

SHORT TREKS ON CORSICA



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SHORT TREKS ON CORSICA

FIVE MOUNTAIN AND COASTAL TREKS INCLUDING THE MARE A MARE AND MARE E MONTI

by Gillian Price

CICERONE

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For Betty 'la courageuse' and dear Daddyo.

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Many thanks to the late Walt Unsworth who first suggested I went to *la belle île* and to trail mates Nicola and Laura for their great company on our 'island in the sun'.

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Front cover: Marvellous Capu d'Ortu is on display at the village of Ota (Trek 2: Mare e Monti))

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 before 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/1059/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.

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.

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.

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






















General emergency: tel 112
Fire service (*Pompiers*): tel 18

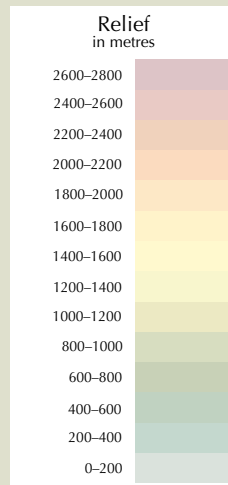
Weather reports

www.meteo.fr

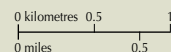
Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  start/finish point
-  route direction
-  peak
-  woodland
-  town/village
-  bus service
-  ferry
-  accommodation
-  refreshments
-  tourist information
-  building(s)
-  church/chapel
-  tower
-  pass
-  bridge
-  water feature
-  viewpoint



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/1059/GPX.



ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Stage	Start	Distance	Ascent	Descent	Time	Page
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Sentier du Douanier: Cap Corse

1	Port de Centuri	11.4km	500m	500m	4hr 15min	38
2	Barcaggio	13km	300m	300m	4hr	41
Total		24.4km	800m	800m	2 days	

Mare e Monti: Calenzana to Cargèse

1	Calenzana	11.5km	560m	300m	4hr	48
2	Bonifatu	15km	800m	1200m	5hr 40min	52
3	Tuarelli	12.8km	230m	290m	3hr 50min	56
4	Galéria	11.5km	770m	800m	5hr	60
5	Girolata	10.5km	840m	550m	4hr	64
6	Curzu	8km	440m	700m	3hr 15min	67
7	Serriera	10.8km	1050m	780m	5hr 40min	70
8	Ota	11.5km	650m	260m	4hr 50min	74
9	Marignana	18km	825m	930m	6hr	78
10	E Case	13km	400m	910m	4hr 30min	82
Total		122.6km	6565m	6720m	10 days	

Mare a Mare Nord: Cargèse to Moriani Plage

1	Cargèse	13km	910m	400m	5hr	87
2	E Case	18km	930m	825m	6hr	90
3	Marignana	15.8km	880m	120m	5hr 30min	94
4	Castel de Vergio	13.4km	160m	700m	4hr	99

Stage	Start	Distance	Ascent	Descent	Time	Page
5	Albertacce	12.6km	800m	450m	5hr 15min	103
6	A Sega	13.3km	100m	770m	4hr 15min	107
7	Corte	16km	1000m	700m	5hr 40min	111
8	Sermano	13km	650m	650m	4hr 45min	115
9	Pianello	13km	600m	750m	4hr 15min	119
10	Pied d'Alesani	9.9km	460m	530m	4hr 10min	122
11	I Penti	10.2km	50m	660m	2hr 45min	125
Total		148.2km	6540m	6555m	11 days	

Mare a Mare Sud: Porto-Vecchio to Burgu

1	Porto-Vecchio	17km	1000m	80m	5hr 20min	131
2	Cartalavonu	13.6km	600m	1000m	4hr 40min	135
3	Levie	18.4km	750m	510m	6hr	139
4	Serra-di-Scopamène	10.5km	400m	800m	4hr	144
5	Sainte-Lucie-de-Tallano	16.4km	670m	1120m	5hr 15min	148
Total		75.9km	3420m	3510m	5 days	

Mare e Monti Sud: Burgu to Porticcio

1	Burgu	10.6km	800m	650m	4hr	155
2	Olmato	15.3km	350m	700m	4hr	158
3	Porto Pollo	11.5km	700m	300m	3hr 30min	161
4	Coti-Chiavari	16km	600m	400m	4hr 45min	164
5	Bisinao	13.5km	350m	1000m	4hr 15min	168
Total		66.9km	2800m	3050m	5 days	

