

WALKS AND CLIMBS IN THE PYRENEES

About the Author

Kev Reynolds is a travel writer and lecturer whose passion for adventure has taken him to many far-flung mountain ranges, but the Pyrenees remains his spiritual home. *Walks and Climbs* was first published by Cicerone Press in 1978, and it has never been out of print. Some of his adventures when researching routes for this guide appear in *A Walk in the Clouds*, a collection of short stories celebrating his life among mountains worldwide. In 2015 Cicerone published his memoir of trekking adventures in Nepal, entitled *Abode of the Gods*, and more recently he was the contributing editor of Cicerone's anniversary book, *50 Years of Adventure*.

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WALKS AND CLIMBS IN THE PYRENEES

WALKS, CLIMBS AND MULTI-DAY TREKS

Kev Reynolds

CICERONE

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Dedication

*For Jean and Pierre Ravier – the ultimate Pyrénéistes –
to mark 30 years of co-operation and friendship.*

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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. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1053/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 or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: The Cirque de Gavarnie – best-known feature of the Pyrenees

CONTENTS

Map key	11
Overview map	12
Preface to the seventh edition	15

INTRODUCTION	17
The mountains	17
National parks	19
Vegetation	22
Wildlife	24
Getting there	25
Weather	26
Equipment	27
Refuges, gîtes and camping	29
Maps	32
Emergency services	33
Using the guide	33
Information at a glance	36

1 CIRQUE DE LESCUN	38
Route 1 Lescun – Refuge de Labérourat	44
Route 2 Lescun – Pic d’Anie	45
Route 3 Lescun (Parking Nabia) – Lac de Lhurs	46
Route 4 Lescun – Cabane de Pédain	48
Route 5 Cabane de Pédain – Cabane d’Ansabère	50
Route 6 Lescun – Cabane d’Ansabère	51
Route 7 Cabane d’Ansabère – Pic d’Ansabère	53
Route 8 Lescun (Pont Lamary) – Lac d’Ansabère – Ibón de Acherito	55
Route 9 Cabane d’Ansabère – Col de Burcq – Refuge d’Arlet	56
Route 10 Cirque de Lescun and the Frontier Ridge	59
Route 11 Lescun to Refuge d’Ayous via Etsaut	62

2 PIC DU MIDI D’OSSAU	65
Route 12 Lac de Bioux-Artigues – Refuge d’Ayous	70
Route 13 Lac de Bioux-Artigues – Col de Suzon – Refuge de Pombie	71
Route 14 Lac de Bioux-Artigues – Col de Peyreget – Refuge de Pombie	72
Route 15 Ossau Valley (Caillou de Soques) – Refuge de Pombie	74
Route 16 Col du Pourtalet (Anéou Pastures) – Refuge de Pombie	75
Route 17 Refuge de Pombie – Pic du Midi d’Ossau	76
Route 18 Ayous Lakes Circuit	78
Route 19 Tour of Pic du Midi d’Ossau	79

Route 20	Extended Tour of Pic du Midi	81
3 BALAITOUS 83		
Route 21	Ossau Valley (Caillou de Soques) – Refuge d'Arrémoulit (via Passage d'Orteig)	88
Route 22	Ossau Valley (Caillou de Soques) – Refuge d'Arrémoulit (via Lac d'Artouste)	89
Route 23	Lac d'Artouste – Refuge d'Arrémoulit	90
Route 24	Refuge d'Arrémoulit – Pic Palas	91
Route 25	Refuge d'Arrémoulit – Col du Palas – Port du Lavedan – Refuge de Larribet	93
Route 26	Plan d'Aste – Lac de Suyen – Refuge de Larribet	94
Route 27	Plan d'Aste – Refuge Ledormeur	96
Route 28	Plan d'Aste – Refuge de Migouélou	97
Route 29	Lac d'Artouste – Col d'Artouste – Refuge de Migouélou	98
Route 30	Refuge d'Arrémoulit – Col d'Arrémoulit – Refugio de Respomuso	99
Route 31	Sallent de Gallego (Puente de la Fajas) – Refugio de Respomuso	100
Route 32	Tour of the Balaitous Region	103
Route 33	Lac du Tech (Vallée d'Arrens) – Lac de Pouey-Laün	104
Route 34	Refuge d'Arrémoulit – Balaitous	107
Route 35	Refuge de Larribet – Balaitous	109
4 THE GOURETTE MASSIF 111		
Route 36	Gourette – Lac d'Anglas	114
Route 37	Gourette – Lac d'Uzious – Lac du Lavedan	115
Route 38	Gourette – Lac du Tech – Arrens-Marsous – Gourette	117
5 VALLÉE D'ESTAING 120		
Route 39	Circuit of Lac d'Estaing	123
Route 40	Lac d'Estaing – Lac du Plaa de Prat	123
Route 41	Lac d'Estaing – Col d'Ilhéou – Refuge d'Ilhéou	124
Route 42	Lac d'Estaing – Lac du Barbat	126
6 VALLÉE DU MARCADAU 128		
Route 43	Cauterets – Pont d'Espagne – Chalet-Refuge du Clot	132
Route 44	Chalet-Refuge du Clot – Refuge Wallon	133
Route 45	Pont d'Espagne – Refuge Wallon	134
Route 46	Refuge Wallon – Grande Fache	135
Route 47	Refuge Wallon – Port du Marcadau	137
Route 48	Refuge Wallon – Pic de Cambalès	138
Route 49	Refuge Wallon – Col de Cambalès	140
Route 50	Marcadau Lakes Circuit	141
Route 51	Refuge Wallon – Col d'Arratille	143

