

Mini trek 1 – Gavarnie, Estaubé and Troumouse

A hut-to-hut trek exploring the Gavarnie UNESCO World Heritage Site, visiting the three cirques of Gavarnie, Estaubé and Troumouse.

SUMMARY : The massive limestone cirques of Gavarnie, Troumouse and Estaubé and are the birth places of the glaciers, which carved the dramatic erosional landscape of the high Pyrenees. The cirques are backed by 1000m high cliffs, forming the near-impenetrable barrier of the Spanish frontier. On foot we will explore these three natural amphitheatres, with the option of a peak ascent to the majestic Pimené, 2801m.

PROGRAMME

Saturday Arrive, night at Refuge La Grange de Holle

A comfortable night in the charming Grande de Holle chalet-refuge, which has good facilities as it is accessible by road. Alternatively, the first night could be spent in the village of Gavarnie itself, where there are bars and restaurants to visit.

Sunday Balconies of the Cirque de Gavarnie, the Grande Cascade. Night at Refuge des Espuguettes, 2027m

A complete tour of the Cirque de Gavarnie, beginning with a section of the Santiago pilgrimage trail up to Plateau de Bellevue – aptly named for its splendid views into the cirque. The trail takes us up the valley and into the cirque itself, to the foot of the Grande Cascade. Here there is the option to scramble up to base of the highest free-hanging waterfall in Europe, very impressive at this time of year with its icy spray and powerful downdraft. We descend back out of the cirque to pick up the Eastern balcony route, known as the “Postman’s path”. This dramatic passage follows a natural rock ledge, skirting high above the valley bottom and offering spectacular views back into the cirque and down towards the village of Gavarnie. There is the chance of seeing rare Pyrenean wallcreepers scaling the crags here, and several rare endemic flowers including, *Ramondia* and *Saxifraga longifolia* grow on the limestone cliffs. The path brings us out into the Cirque des Espuguettes, a favourite playground for marmots and Pyrenean chamois. Looming on the skyline, here we catch a first glimpse of the Refuge des Espuguettes, and a steady climb takes us up to the refuge – our base for the night, with a backdrop of snow-clad 3000m peaks.

Timing : 7 hours walk, 12 km, approx. 600m ascent, 100m descent (optional 100m ascent to Grande Cascade).



Monday A challenging day's walk traversing the Cirque d'Estaubé, with an optional ascent of Pic de Pimené

Today's walk begins with a stiff climb from the Refuge des Espuguettes to the high pass of the Hourquette d'Alans, 2430m. For keen walkers, there is the option to make the ascent to the dramatic Pimené peak, 2801m - an airy summit guarding the watershed between the cirques of Gavarnie and Estaubé. It has awe-inspiring 360 degree views as well as a knee-quivering drop into the Gavarnie valley below! From the Hourquette d'Alans the path zigzags down into the picturesque Cirque d'Estaubé. The atmosphere here is very different from Gavarnie, with its quiet green meadows, grazing cattle, and the deep, blue Lac de Gloriettes at the mouth of the valley. The path makes its way down to the

edge of the lake, where there is time for a paddle before the second climb of the day takes us up to the plateau of the Turon de Pouey Boucou and our first view towards the high peaks of the Cirque de Troumouse. The path descends steadily towards the Auberge de Maillet, 1837m – simple accommodation serving tasty, local food.

Timing : 8 hours walk, 14 km, 635m ascent, 835m descent (optional ascent/descent, 4km, of Pimené 400m).



Tuesday Exploring the Cirque de Troumouse, Lacs de Troumouse and the Heas valley

A short morning's climb takes us up from the Auberge de Maillet into the Cirque de Troumouse. Avoiding the main path, we take a secret route skirting the edge of the cirque, where there is the best chance of seeing Griffon vultures, chamois and marmots, as well as tiny alpine flowers nestling amongst the rocks. We pick a route through fallen limestone blocks, heading into the heart of the cirque where we stop for a leisurely lunch beside the ice-cold ephemeral Lacs de Troumouse. In the afternoon we take a balcony path above the glacial U-valley of Heas, with fine views back into the cirque and the Vignemale glacier away to the West. A steady zig-zag descent now takes us down into the valley bottom, where we can enjoy a drink in the hamlet of Heas - a fascinating spot with a colourful history of pilgrimages, escaping WW2 prisoners of war, and its chapel that was destroyed repeatedly by avalanches.