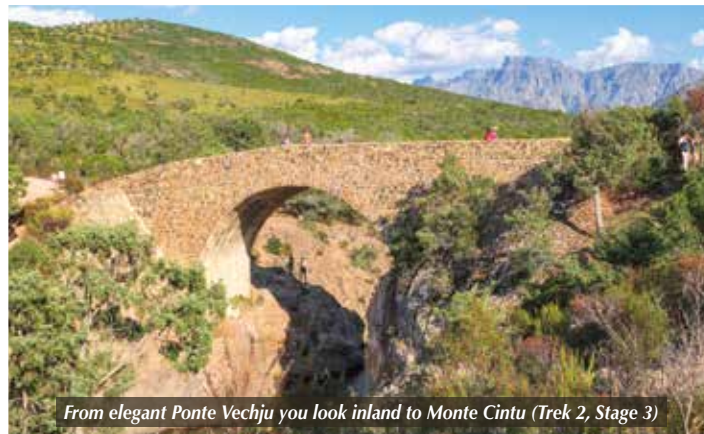
A tricky rocky ridge is negotiated prior to the 700m saddle below Capu di Curzu on stage 5 of the Mare e Monti (Trek 2)



INTRODUCTION

Will there be anything worth seeing in Corsica? Is there any romance left in that island? Is there any sublimity or beauty in its scenery? Have I taken too much baggage? Have I not rather taken too little? Am I not an idiot for coming at all?

Journal of a Landscape Painter in Corsica, Edward Lear (1870)



From elegant Ponte Vechju you look inland to Monte Cintu (Trek 2, Stage 3)

In the quote above, poet and artist Edward Lear expressed his doubts about travelling to Corsica. He might also have asked: Is the food good? Are the wildflowers interesting? Are the guesthouses comfortable? And above all, are there any worthwhile walks? The answers to these questions are provided by this guidebook and are unfailingly 'Yes!'. There are hundreds of kilometres of marked paths, leading into marvellous rugged mountains and across crystal-clear rivers; to golden sandy coves by the brilliant turquoise sea; over scented maquis

scrubland, along old mule tracks, through romantic forests of majestic Corsican pine trees; and on to quiet villages offering accommodation in cosy guesthouses and friendly hostels. What more could a walker ask?

This guide is designed to give a taste of the delights Corsica offers, with its wonderful network of intersecting long-distance pathways that allow walkers to mix and match. Five time-tested trekking routes are enticingly described here in detail. However, two words of warning: despite the word 'short' in the title – *Short Treks on*

Corsica – two of these pedestrian journeys last as long as 10 and 11 days. (If it's day walks you're after, check out the Cicerone guidebook *Walking on Corsica*.) And secondly, they can be highly addictive: just one taste and you may find yourself back for more!

THE TREKS

The five long-distance treks revealed in the following pages ramble over the island from top to bottom with well over a month's worth of exploring. Well-marked paths cross a surprising range of terrain – from soft sandy beaches to grassy pasture and scrubland, pine forests and challenging rough mountain slopes, not forgetting river crossings. There's something for everyone; the (difficult) choice is yours.

The **Sentier du Douanier** explores Cap Corse in the island's far north. Short and very sweet, it starts at the pretty fishing haven of Port de Centuri and traverses solitary headlands and coves on the two days it takes to round the elongated cape en route to Macinaggio.

The outstanding **Mare e Monti**, Corsica's longest-standing trek,

spends 10 memorable days getting from Calenzana to Cargèse. True to its name, 'sea and mountains', it's a roller-coaster of treats ranging from the breathtaking west coast to the rugged inland with its awe-inspiring mountain landscapes.

A hefty 11 days are needed for the **Mare a Mare Nord**, a superb coast-to-coast traverse all the way across the central northern midriff of the island, from Cargèse to Moriani Plage. Magnificent pine forests and landmark peaks give way to beautifully located rural settlements where time stands still.

Mare a Mare Sud links Porto-Vecchio with Burgu in five very enjoyable stages, crossing the southern realms of Corsica, touching on traditional mountain villages amid breathtaking rock landscapes and river after cooling river. This is probably the most straightforward of the long-distance routes.

Mare e Monti Sud is a relative newcomer. This five-day jaunt along the southwestern coast joins the beautiful gulfs of Valincu and Ajaccio, alternating beaches with hills, between the villages of Burgu and Porticcio.