Route 52	A Tour of the Arratille Valley	144
Route 53	Refuge Wallon to Gavarnie	145

7 VIGNEMALE 148		
Route 54	Pont d'Espagne – Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube	152
Route 55	Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube – Refuge de Bayscellance	153
Route 56	Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube – Petit Vignemale	154
Route 57	Hourquette d'Ossoue – Pointe Chausenque	156
Route 58	Gavarnie (Barrage d'Ossoue) – Refuge de Bayscellance	157
Route 59	Refuge de Bayscellance – Vignemale	159
Route 60	Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube – Col des Oulettes – Torla	162
Route 61	Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube – Refuge d'Estom	165

8 VALLÉE DE LUTOUR 166		
Route 62	Cauterets – La Fruitière	169
Route 63	La Fruitière – Refuge d'Estom	169
Route 64	Refuge d'Estom – Lac Glacé	170
Route 65	La Fruitière – Refuge Russell	171

9 GAVARNIE 173		
Route 66	Gavarnie – Plateau de Bellevue – Gavarnie	178
Route 67	Gavarnie – Hôtellerie du Cirque – Gavarnie	179
Route 68	Gavarnie – Refuge des Espuguettes	180
Route 69	Gavarnie – Refuge des Espuguettes – Piméné	181
Route 70	Gavarnie (Col de Tentes) – Pic de Tentes – Pic de la Pahule	182
Route 71	Gavarnie – Refuge de la Brèche	184
Route 72	Col de Tentes – Port de Boucharo – Refuge de la Brèche	185
Route 73	Gavarnie – Refuge de la Brèche	186
Route 74	Refuge de la Brèche – Pic du Marboré	187
Route 75	Refuge de la Brèche – Tour du Marboré	189
Route 76	Refuge de la Brèche – Casque du Marboré	190
Route 77	Refuge de la Brèche – Pic du Taillon	191
Route 78	Refuge de la Brèche – Refugio de Góriz	192

10 ORDESA NATIONAL PARK 195		
Route 79	Torla – Pradera de Ordesa	202
Route 80	Pradera de Ordesa – Refugio de Góriz	202
Route 81	Pradera de Ordesa – Circo de Soaso – Faja de Pelay – Ordesa	204
Route 82	Pradera de Ordesa – Faja los Canarellas – Ordesa	206
Route 83	Refugio de Góriz – Collado de Arrablo – Añisclo Canyon – Puente de San Úrbez	207
Route 84	The Spanish Canyons Tour	210
Route 85	Refugio de Góriz – Monte Perdido	211

Route 86	Valle de Pineta – Monte Perdido	213
Route 87	Valle de Pineta – Llanos de La Larri	215

11 ESTAUBÉ, TROUMOUSE AND BARROUDE

Route 88	Barrage des Gloriettes – Cabane d'Estaubé	220
Route 89	Héas – Lacs des Aires – Le Cot	222
Route 90	Héas – Hourquette d'Héas – Hourquette de Chermentas – Cirque de Barroude	223
Route 91	Cirque de Barroude – Pic de Port-Vieux – Port Vieux – Cirque de Barroude	225