Timing : 6 hours walk, 12km, 500m ascent, 700m descent



Transfer down the valley to the pretty mountain village of Luz-St. Sauveur. Night in a comfortable trekkers' hostel.

Mini trek 2 – Néouvielle Nature Reserve, the Pyrenean Lake District

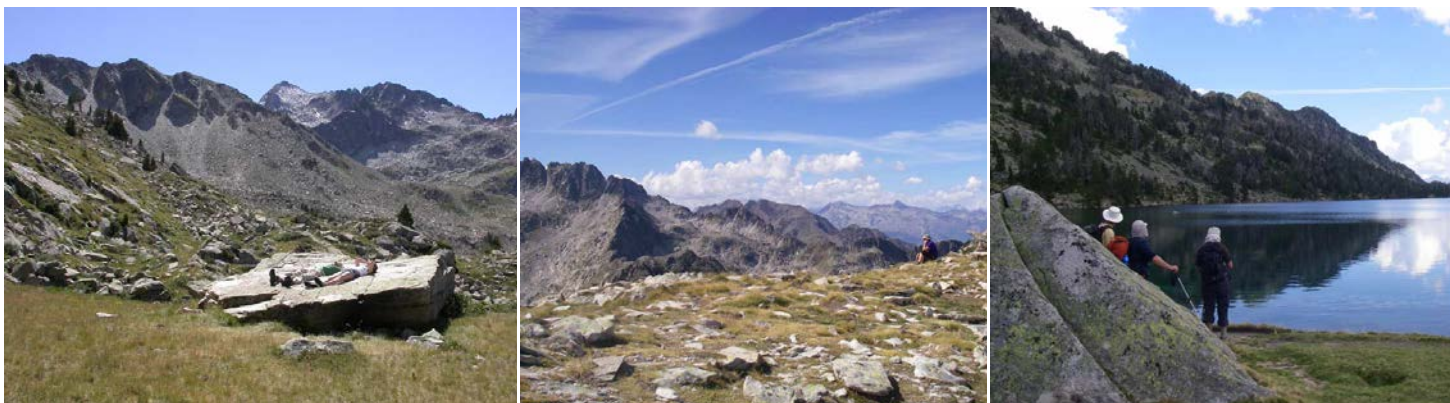
A high mountain trek, exploring the Neouvielle Nature Reserve - one of the wildest and most untouched parts of the Pyrenees, known for its wild granitic landscape, miniature pines and sparkling lakes

SUMMARY : A circular walk from the Pont de la Gaubie above Bareges, spending two nights at mountain refuges. Parts of this route follow the infamous GR10 trail, while other sections are incredibly wild, with little visible path, where your guide will take you to the most unspoilt and remote lakes of the reserve

Wednesday *Pont de la Gaubie to the Refuge Oredon*

5 minutes drive from Bareges, the GR10 sets out into the Neouvielle Nature Reserve from the Pont de la Gaubie at 1550m. A vigorous wake-up climb takes us 500m up to the Lac d'Etscoubous, the first of a multitude of lakes that are scattered across the reserve. Making our way across rounded boulders (on a marked trail) we head steadily uphill to the dark Lac Nere, where we take a break beside a lonesome pine before the final push on a little-used cairned route up to the Col de Tracens and the (optional) Pic de Madamete at 2657m. This is a magnificent peak, offering 360 degree panoramic views across the whole of the Neouvielle Nature Reserve, North to the Pic du Midi de Bigorre and South towards the Spanish border. After descending to the Col de Madamete, we again pick up the GR10 and follow a scenic trail passing the Lacs d'Aumar and d'Aubert, before reaching our destination for the night – a comfortable trekkers' auberge beside the lac d'Oredon.