THE GR20

Easily the most famous trek on Corsica, the GR20 lasts around two weeks and covers 190km. For experienced, well-equipped walkers, the challenging route links Calenzana with Conca, cutting across the island's mountainous interior. See the exhaustive Cicerone guidebook *The GR20 Corsica* by Paddy Dillon.



The inviting sweep of Cala Genovese (Trek 1, Stage 2)

CORSICA

Its shores lapped by the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian seas, Corsica is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean – after Sicily, Sardinia and Cyprus. It has a surface area of 8682km², is 183km long and 83km wide, and is blessed with a stunning 1000km coastline. Moreover, two-thirds of its land mass is taken up by an ancient mountain chain punctuated by a good 20 peaks over 2000m, while one-fifth is forested. Since 1972, a regional nature park (the Parc Naturel Régional de Corse, PNRC) has been responsible for safeguarding a vast 3500km² central swathe of the island.

Corsica – or more correctly Corse, in French – is part of France, despite being closer to Italy in both cultural and physical terms, although in fact

many of the inhabitants would rather be independent. A narrow strait of only 11km separates it from Sardinia, and it's only 90km across to the Tuscan coast, whereas it lies 170km from the Côte d'Azur in the south of France. The population of approximately 330,000 includes many mainlanders along with a sizeable percentage of North Africans, Italians and other Europeans. In contrast, it is said that more native Corsicans live in France than on the island itself.

Fanciful tales abound to explain the island's name. Phoenicians, the first seafarers to arrive, apparently referred to it as Ker-Cic, meaning 'slender promontory'. The Greeks came a little later and for them it was Kurnos, 'covered with forests'. Legendary Greco-Roman hero

TREK 1

Sentier du Douanier: Cap Corse

Start	Port de Centuri
Finish	Macinaggio
Distance	24.4km
Walking time	2 days
Maps	IGN 1:25,000, sheet 4347OT
Access	Buses from Bastia run year-round to Macinaggio (the walk end), where a taxi (tel 06 11536864 or 06 33647059) will cover the remaining 19km to Port de Centuri. The walk can be shortened by taking the May–Sept shuttle ferry from Barcaggio to Macinaggio (tel 06 14781416, www.sanpaulu.com).
Note	Do not set out in summer with strong winds and high fire risk. Be aware that Stage 1 has a few short stretches with a little exposure.

The superb Sentier du Douanier or Customs Officer's Path (abbreviated as SD) explores Corsica's northernmost tip, the 'thumb' known as Cap Corse. While the opening has a few rough spots, on the whole the walking is straightforward, not to mention highly enjoyable, as it sticks close to the spectacular rocky coast and visits sandy cove after glorious sandy cove. Stage 1 sees very few other walkers, while the later leg to Macinaggio has become quite popular as a day walk.

Waymarking for the SD consists of low wooden poles and heaped stone cairns, supplemented by orange paint splashes on the second stage. The whole area is a nature reserve and wild camping is forbidden; accommodation is in comfortable hotels.



PORT DE CENTURI

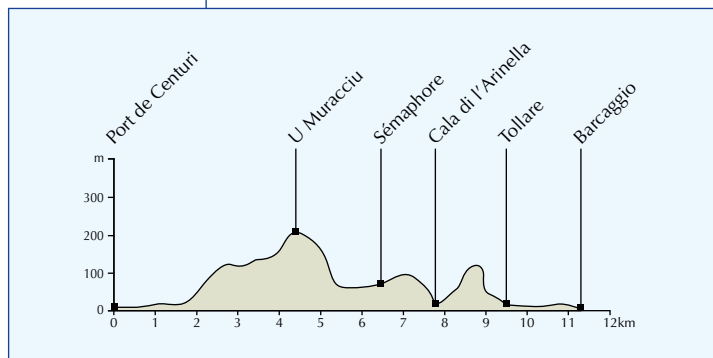
The start point, Port de Centuri, is a cosy fishing village with a photogenic harbourside lined with family-run hotels and restaurants frequented by yacht-borne visitors – this is France's leading lobster fishery. Accommodation options include Hôtel de la Jetée (tel 09 70356151, www.hotel-de-la-jetee-centuri.fr) and Auberge du Pêcheur (tel 04 95356014).

STAGE 1

Port de Centuri to Barcaggio

Start	Port de Centuri
Distance	11.4km
Ascent	500m
Descent	500m
Walking time	4hr 15min

The first half of this stage heads across rugged paths and saddles through scratchy bushes and over several narrow hands-on sections that can feel exposed. Once the north coast is reached, the going is easier and you drop in at the delightful seaside hamlet of Tollare; it's not far then to Barcaggio for a comfortable night at a guesthouse.