12 RÉSERVE NATURELLE DE NÉOUVELLE

Route 92	Barèges – Refuge de la Glère	234
Route 93	Barèges (Pont de la Gaubie) – Lac dets Coubous	235
Route 94	Barèges (Pont de la Gaubie) – Cabane d'Aygués-Cluses	236
Route 95	Barèges (Pont de la Gaubie) – Col de Madamète – Pic de Madamète – Lac dets Coubous – Pont de la Gaubie	237
Route 96	Barèges (Pont de la Gaubie) – Col de Madamète – Chalet-Hôtel de l'Oule	238
Route 97	Barèges (Pont de la Gaubie) – Hourquette Nère – Refuge de Bastan	239
Route 98	Chalet-Hôtel de l'Oule – Refuge de Bastan	241
Route 99	Artigues (Col du Tourmalet road) – Refuge de Campana de Cloutou	241
Route 100	Vallée de Couplan – Chalet-Hôtel de l'Oule	243
Route 101	A Walking Circuit of Lac de l'Oule	244
Route 102	A Circuit of Lac d'Aumar	244
Route 103	A Néouvielle Lakes Circuit	246

13 LAC D'OÔ AND THE CIRQUE D'ESPINGO

Route 104	Granges d'Astau – Lac d'Oô – Refuge d'Espingo	252
Route 105	Refuge d'Espingo – Refuge du Portillon	254
Route 106	Refuge d'Espingo – Port d'Oô – Refuge de Estós	255

14 THE POSETS MASSIF

Route 107	Eriste – Refuge Ángel Orús	262
Route 108	Benasque – Refuge de Estós	263
Route 109	Refugio de Estós – Pico de Posets	265
Route 110	Refugio de Estós – Pico de Posets via SE Arête	266
Route 111	Puente Nuevo de San Chaime – Ibóns d'Escarpinosa	268
Route 112	Refugio de Estós – Puerto de Gistain – Refuge de Viadós	269
Route 113	Refugio de Viadós – Collado de Eriste – Refuge Ángel Orús	271
Route 114	Tour of the Posets Massif	273

15 VALLÉES DE LA PIQUE AND DU LIS

Route 115	Vallée du Lis – Refuge du Maupas	278
Route 116	Refuge du Maupas – Lac Céline	280
Route 117	Vallée du Lis – Lac Vert – Lac des Graüs – Vallée du Lis	281
Route 118	Hospice de France – Refuge de Vénasque – Port de Vénasque	282
Route 119	Hospice de France – Pas de la Montjoie – Pas de l'Escalette – Puerto de la Picada – Port de Vénasque – Hospice de France	284

16 THE MALADETA MASSIF

Route 120	Hospital de Benasque – Ibón de Gorgutes	291
Route 121	Hospital de Benasque – Forau dels Aigualluts	292
Route 122	Hospital de Benasque – Refuge de la Renclusa	293
Route 123	Refugio de la Renclusa – Pico de Aneto	294
Route 124	Refugio de Coronas – Pico de Aneto	296
Route 125	Refugio de la Renclusa – Pico de la Maladeta	298
Route 126	Refugio de la Renclusa – Pico de la Maladeta	299
Route 127	Refugio de la Renclusa – Pico de Alba	300
Route 128	Refugio de la Renclusa – Pico Forcanada	302
Route 129	Hospital de Benasque – Refuge Sant Nicolau	305

17 AIGÜESTORTES WEST – THE BESIBERRI MASSIF

Route 130	Refugi Sant Nicolau – Port de Rius – Collado de Lac de Mar – Refuge de la Restanca	313
Route 131	Refugi Conangles – Estany Gran de Besiberri – Refuge de Besiberri	315
Route 132	Vall de Sant Nicolau – Aigüestortes – Refuge d'Estany Llong	318
Route 133	Refugi d'Estany Llong – Estany Redó – Refuge d'Estany Llong	319
Route 134	Refugi d'Estany Llong – Portarró d'Espot	320
Route 135	Estany de Cavallers – Refuge Ventosa i Calvell	321
Route 136	Refugi Ventosa i Calvell – Besiberri Nord	322
Route 137	Tour of the Agulles de Travessani	323
Route 138	Refugi Ventosa i Calvell – Montardo d'Aran	325
Route 139	Refugi Ventosa i Calvell – Coll de Crestada – Refuge de la Restanca	326
Route 140	Salardú/Banhs de Tredòs – Refuge de Colomers	327