Timing : 8 hours walk, 1100m ascent including the Pic de Madamete, 800m descent



Thursday *Refuge Oredon to Refuge Bastan, through the lake-land wilderness*

This morning's climb takes us 500m up into a secluded valley where we will almost certainly not see another soul. This valley of small lakes, sculpted pine trees, cotton grasses and far-reaching views really typifies the wilderness of the Néouvielle. Here you will really rely on your guide's local knowledge, as there is barely a trace of a path! Towards the end of the afternoon, we make our way back to a well-travelled route, passing another series of lakes and a final climb of 150m to a col from where we look down into the next valley and should soon be able to spot the idyllic Refuge de Bastan, nestling beside its own lake – a great spot for a refreshing swim at the end of the day.

Timing : 8 hours walk, Height gain 650-800m depending on precise route chosen, descent 200-400m undulating



Friday *Refuge de Bastan to Pont de la Gaubie via the Pic de Bastan and the Port Bielh*

Wake up at the Refuge Bastan, and set out early whilst the big peaks to the South are still lit pink. A steady 250m climb takes us to the Col de Bastan – departure point for the optional ascent of the Pic de Bastan. This is a classic “pointy” peak, visible from all sides in the surrounding valleys and seemingly un-scalable from most angles! To reach the pic

there is a 200m ascent on a steep path, ending with a short, exposed scramble to the summit. The scramble is not technically difficult, but there is an impressive drop down to the big lake directly below the peak. Return to the Col de Bastan then traverse to the Hourquette de Caderolles before descending to the Lac de Port-Bielh. You may be tempted to take a dip, but this vast lake is icy cold all summer long. After a good break, a steady and pleasant climb takes us up to the Port Bielh, where we cross back onto the Baresges side of the watershed. Now we have a beautiful, scenic descent passing more lakes and countless colourful wildflowers to reach our path beside the rushing Aygues Cluses torrent, once again following the GR10, back to the Pont de la Gaubie.

Timing : 7-8 hours walk, Height gain 750m, descent 1400m



Transfer to Baresges or Luz-St. Sauveur for a last night's accommodation at a trekkers' hostel.

Saturday Depart

LEVEL

This is a challenging week, classified as "adventurer" level and comparable in difficulty with our HRP trekking programme. The route is through high-mountain terrain, generally on good well-travelled paths, but with some sections of sheep track, scree, boulders and the possibility of some snow crossings in June.

The days are variable in length and difficulty, as necessitated by the location of accommodation in the mountains. Please note that the route cannot easily be changed after the refuges are booked, so you are committed to completing the hike.

Most walks include around 800m of ascent per day, with distances of up to 16km / 10 miles.

Accommodation:

7 nights in mountain refuges and trekkers' lodges, with continental breakfasts, picnic lunches and generous evening meals provided every day.

Refuge accommodation is generally clean and comfortable, but basic – with communal dormitories (either bunk beds or shared sleeping platforms) and simple toilet and washing facilities. Most refuges do not have showers, and you are expected to carry your rubbish away with you. There is a friendly atmosphere and they serve tasty, hearty meals. Mattresses and blankets are provided, so there is no need to carry any camping equipment.

Weather : generally warm and sunny. At this time of year you can expect temperatures in the high teens to mid 20s°C but it can be significantly cooler at altitude, or warmer if we have a hot spell. We recommend that you carry at least 1.5l of water per person, as it is best to avoid drinking from streams. In particular, the limestone landscape of the Ordesa National Park has no surface water. Drinking water can be obtained at the refuge sources, or you can purchase mineral water.

~~**PRICE: £710 per person** including 7 breakfasts, 6 packed lunches, 7 evening meals, all accommodation, 6 days of guiding with a qualified International Mountain Leader, excess baggage storage and local transfers.~~

We can help out with arrangements for airport or station transfers at extra charge if required.