



Walk up through **Calinzana** from the *gîte d'étape* and campsite, passing the Spar shop at 255m. Follow the road up through the village to reach Le GR20 bar-restaurant. It's possible to turn right and short-cut up the backstreet of A Torra to reach the Place Saint Antoine. However, stay on the main road to continue past the Picciu Café and Pizzeria Prince Pierre to reach the Hôtel Bel Horizon and the Église St Blaise in the middle of the village, to follow the 'official' route.

Map continues on page 63





Turn right along a narrow street signposted as the GR20, which soon climbs a broad flight of steps into a palm-shaded car park. Turn right beside the town hall, or Hôtel de Ville, down another flight of steps. Pass alongside the post office, climbing another flight of steps, as signposted for the GR20. A narrow, winding alley rises to a junction. Turn right at the Place Commune, then turn left to continue through the Place Saint Antoine along paved streets.

Pass the Oratoire St Antoine de Padoue and, as you do, offer a little prayer to the patron saint of lost things that you've remembered to pack everything you need for the trek! Pass a signpost beside a stone-built well and follow a cobbled path up from the village. This runs through a deep groove overhung by trees, passing through a small gate. The path rises from the trees and reaches an area of bare granite at **Lavupargu**, turning right to follow a low drystone wall further uphill.

Dense growths of sticky-leaved cistus press in on both sides as the path climbs up an eroded groove in the bedrock, and there are ruined drystone walls on either side. ◀ The slope is exposed to the sun and bears the



charred remains of trees destroyed by a big fire in 1982. The area has seen smaller blazes in subsequent years, followed by another extensive fire in 2019.

Pass a stand of tall, charred laricio pines on the broom-covered slope, then later a **water source** spills on the left, before some charred chestnut trees. The path rises fairly gently, passing a couple more chestnut trees and a few pines, zigzagging up to a signpost at a junction of paths at 550m. ▶ The GR20 heads up to the left, marked by red and white paint flashes. The Tra Mare e Monti (TMM) heads off to the right, marked by orange paint flashes.

At this point a choice must be made between the high-level route and the low-level variant. See the next section, Stage 1B, for a description of the low-level variant.

Go left to follow the GR20 and zigzag up past a couple of monstrous boulders beneath the rocky peaks of **Capu di u Ravalente**. The path crosses a rocky gap at 625m where small boulders make good seats. If you haven't already learnt from painful experience, don't sit down on the maquis, which here is a mixture of cistus and spiny broom. Take a last look back to Calinzana before it passes from view.

*Looking back along the trail to the rugged peak of Capu di u Ravalente*

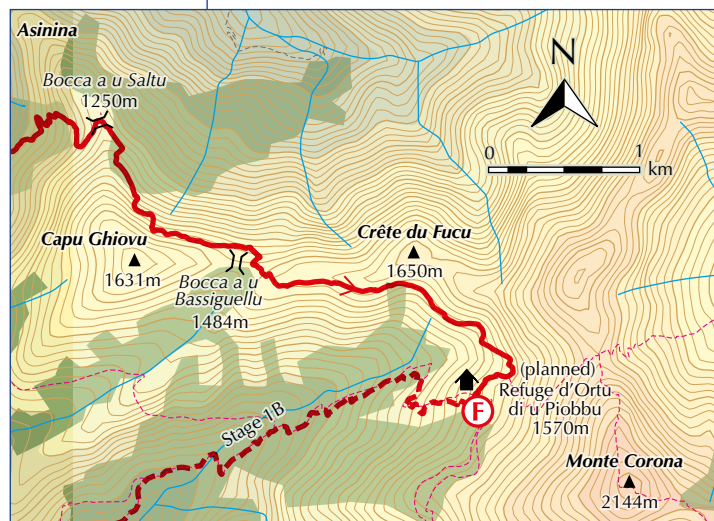
There is a worn patch on the hillside, about an hour from Calinzana, where trekkers can't resist dropping their packs and taking a break.

There is a view back to Calinzana, as well as to the neighbouring village of Moncale, while Calvi and Lumio are seen near the coast as the path climbs further.

The low-level track leading to Bonifatu can also be seen. Hopefully you won't be wishing you were on it at this late stage!