18 AIGÜESTORTES EAST – ENCANTADOS

Route 141	Espot – Refuge JM Blanc	334
Route 142	Espot (Prat de Peiro) – Refuge E. Mallafré	335
Route 143	A Circular Tour of Estany Sant Maurici	336
Route 144	Refuge E. Mallafré – Gran Encantat	337
Route 145	Estany de Sant Maurici – Refuge d'Amitges	340
Route 146	Refuge d'Amitges – Agulle d'Amitges	341
Route 147	Capdella/Embalse de Sallente – Refuge Colomina	342

19 HAUTE VALLÉE DU GARBET	345
Route 148 Aulus-les-Bains – Cascade du Fouillet – Aulus-les-Bains	348
Route 149 Aulus-les-Bains – Étang de Guzet – Cascade d'Ars – Aulus	349
Route 150 Aulus-les-Bains (Le Garbettou) – Plateau de Garbettou – Étang du Garbet	352
Route 151 Aulus-les-Bains (Coumebière) – Port de Saleix – Refuge de Bassiès ..	354
20 ANDORRA	356
Route 152 Grau Roig – Estanys dels Pessons	360
Route 153 Soldeu – Estanys del Siscaró – Pont de la Baladosa – Soldeu	362
Route 154 Soldeu (Pont de la Baladosa) – Collada de Juclar	365
Route 155 Soldeu (Pont d'Incles) – Pont de Bonavida – Port d'Incles – Étangs de Fontargente	366
Route 156 Soldeu – Canillo	367
Route 157 Ransol – Refuge dels Coms de Jan	369
Route 158 Arcalis – Estanys de Tristaina	371
Route 159 Arinsal – Refuge de Coma Pedrosa	374
Route 160 Refuge de Coma Pedrosa – Pic de Coma Pedrosa	375
Route 161 Les Escaldes – Refuge de l'Illa	377
Route 162 A Circuit of Andorra's Frontier Peaks	379
21 THE CARLIT MASSIF	381
Route 163 Orlu (Pont de Bisp) – Refuge d'En Beys	386
Route 164 Refuge d'En Beys – Porté-Puymorens	386
Route 165 l'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre – Refuge des Bésines	387
Route 166 Walking Tour of the Vallée de Lanous	388
Route 167 Porté-Puymorens – Pic Carlit	390
Route 168 Chalet-Refuge des Bouillouses – Pic Carlit	392
Route 169 The Carlit Lakes Tour	393
Route 170 Tour du Carlit	395
Appendix A Useful addresses	397
Appendix B Bibliography	398
Appendix C Glossary	400
Appendix D Route index	402