From the main car park and *L'Auberge du Pêcheur* at Port de Centuri, follow the steps past *La Bella Vista restaurant* then go R up to the church and road. A few metres further on, the SD forks L (N), soon passing an old wash trough. ◀ Scented maquis dominated by rosemary and myrtle shrubs accompanies the clear path via rocky coves. Some 40min along, after a sign warning of a passage

Above on the hillside
are windmills
old and new.



Here, you look out to Île de la Giraglia. You're a little over halfway now – *courage!*

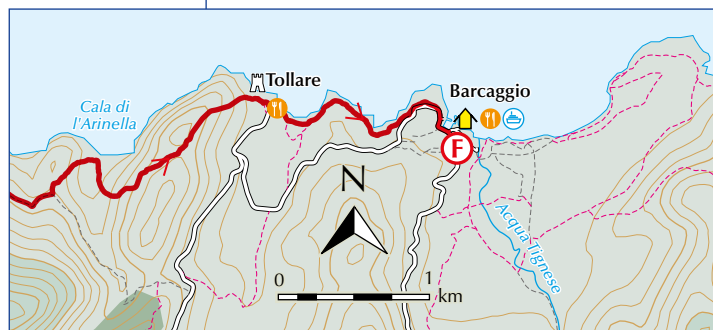
dangereux (ignore this fork), make sure you branch down L across a rocky gully following cairns, before a steepish climb over a minor headland. Long, mostly level traverses through bushes lead to the ancient stone wall **U Muracciu** (218m, **1hr 45min**), the highest point on the route, spanning a saddle inland from Capo Bianco.

You drop to cross a stream and continue N in descent towards the sea, before a level traverse NE over dry red terrain colonised by hardy grasses. A helicopter pad precedes a minor road near the prominent **Sémaphore** (signal station) on Capo Grosso. ◀

Walk R (E) along the road for 1.2km to where the SD veers L to plunge to the quiet pebbly cove **Cala di l'Arinella**. Now brace yourself for the day's last effort – a stiff 150m climb to a crest-cum-lookout with a glorious view over the coast to Barcaggio, and Tollare with its watchtower at your feet. It's a stroll down to the photogenic fishing village of **Tollare (2hr)** where a rustic *café* and grazing cows await on the pebble beach.

A delightful coast-hugging path leads on E through shady woodland to masses of colourful Hottentot figs on the pale flat headland of Petra Cinta (encircled rock), surrounded by sea. Not far on is laid-back **Barcaggio (30min)**.

Tiny harbour with *café-restaurants* and comfortable *Hôtel Petra Cinta* (tel 04 95368745, <http://hotelpetracinta.free.fr>).



The Sentier du Douanier hugs the lovely coast at first

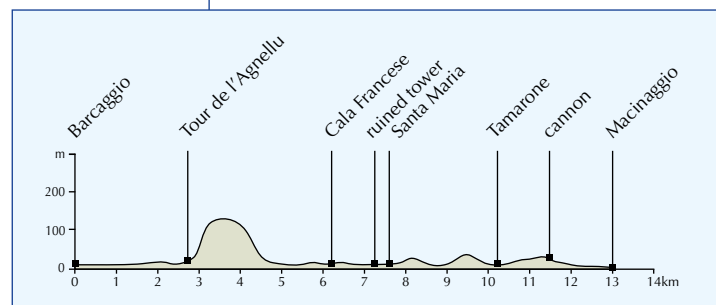
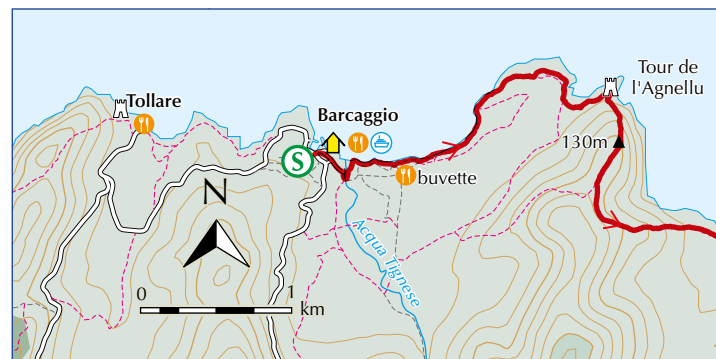
STAGE 2

Barcaggio to Macinaggio

Start	Barcaggio
Distance	13km
Ascent	300m
Descent	300m
Walking time	4hr

Today is a marvellous roller-coaster ramble via pretty coves, beaches and old watchtowers, and it all comes to a lovely conclusion at the well-served village of Macinaggio. If needs be, catch the ferry (see 'Access' information at the start of Trek 1).

