

SHORTER TREKS IN THE PYRENEES



About the Author

Since taking early retirement from his career as a physics and sports teacher, Brian Johnson has found time for three through-hikes of the Pacific Crest Trail, a 2700-mile round-Britain walk, 10 hikes across the Pyrenees from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, a hike along the Via de la Plata from Seville to Santiago and a single summer completion of the Munros (Scotland's 3000ft mountains), as well as climbing all the Scottish 2000ft-plus mountains. He has also completed a 2200-mile cycle tour of Spain and France and done multi-week canoe tours in Sweden, France, Spain and Portugal. In his younger days, Brian's main sport was orienteering, competing as well as coaching Bishop Wordsworth's School and South-West Junior Orienteering Squads. After retiring due to injury 25 years ago, he has now been able to return to orienteering, winning the British Middle Distance Championships for his age group in 2017 and a five-day international event in France in 2018.

He has walked and climbed extensively in summer and winter conditions in Britain, the Alps, the Pyrenees and California, often leading school groups. As a fanatical sportsman and games player, Brian competed to a high level in cricket, hockey, bridge and chess – his major achievement being to win the 1995/96 World Amateur Chess Championships.

Other Cicerone guides by the author

The GR10 Trail: Through the French Pyrenees

The GR11 Trail: The Traverse of the Spanish Pyrenees

The Pacific Crest Trail

Walking the Corbetts Volume 1: South of the Great Glen

Walking the Corbetts Volume 2: North of the Great Glen

SHORTER TREKS IN THE PYRENEES

7 GREAT ONE AND TWO WEEK CIRCULAR TREKS

by **Brian Johnson**

CICERONE

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Front cover: Evening view of Pic du Midi d'Ossau, looking over Lac Gentau from Refuge d'Ayous (Route 2, Stages 7 and 8)