Map key



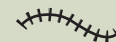
International border



National Park/Réserve Naturelle/
Parque Natural boundary



Route number



Railway



Town/village



Refuge/refugio



Mountain



Ridge



Lake



River/stream



Cascade



Road/road tunnel



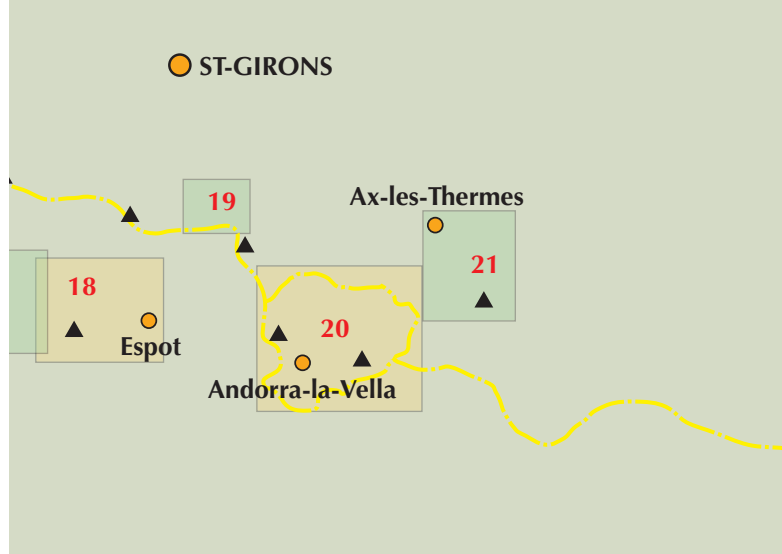
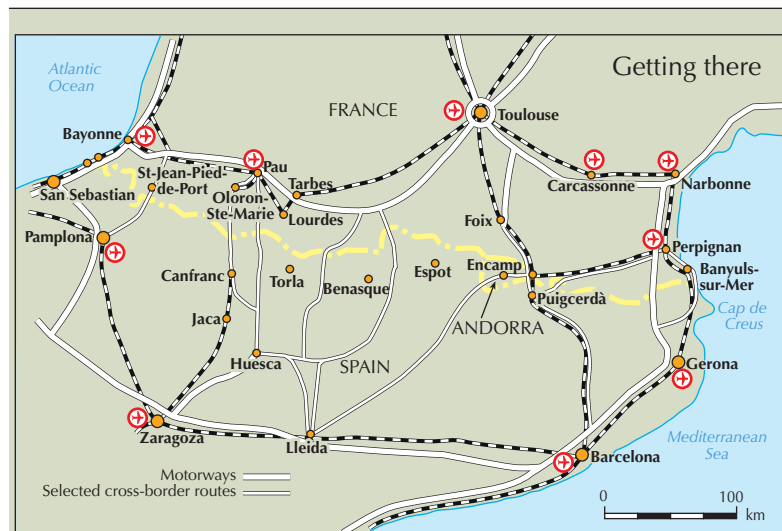
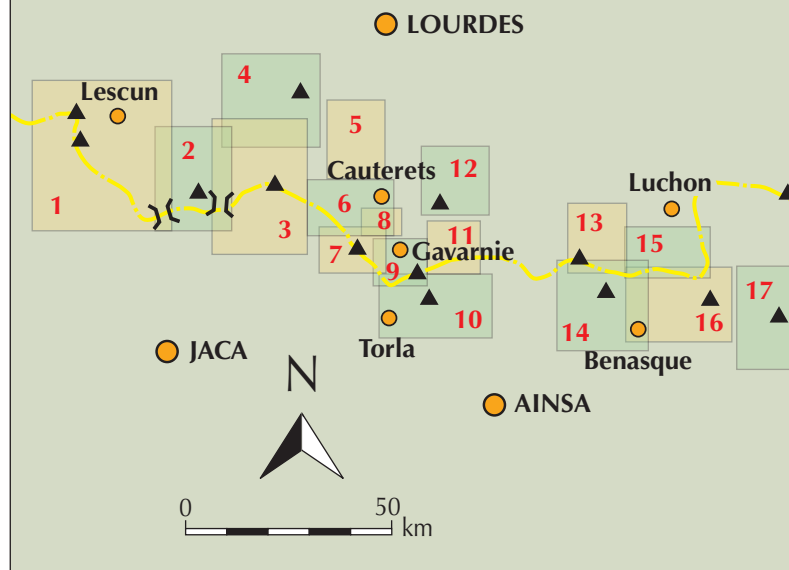
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Campground

THE PYRENEES

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Cirque de Lescun | 12 Réserve Naturelle de Néouvielle |
| 2 Pic du Midi d'Ossau | 13 Lac d'Oô and the Cirque d'Espingo |
| 3 Balaïtous | 14 The Posets Massif |
| 4 The Gourette Massif | 15 Vallées de la Pique and du Lis |
| 5 Vallée d'Etaing | 16 The Maladeta Massif |
| 6 Vallée du Marcadau | 17 Aigüestortes West – The Besiberri Massif |
| 7 Vignemale | 18 Aigüestortes East – Encantados |
| 8 Vallée de Lutour | 19 Haute Vallée du Garbet |
| 9 Gavarnie | 20 Andorra |
| 10 Ordesa National Park | 21 The Carlit Massif |
| 11 Estaubé, Troumouse and Barroude | |





The author with climbing partner Alan Payne researching routes in 1980
(Photo: Peter Smith)

PREFACE

Since the first slim edition of this guide appeared in 1978, the Pyrenees have changed enormously, and the huge increase in the number of active walkers and climbers has brought about a boom in tourist infrastructure undreamed of four decades ago. Hilaire Belloc's 'fleas that tease in the high Pyrenees' are now a rarity in hotels and refuges that no longer expect their guests to doss down on straw mattresses, while signed and waymarked paths, and improved mapping, have unravelled the mysteries of so many previously little-known valleys.

