

Pyrenees Freedom Trail



Duration: 6 days

This beautiful and demanding trek in the Pyrenees follows the Freedom Trail, or 'Chemin de la Liberté', one of the toughest WW2 escape routes from Nazi-occupied France into Spain. Local people risked their lives to help thousands of allied servicemen and Jewish refugees fleeing to safety, and we pass plaques and memorials dedicated to their bravery.

The trek is arduous and steep, taking us through spectacular scenery on remote trails reaching approx. 2500m. Whenever the going gets tough, we have only to think of those who undertook the same paths in fear of their lives to find the determination to continue. This is an incredible trek with a poignant undertone – a personal challenge which commemorates the bravery of others.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Fly London to Toulouse

We fly to Toulouse and transfer to St Giron, where you are free to explore this lovely small town in the Ariège. Look out for the bridge over the River Salat; escapees reportedly jumped from the train here when the guard blew his whistle, and it's where many would have met their first *passeur*, the local guide who would take them over his section of the network. Time permitting, we recommend you visit the town's excellent Chemin de la Liberté museum, which brings vividly to life some of the stories connected with our route. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Day 2: St Giron – Aunac

We drive out of town to the start of our trek, taking a scenic road that winds through the valleys. Our trailhead leaves the road and takes us through woodland on a good path. This is only a half-day walk to save our energy for

the strenuous days ahead, but it's not an easy stroll! We don't reach any high elevations, but there are plenty of steep gradients as we head deeper into the mountains – there's very little flat on today's terrain. The path climbs steeply up again towards the end, taking us to Aunac, where there's a memorial to the Évadés de France (escapees of France). Night refuge / camp (760m).

Trek approx. 4 hours

Day 3: Aunac – Cabane d'Eychelle

After a hearty breakfast with wonderful views, we head off through forest on another long day of trekking. Our path takes us steeply up to the Col de le Core (1395m) – this is a fairly demanding ascent but the views around us are spectacular as we gain height. We pause here and admire the mountain scenery, taking a moment to pay our respects at the col's memorial to passeurs. We also meet our vehicles and collect our kit for tonight, which we must carry to the hut as there's no access by vehicle. From now on we'll be carrying our own gear (though we travel lighter after tonight's camp); despite that, the hardest terrain is behind us. Our path leads us gradually uphill through shady forest, gaining height steadily as we contour around the mountain-side. As we near our camp for the night, we emerge into open mountain pasture, a boulder-strewn grassy bowl surrounded by rocky peaks, where we find the picturesque Etang d'Eychelle; if the weather's good it's perfect for an invigorating swim. From here it is a short walk to Cabane d'Eychelle, a simple hut, where we camp. In clear weather the sunset from camp is beautiful. Night camp (1964m).

Trek approx. 7 - 8 hours

Day 4: Cabane d'Eychelle – Estagnous Refuge

A challenging day lies ahead of us today, as our trek takes us into serious mountain terrain. We climb and descend – much of it steep – through fields of boulders and around rocky crags. We're likely to see wild horses and flocks of sheep guarded by *patous*, the famous Pyrenean Mountain dogs, in this area. As we near the snow-line, the scenery becomes more impressive; jagged peaks and towering cliffs, with patches of snow lying in isolated dips between the rocks. It's spectacular, but not a hospitable landscape, especially in bad weather; it's hard to imagine how those escaping France would have felt, making this journey in the dark and in fear of betrayal and capture. After our last steep climb, we descend over boulder-strewn slopes to our refuge. Night refuge (2245m).

Trek approx. 7-8 hours

NB: There is an alternative route, taking us over the Col de Craberous (2382m); this leads past the crash site of a British Halifax bomber which, 80km off its intended route on a training flight in July 1945, sadly crashed, killing all seven on board. Wreckage is left untouched out of respect, and a plaque commemorates the crew. Unfortunately weather conditions often make this approach unfeasible; with more demanding and exposed terrain, group ability is also a factor.

Day 5: Estagnous – Spanish Border – Vielha

We set off from our hospitable refuge, and trek downhill to the lovely Lac Rond (1929m), stretching out any aching muscles in anticipation of the next challenge. Lac Long lies only about half an hour away, but is 200m above us, and the path to it is extremely steep; in places there's a fixed cable to assist us. Once at Lac Long (2125m) the

border at the Col de la Clauère is almost within sight. Our path crosses a deep gully, usually filled with snow, which provides an arduous slog to the top (2522m), where we gaze into Spain. It's hard to imagine how the escapees from France would have felt at this moment, having survived the mountain crossing. We are likely to feel a mix of relief and elation, as all that remains of our very challenging trek now is a relatively gentle descent over grassy slopes to the end of the trailhead above the village of Esterri de Aneu. We get into our waiting transport and drive to the small mountain town of Vielha, where we celebrate our many achievements this week.

Trek approx. 6 hours; drive approx. 1 hour

Day 6: Vielha – Toulouse; Depart

Time to wander and explore this historic town; depending on flight schedule times; we then transfer to Toulouse Airport for our flight home.

(Lunch not included)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All transport from London to Toulouse return
- All meals except where specified, accommodation & camping equipment
- Discover Adventure leaders; doctor with group of 15 or more participants; local mountain guides, cooks & drivers
- Local support and back-up equipment
- Entry to any sites included in itinerary

WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- Any meals specified 'not included' in the itinerary
- Travel insurance
- Personal spending money, souvenirs & drinks
- Tips for the local support crew
- Sleeping bag and sleeping mat
- Inbound airport departure tax (no tax applied at the time of writing)
- Fees for any optional sites, attractions or activities (eg. museum or spa)
- Any applicable surcharges as per Terms and Conditions

GRADE | RED

Trips are graded Yellow, Orange or Red, in increasing level of challenge. This trip lies within the **RED** range.



The grade is determined by factors such as terrain, distance, climate, altitude, etc. Each colour grade has a **spectrum** which reflects the difficulty of these factors; trip duration, accommodation and living conditions (see icon) are also taken into account.

[Trip grading explained](#)



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Discover Adventure reserves the right to change the route or itinerary for safety reasons should local conditions dictate.

Please note: This document was downloaded on 25 Apr 2024, and the challenge is subject to change.