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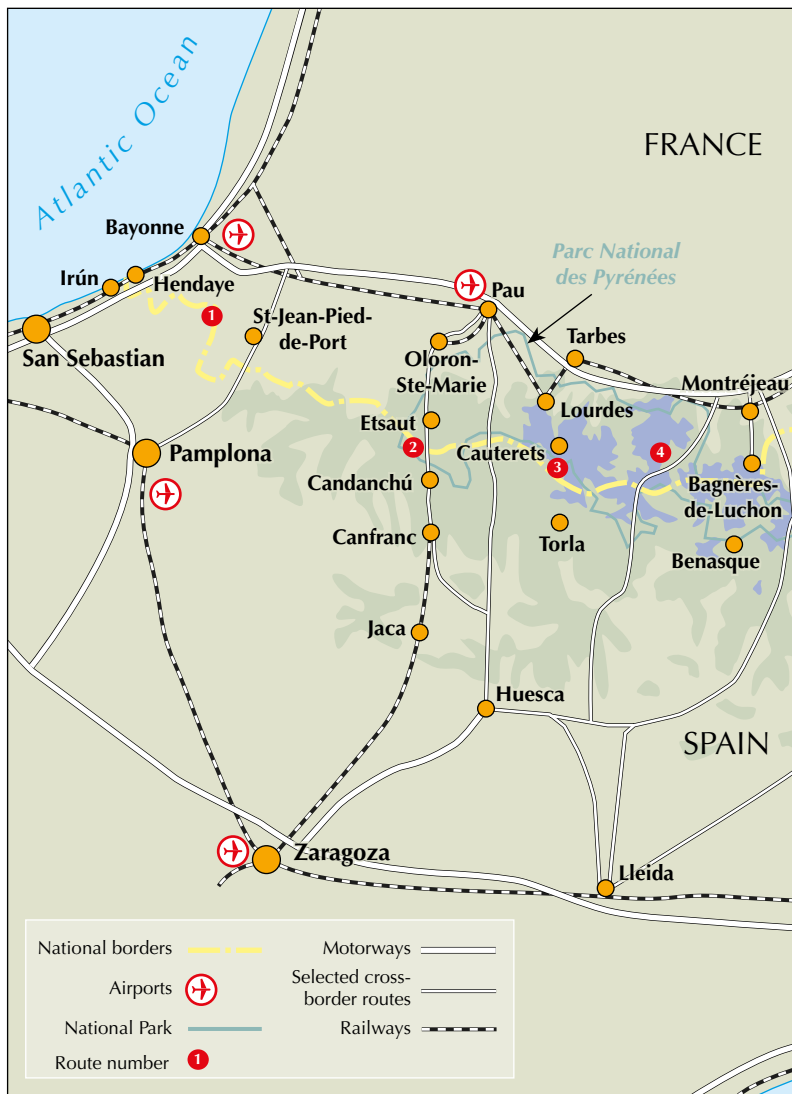
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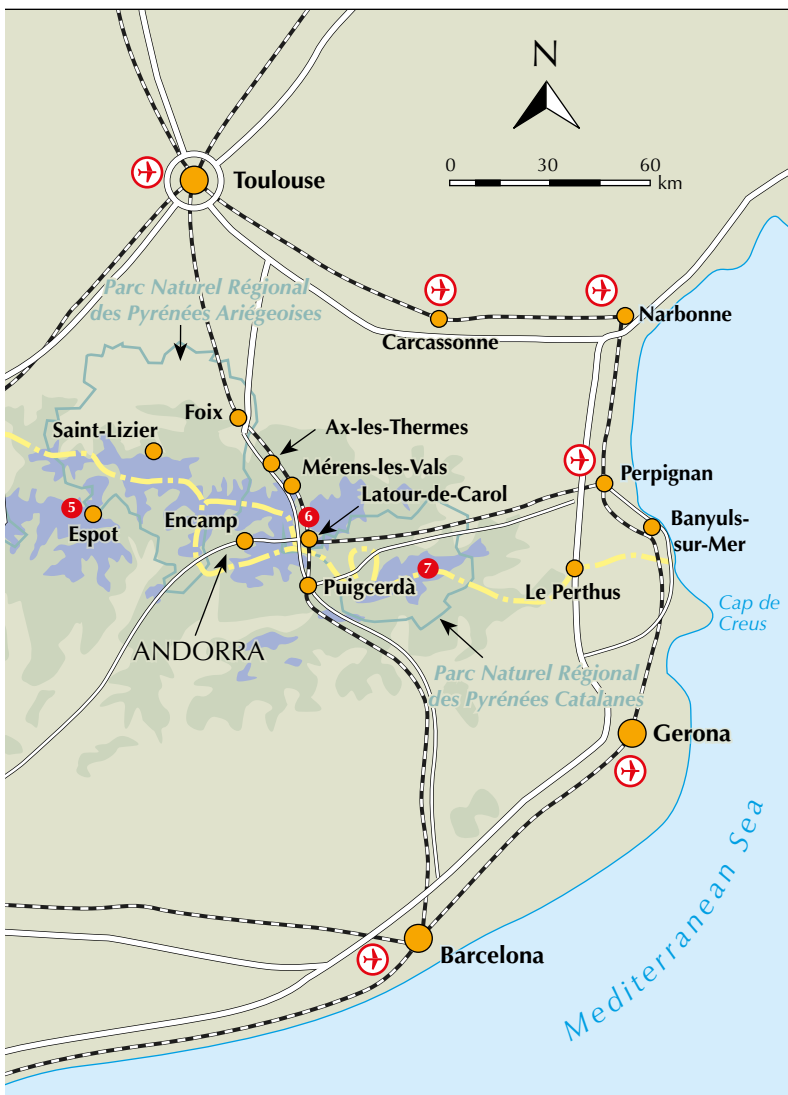
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SUMMARY OF THE TREKS

Route no	Start/finish	Distance	Total ascent	Time	Page
Route 1	St-Jean-Pied-de-Port	194km	8100m	9 stages (52hr)	33
Route 2	Etsaut	141km	7900m	8 stages (42hr)	78
Route 3	Cauterets	186km	10,600m	11 stages (64hr)	108
Route 4	Barèges	70km	3900m	4 stages (21hr)	151
Route 5	Refugi dera Restanca	89km	4700m	7 stages (32hr)	169
Route 6	Ax-les-Thermes	125km	6500m	8 stages (41hr)	196
Route 7	Eyne	224km	11,000m	12 stages (65hr)	224





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

If telephoning from the UK the dialling codes are:

France: 0033

Spain: 0034

France: PGHM (Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne):
tel 04 50 53 16 89; Emergency services: tel 112

Spain: Guardia Civil (responsible for mountain rescue): tel 112





























Weather reports

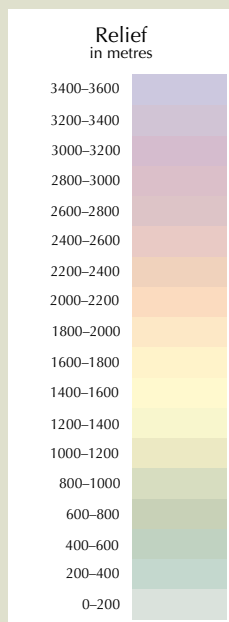
France: www.meteo.fr or tel 3250

Spain: www.spainweather.es

Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

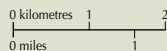
Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	start point
	finish point
	start/finish point
	route direction
	glacier
	woodland
	urban areas
	regional border
	international border
	station/railway
	peak
	building
	church/monastery/cross
	castle
	pass
	water feature
	viewpoint
	other feature
	cave
	information centre
	accommodation
	bothy
	campground
	café/restaurant
	food shop
	parking