Not least of all the changes is the transformation of the Pyrenean landscape that once dazzled with modest glaciers and small snowfields on the highest summits. Thanks to climate change, the few remaining glaciers are shrinking at an alarming rate and it has been estimated that there will be none left by 2050. Already we find that once winter snow has melted, the white-capped summits remain white in memory only. But for all this change the Pyrenees remains a wonderland for all who are attracted by wildly romantic scenery and a taste for adventure, and even the most dedicated of aficionados will find that a single lifetime is not long enough to explore it all.

Despite its size, this guide merely picks out a few of the juiciest plums clustered on both sides of the international border between the Cirque de Lescun in the west, and the tarn-spattered Carlit Massif in the east. But there should be enough to satisfy a dozen active holidays. When following any of the routes, whether walks, treks or climbs, my hope is that you will have the best of experiences, and discover for yourself what it is that makes the Pyrenees so special.

Once again I am indebted to fellow enthusiasts for their letters and emails keeping me informed about changes to routes and accommodation, and for valuable suggestions I'm happy to pass on. My good friend and Pyrenean specialist Françoise Besson generously gave me free use of her home in the foothills during periods of research, and joined me and my wife on some of the walks. My wife continues to share my love of these mountains and is the best of companions on the hills, in the valleys and at home, while Jonathan Williams and all the team at Cicerone once again used their skills and talents on my behalf to create the book you hold in your hands. I thank them all for their support.

And lastly, a special debt of gratitude is due to my friends Jean and Pierre Ravier, the ultimate Pyrénéistes, whose generous flow of information, advice and encouragement has been a frequent and much-valued source of pleasure for more than three decades. Their devotion to all things Pyrenean is a true inspiration, and it is both a pleasure and a privilege to dedicate this guide to them. *Merci mon amis!*

Kev Reynolds, 2019

ROUTE 1

Lescun (900m) – Refuge de Labérrouat (1442m)

Start	Lescun (900m)
Distance	4km
Grade	1
Time	1–1½hr
Height gain	542m

This walk follows the route of GR10 all the way from Lescun, and is waymarked with red-white paint flashes.

There's ample parking space just before reaching the refuge, should you prefer to drive.

The walk begins in the heart of the village near the Maison de la Montagne, and climbs above it on a stony path between fields heading roughly northwest, soon joining the narrow road which serves the refuge. ◀

Follow the road to the right, but when it forks take the left branch. Soon after it bends note a waymark sending you into the right-hand meadow. The way progresses through a tree-lined gully, then up to a farm track from which you gain fine views of the Cirque de Lescun, the Pics Billare and Pic d'Anie.

The track brings you above a farm where you cut off to the right on a narrow path slanting uphill and onto another track above a second farm. Come onto the road once more at a hairpin bend. About 30m up the road break left on the continuing waymarked path which soon takes you across an open boggy patch, through a belt of woodland, then emerges to a broad grass path slanting uphill to the right. After passing through another belt of woodland come to a view of Pic Oueillarissee directly ahead. The path eventually makes a couple of zigzags before spilling onto the road for the last time. Turn left. The refuge is reached in another 200m or so (refreshments usually available). An orientation table names the high points in an extensive view.

To return to Lescun by the same route, allow 45min.

PIC D'ANIE (2504M)

Significant as the first of the High Pyrenees, Pic d'Anie requires little more than a long walk to reach its summit by the standard route. With a dusting of winter snow the mountain looks especially impressive from Lescun; in fact it appears much more majestic from afar than it does on close inspection, where it is revealed as a chaos of scree and limestone pits. The summit panorama scans the Basque country spreading to the west. Below, to the northwest, lies the entrance to the Gouffre de la Pierre St-Martin, one of the world's most extensive underground caverns.

ROUTE 2

Lescun (900m) – Pic d'Anie (2504m)

Start	Lescun (900m)
Distance	10km
Grade	F
Time	5hr
Height gain	1604m

A straightforward but rewarding ascent. Note the considerable height gain from Lescun, and the length of time taken to get there and back again. Add on time for rests, and you'll see that you face a fairly long and tiring day.