The path is quite rugged as it descends a short way from the gap, passing beneath an overhanging rock with holm oaks growing in crevices. The surface is easier underfoot as the path contours along an old terrace high on the slope. Straggly barbed-wire fencing runs alongside to the right, and the maquis is an exotic mix of aromatic species. The path rises to a few chestnut trees that draw moisture from a seasonal stream, the **Ruisseau de Sambucu**, and it is clear that they have suffered severe burnings. Cross a track and continue as marked. *Bergeries* can be seen on the valley sides, and the bongling bells of cattle or goats grazing in the maquis may be heard. ◀

As it leaves the chestnut trees, the path is in an eroded rocky groove, but it levels out as it runs across the slope. The barbed-wire fence is still visible on the right. Another stream called the **Ruisseau d'Arghioa** is crossed where tall, burnt lario pine grow, and the path on either side of the watercourse is quite rocky. This is a fine place to fill up with water early in the summer, but it quickly dries away, leaving this whole stage waterless. Above the



stream there is a pleasant grassy ledge at **Arghioa**, overlooking the valley from an altitude of 800m. Those who reach this point within 1hr 30min of leaving the GR20/TMM trail junction are doing fairly well.

A zigzag path leads up past young pines and heather scrub on a steep and stony slope. The path is well graded and well marked at all the crucial turnings, although there are a couple of other paths that lead away on either side. Note the clumps of hellebores growing profusely in places. There is a rocky stretch where the path crosses a streambed at a higher level, then it swings right near a rocky pinnacle. There are more zigzags and a few tight squeezes, where young pines and heather grow between tall, burnt lario pine on the higher slopes. Another series of zigzags leads above young pines and spiny broom scrub to reach a



A short chain assists on the ascent of a rock face on Capu Ghiovu



grassy gap, the **Bocca a u Saltu**, at 1250m. Trekkers should reach this point 1hr 30min after leaving Arghioa. There is a small drystone windbreak shelter to the left and the rocky spires of **Capu Ghiovu** to the right. Monte Corona is seen rising beyond the next gap.

Watch carefully as the GR20 markers lead away from the gap. The path runs downhill around the base of a cliff, then rises gently between tall *laricio* pines. A bouldery zigzag path climbs up to a rocky slope, then a series of short scrambles must be completed. Watch carefully for the markers, which always indicate the easiest course. The pitches are very short and there are plenty of holds, but those carrying a full pack on their first full day will find getting their balance right more of a problem. There is very little sense of exposure because of the tall trees alongside, and there is often good shade as the slope faces north. ◀

There is another easy stretch of path and another bouldery ascent, then more scrambling on a more open slope of rock. A short chain marks the point where the route straddles a rock ridge and enters a gully, and there may be a drop of water here early in the summer. After more uphill scrambling, the path drops to pass beneath a spire of rock pierced with a hole, then crosses a bouldery slope. There are a couple of rocky notches to cross, with some grotesque outcrops of rock high above, and plenty of prostrate juniper and clumps of hellebore on the ground. An eroded groove leads up to another gap, the **Bocca a u Bassiguellu**, which has patches of grass and scrub at 1484m. The scrambling from one *bocca* to the next should take 1hr 30min, depending on how much caution is exercised.

Turn left to follow the path gently uphill past some tall pines. There is a sudden fine view of distant mountains, and their profiles will become familiar over the next few days. An easy, level stretch of path runs below the **Crête du Fucu**, where the juniper gives way to spiny broom. The site of the former refuge is visible across the valley. Young pines press in on either side and there are bouldery areas to cross. The path rises across slopes of broken rock and is well wooded in places with birch and alder. There is a rugged descent and a short climb



around the head of the valley before the **Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu** is reached, within 1hr 30min of leaving the **Bocca a u Bassiguellu**.

The PNRC **Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu** was perched at 1570m, occupying the site of a former *bergerie*, on a tongue of sloping, open land surrounded by high mountains, overlooking a forested valley. It was deliberately burnt down in May 2019 and a replacement is planned. Toilets and showers stand nearby. Hot meals, food supplies and drinks are on sale at a temporary cabin in woodland. Hire tents and camping spaces – the only sleeping options for the moment because nothing has been rebuilt to date (early 2022) – are dotted around on the slope below the refuge site. Water should be drawn from a source signposted 200m beyond the refuge site.

*Taking a break on the gentle grassy gap of Bocca a u Bassiguellu*

Looking around, it is often possible to spot long-horned mouflon grazing along some of the ledges.



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- in 16 stages • optional ascent of Monte Cinto • rugged mountains, forest, maquis, lakes, alpine pastures

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Although there are mountain refuges, gîtes and hotels at sporadic intervals along the way, other nights will require camping. However, there are daily opportunities to purchase food and drink, and optional detours visit local villages where you can experience Corsican culture and enjoy delicious local produce.

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- high and low-level alternatives and optional variants



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