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

SCALE: 1:100,000





The north face of Vignemale from Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube (Route 3, Stages 1 and 2)

PREFACE

I first discovered the Pyrenees about 40 years ago when I hiked the Pyrenean high-level route (Haute Route Pyrénées, or HRP) from Atlantic to Mediterranean over four summers. Since then I have completed 10 hikes from Atlantic to Mediterranean on the HRP, GR10 and GR11 and written the Cicerone guides to the GR10 and GR11. These are fantastic expeditions and are the ideal way to explore this magnificent mountain range, but most walkers cannot spare the time to be away from home for the 35–50 days most people take to complete these expeditions. Kev Reynolds has written an encyclopaedic guide for Cicerone on day-walking and climbing the major peaks in the Pyrenees, but there is no guide to shorter hut-to-hut or backpacking treks. This book is intended to fill the gap, with seven routes taking from four days to two weeks. I hope this will encourage you to take short treks in the Pyrenees and plan your own as well, using these as a base.

Except for the Carros de Foc, which is a promoted tour, the routes have been devised by the author to take you through the most spectacular parts of the Pyrenees and all have been walked at least twice in preparation of this guide.

The routes are designed so that it is possible to stay in accommodation each night, with meals and bed provided. Having said that, they are all magnificent routes for those walkers who prefer wild-camping to using huts and hotels. Use is made of the GR10, GR11, HRP, Camino de Santiago as well as less well-known long-distance and local paths.

Brian Johnson

GR10 hiker on Crête des Isards (Route 6, Stage 8)



INTRODUCTION



The Pyrenees is the diverse mountain chain which forms the border between France and Spain and stretches over 400km from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. The chain consists predominantly of granite massifs with rocky peaks dotted with lakes, tarns, cascading streams and spectacular waterfalls, and limestone mountains with vertical cliffs and the associated karst terrain.

Rising to over 3000m, the scenery compares favourably with the Alps, but the lower altitude means the highest peaks and passes are far

more accessible to the hillwalker and backpacker. Although the treks in this guide are designed for those wanting overnight accommodation, with meals provided, the Pyrenees are almost certainly the best area in Europe for those who prefer wild-camping; it is still possible to find solitude and wilderness areas seemingly untouched by man. The predominantly dry, sunny summer climate is almost perfect for the backpacker, as is the relative absence of biting insects. It isn't just walkers who are attracted to the Pyrenees, however; it

STAGE 1

*St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to
Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry*

Start	St-Jean-Pied-de-Port
Distance	20km
Total ascent	900m
Total descent	900m
Time	5hr 15min
High points	Munhoa (1021m)

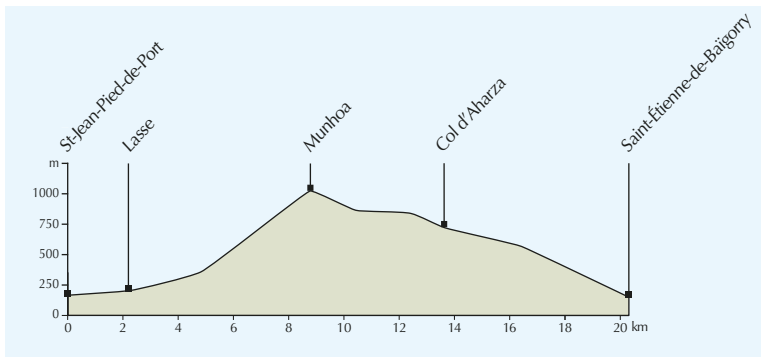
St-Jean-Pied-de-Port is the most popular starting point for the Camino de Santiago, a network of pilgrim routes from all over Europe leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain, where tradition has it that the remains of the saint are buried. The town is a major tourist resort with tourist office, several campgrounds, a wide range of accommodation, bar-restaurants and shops to cater for both the tourist and Camino de Santiago 'pilgrim'. Maya Sport, which stocks walking equipment and all types of camping gas, is beside the Carrefour supermarket.

This easy first stage follows the GR10, with red/white waymarks, over Munhoa with the option of the ascent of Oylarandoy.