Pic d'Anie (2504m), first of the High Pyrenees

From Lescun follow Route 1 as far as Refuge de Labérourat, and continue beyond it to pass through woodland beneath the strange organ-pipe rocks of the Orgues de Camplong. About 1hr 15min beyond Labérourat along the GR10 you pass below a simple hut, Cabane d'Ardinet (1570m), which has a water supply and spaces for about five people. The path climbs on and reaches a second hut, Cabane du Cap de la Baigt (1680m), with room for about eight.

GR10 now strikes north towards Pas d'Azuns, Pas de l'Osque and Arette la Pierre St-Martin, but the path to Pic d'Anie swings southwest, rising between Pic du Soum Couy and Pic de Countende towards Col des Anies (2030m) where the way is marked on a large boulder. Pic d'Anie stands to the south of the col and is reached in about 1½hr from it, by crossing an impressive karst landscape waymarked with small cairns and paint flashes. Traversing the scree-ridden north face, the way curves round its west face to make the final climb from the southwest.

Allow at least 3½–4hr for a return to Lescun by the same route.

ROUTE 3

*Lescun (Parking Nabia, 1040m)
– Lac de Lhurs (1691m)*

Start	Lescun (Parking Nabia, 1040m)
Distance	5km
Grade	3
Time	3hr
Height gain	651m

Lac de Lhurs is hidden below the Table des Trois Rois in a small cirque shown on the map as Montagne de Lhurs southwest of Lescun. This walk to it is quite strenuous, but it makes for an entertaining day out.

To get to the start follow signs from Lescun marked 'Lhurs (Lac)'. These take you onto one of several minor lanes cutting through the pastures. Soon after crossing a sub-valley you come to a sign pointing to the right along a track marked 'Parking Nabia 100m'. The continuing lane goes to Pont de Masousa and Ansabère.

Just beyond the parking space bear left where the track forks. As it makes a long loop you can make a short cut by taking a broad grassy path left up through a meadow to regain the track a little higher. Remain on the track now as it makes a scenic contour of hillside overlooking the great pastureland bowl of the Cirque de Lescun. When it begins a short downward slope, note a small parking space and continue for about 150m along the track to a major junction. Turn right, uphill, and follow this obvious route, bearing left at the top of the steep section, looking out for waymarks.

About 1hr 20min from the start you come to the woodland edge near an abrupt rock wall. Here the path zigzags up to the head of a track (1455m) where you turn left. A stony path now contours immediately below a section of rock wall, and at the far end it curves right and resumes uphill. After passing through scrub cross an open avalanche runnel, on the far side of which you gaze into a ravine that supports the unseen Lac de Lhurs.

The path dips into the ravine entrance, crosses to its left-hand side, then zigzags up to gain a high grassy shoulder. Looking back, you can see the unmistakable Pic du Midi d'Ossau to the southeast. From the shoulder the path (now broken into several braidings) cuts along the steep left-hand wall of the ravine, crosses sections of limestone pavement and brings you to the lake's outflow stream. Cross on partly submerged rocks and follow the stream to the Lac de Lhurs. The lake is surrounded by pastures topped by screes and mountain peaks. A small unmanned *cabane* is seen at the far end. Most notable of the walling peaks is the tilted, semi-pointed summit of the Table des Trois Rois on which it is said the kings of Navarre, Aragón and Béarn met to agree the frontiers of their respective territories.

Allow at least 2hr to return by the same route.

ROUTE 4

Lescun (900m) – Cabane de Pédain (1533m)

Start	Lescun (900m)
Distance	9km
Grade	2–3
Time	3hr
Height gain	633m

This walk leads to a steeply tilted basin below the Aiguilles d'Ansabère, those dramatic limestone pinnacles that are a major feature of the district. It's an easy route at first along a country lane, through woodland and into a pastureland bowl. But then the gradient increases and the way becomes faint on the climb to a rough *cabane*. Built of stone and concrete, the very simple Cabane de Pédain is only recommended as an emergency shelter, although climbers with ambitions for hard routes on the aiguilles may be prepared to accept its uncompromisingly basic facilities and use it as a base. There are some great views of those pinnacles from the route to it, and from the path of Route 5 which makes a worthwhile link with the Cabane d'Ansabère, thus enabling a partial alternative return to be made.

If you have your own transport it's possible to drive as far as either Pont de Masousa (960m) or Pont Lamary (1171m) where there are several parking spaces, thus reducing the approach by 2hr or 1½hr respectively. The forest track between the two bridges is not paved and might be problematic for vehicles with low suspension.