Head E along the Barcaggio waterfront to join a road, then on to the SD sign pointing through to a car park. Here, a minor river is crossed on a footbridge and you're



soon on the glorious sandy beach of Barcaggio, with banks of *Posidonia* interspersed with yellow poppies. Past a *buvette* (snack bar) are low dunes thick with elegant sea lilies. The SD rounds a headland through wind-sculpted juniper and cypress shrubs, touching on beautiful turquoise coves before the **Tour de l'Agnellu** headland and your first view to the Italian island of Capraia.

A short climb S to 130m is followed by a traverse W to inviting inlets enclosed by eroded light green rock. Sea lavender and rock samphire abound here, as do cormorants, and the sandy beaches of **Cala Francese** and **Cala Genovese** make perfect swimming/picnic spots.

The next interesting landmark is an attractive **ruined tower** (2hr 30min), then you reach fields where an



The Sentier visits the Tour de l'Agnellu on its marvellous headland



Shortcut: from the chapel, a clear path heads S through fields, avoiding the climb over the Monte di a Guardia promontory and rejoining the SD at Tamarone beach.

Macinaggio was once an important port: muscat wine – appreciated by the papal court during the Renaissance – was shipped from here.

optional detour leads to the modest chapel of **Santa Maria**; if you visit the chapel, retrace your steps to the SD. ◀

Beyond a headland with head-high ever-green shrubs, the SD emerges to the sight of the Îles Finocchiarola, a nature reserve. Another stretch of sand (Plage des Îles) precedes a climb S over the promontory below Monte di a Guardia to popular **Tamarone** beach. Here, after the [café-restaurant](#) and car park, comes the final uphill section, initially on an unsurfaced road, before the SD breaks off L. You round Punta di a Coscia via an old **cannon** and walk along the beach to the marina and centre of **Macinaggio (1hr 30min)**. ◀

Restaurants, shops, bus for Bastia, tourist office and hotels such as U Libecciu (tel 04 95354322, www.u-libecciu.com). Camping U Stazzu (tel 04 95354376, <https://camping-u-stazzu.jimdo.com>, campsite with bungalows).

TREK 2

Mare e Monti: Calenzana to Cargèse

Start	Calenzana
Finish	Cargèse
Distance	122.6km
Walking time	10 days
Maps	IGN 1:25,000, sheets 4149OT, 4150OT, 4151OT
Access	A year-round bus from Calvi railway station runs to Calenzana. Failing that, try hitching a lift or take a taxi (tel 04 95627780 or 06 08165365) – the GR20 commences here too so trekkers are plentiful. Villages en route can be used as exit/entry points: Fangu is on the summer Calvi–Porto bus run, as are Curzu and Serriera. Further on, Ota is linked year-round with Porto, while Evisa and Marignana have buses to Ajaccio. The novel (and only!) way to access or leave the isolated fishing hamlet of Girolata is by boat to Porto in summer. The finish point at Cargèse has buses to Ajaccio and Calvi.
Note	There are short, moderately exposed stretches in Stages 4 and 5.

The superb Mare e Monti (sometimes referred to as Tra Mare e Monti or TMM) follows a huge ‘S’ as it heads southwards, ducking in and out of the reliefs parallel to Corsica’s rugged west coast. The many and varied highlights include the Forest of Bonifatu, the Fango river gorge, the isolated fishing village of Girolata, the Golfe de Porto and the Spilonca gorge, along with days and days of wandering through memorable maquis impregnated with the scents of the Mediterranean and bright with wildflowers. Don’t forget to carry swimming gear for the rock pools, rivers and sea, as there are almost daily opportunities for a dip! Waymarks are orange paint stripes.

The concluding two days are shared with the Mare a Mare Nord route, so it’s a good idea to pre-book accommodation at peak times. The trek can easily be lengthened into a rewarding 12-day route by slotting into Stage 3 of the Mare a Mare Nord at Evisa and branching eastwards towards the island’s centre to conclude at Corte.