Start at the roundabout at the south end of **St-Jean-Pied-de-Port** (N43°09.791 W001°14.339) where there are **toilets** and a **water point**. Head northwest along the D933, forking right along the D918 and then left just before the Lidl **supermarket** to pick up the D403 towards Lasse. Follow the D403 right across a bridge and on to the Auberge Etchoinia in **Lasse (30min)**. **Opposite the auberge are public toilets with a water point and free hot showers.**

Keep on past the church, then turn left and right and fork left. Pass a farm with a **water point** and ignore three right turns before reaching a track on the right, signed to

ROUTE 1 – STAGE 1 – ST-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT TO SAINT-ÉTIENNE-DE-BAÏGORRY





In bad weather you have the option of following this road all the way to Saint-Etienne-de-Baïgorry.

Munhoa (**1hr 5min**, 360m, N43°09.203 W001°17.233). Turn right and follow the track as it switchbacks up the hill to reach a farm road at a [water point](#) on the east ridge of Munhoa (**2hr 10min**, 745m). ◀ Cross the road and go diagonally right, soon recrossing the road and climbing the ridge to the mast on the summit of **Munhoa** (**2hr 55min**, 1021m, N43°08.521 W001°18.425).

Descend the southwest ridge, turning right on returning to the road. Go straight on at a junction on the **Col d'Urdanzia** and climb gently, passing below a barn before a path goes off right (**3hr 25min**, 920m, N43°07.899 W001°19.345). Follow this path which goes just below the Col de Leizarze and turn right on reaching a farm road. Follow this to the **Col d'Aharza**, with a [water point](#) by the sheepfolds (**4hr**, 734m, N43°08.689 W001°20.111).

If you have surplus energy you could climb the ridge to the north to the summit of **Oylarandoy** (933m) where a hermitage was first built in 1706. The shrine has been rebuilt on several occasions and the latest (1985) rebuild even includes stained-glass windows. You could then rejoin the GR10

down the steep bracken-covered northeast ridge, however it would be easier to leave your rucksack at the col and return down the south ridge (up and down in 35min).

From the Col d'Aharza, follow the GR10 which goes right of the pens and contours the eastern slopes of Oylarandoy, passing a barn with a [water point](#) before reaching the northeast ridge. Veer sharp left along a track, then right down a concrete track and straight on down the road before forking left down another track. Keep straight on down a path at a bend in the track and take the descending option at every junction until you turn left under the old railway bridge to arrive at the bridge over La Nive des Aldudes in **Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry (5hr 15min, 158m, N43°10.642 W001°20.522)**.

Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry is a village with two supermarkets, a range of accommodation, bar-restaurants and shops. Most of the facilities are to the left, but the tourist office and pizzeria are to the right.

FACILITIES FOR STAGE 1

St-Jean-Pied-de-Port (a small selection of the available accommodation)

Tourist office: tel (33) 0559 37 03 57 www.saintjeanpieddeport-paysbasque-tourisme.com

Camping Municipal Plaza Berri: tel (33) 0559 37 11 19

Gîte d'étape Compostella: tel (33) 0559 37 02 36

Gîte d'étape Ultraïa: tel (33) 0680 88 46 22 www.ultraia64.fr

Hôtel Les Remparts: tel (33) 0559 37 13 79 www.hoteldesremparts.fr

Hôtel Central: tel (33) 0559 37 00 22

Lasse

Auberge Etchoïnia has accommodation and bar-restaurant: tel (33) 0559 37 01 57 www.auberge-etchoinia-pays-basque.com

Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry

Tourist office: tel (33) 0559 37 47 28 www.pyrenees-basques.com

Gîte Gaineko Karrikan has chambres d'hôtes, gîte d'étape and meals: tel (33) 0559 37 47 04 or (33) 0625 19 18 67 <http://gitospit.free.fr>

Gîte d'étape Mendy is at the Domaine de Leispars about 1.5km northeast of Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry: tel (33) 0559 37 42 39

Villages VVF Iparla is mainly aimed at tourists but will take hikers: tel (33) 0559 37 40 58 www.vvf-villages.fr

Camping Municipal Irouleguy: tel (33) 0559 37 40 80

Hôtel-restaurant Arce: tel (33) 0559 37 40 14 www.hotel-arce.com

Hôtel-restaurant Juantorena: tel (33) 0559 37 40 78 www.hotelrestaurantjuantorena.fr

STAGE 2

Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry to Bidarray

Start	Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry
Distance	19km
Total ascent	1400m
Total descent	1400m
Time	6hr 45min
High points	Buztanzelhay (1029m), Astate (1022m) and Pic d'Iparla (1044m)

This demanding stage follows the GR10 as it traverses the magnificent Pic d'Iparla ridge, arguably the most spectacular ridge in the Basque Country.

In **Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry**, cross the bridge over la Nive des Aldudes and follow the road right to a square