Leave Lescun by the road that branches southwest just below the village and goes to the campsite on the south side of the Gave de Lescun. Continue beyond the campsite entrance along the surfaced lane following signs to 'Masousa-Ansabère'. This leads to the unpaved parking area by Pont de Masousa (45min walking time from Camping du Lauzart). Immediately before the parking area bear left on a forest track rising through woodland. Remaining well above the true right (south) bank of the Gave d'Ansabère follow this track all the way to Pont Lamary where there are a few parking spaces (about 30min from Pont de Masousa).

The Aiguilles d'Ansabère, seen above Cabane de Pédain

Cross the simple concrete bridge and follow a clear path which takes you through more light woodland as it gains height, with the Ansabère needles now luring you on. At the top of a rise a large pastureland clearing is reached. ►

Leave the path and wander off to the right towards a small, low shepherd's hut seen a short distance away. Beyond the hut a faint trace of a path is guided by a few cairns along the lower edge of beechwoods on the right-hand side of a (dry in summer) stream bed. Out of the woods the way zig-zags up a steep grass slope with cairns and traces of path. About two-thirds of the way up this slope enter woods on the far side, still gaining height but less steeply now.

Emerge from the woods and continue up the slope with splendid views of the aiguilles above to the left, and the Table des Trois Rois ahead. More small cairns indicate the way in lieu of a proper path. It crosses another dry stream bed on the left where a path appears, after which you angle half-left up a rib of grass before joining a much clearer path (used by Route 5). Cabane de Pédain can now be seen ahead, and is soon reached.

If returning by the same route allow 2–2½hr to Lescun; see Route 5 for a recommended alternative.

This is a lovely mountain bowl with streams meandering through, dark woods on the far side and the Aiguilles d'Ansabère rising dramatically above.

ROUTE 5

*Cabane de Pédain (1533m) –
Cabane d'Ansabère (1560m)*

Start	Cabane de Pédain (1533m)
Distance	2km
Grade	2
Time	30min
Height gain	27m

This linking route is recommended not only for the quality of the views but also for variety. If it is your intention to make a direct return to Lescun, it's not necessary to go quite as far as the Cabane d'Ansabère, for the Lescun path is reached a few minutes below it.

Descend from the hut for about 2min to reach the well-defined path which contours roughly southwest then south round the hillside. The gradient is much gentler than that of the route of approach (Route 4), but after turning a spur the way begins to climb, and shortly after (about 10min from the hut) it brings you to a stream with a stunning view up to the aiguilles. By climbing a few metres beside the stream you'll find a delightful little rocky area where gathering streams have formed a small pool backed by beech trees, alpine flowers and great views.

Beyond the stream the path contours again through beechwoods, then winds gently downhill, coming out of the trees onto a crossing path below the Cabanes d'Ansabère. To reach these, wander up the path for a few min, or to return to Lescun turn left and descend to Pont Lamary in 20–30min.

ROUTE 6

Lescun (900m) – Cabane d'Ansabère (1560m)

Start	Lescun (900m)
Distance	9km
Grade	2–3
Time	3hr
Height gain	660m

Sometimes used by trekkers tackling the HRP, Cabane d'Ansabère has very limited accommodation, but it is the only shelter on the long stage between Lescun and Refuge d'Arlet (see Route 9). The HRP now has an optional variation, but the *cabane* is occasionally used by trekkers passing this way, and by climbers tackling routes on the Petite Aiguille d'Ansabère, which soars overhead. There are three *cabanes* in all, the others being used by shepherds. Whether you have plans to spend a night there (you'll need to carry your own food and cooking equipment), the approach walk has plenty of appeal. It's also temptingly close to Pic d'Ansabère, whose summit can be reached by walkers with a modicum of scrambling experience (see Route 7).

Follow Route 4 directions as far as the pastureland basin at the top of the rise above Pont Lamary – but bear in mind that it's possible to drive as far as either Pont de Masousa or Lamary itself. If walking all the way from Lescun, it will take about 2hr 20min to gain the pastureland bowl.

Descend to the stream, cross it and climb steeply through the woods beyond. The path is obvious and it leads directly to the *cabanes*, which are located at the foot of screes fanning from the base of the aiguilles.