

Pyrenees walks and drives



This is a sample from the PDF edition of

Landscapes of the

PYRENEES

a countryside guide



Paul Jenner and Christine Smith

This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, the introductions to each of the main sections (Picnicking, Car Touring and Walking) with an example of each. There is a total of 136 pages, plus two pull-out touring maps, in the full book



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Getting about

This is a countryside guide to all of the Pyrenees — to the wild and haunting scenery in France, Spain and Andorra, stretching some 400km between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Some of the tours and walks are entirely within one country, but many take you across borders — so a passport in your pocket is a good idea, even though formal frontier checks no

longer exist.

Unless you have a great deal of time, such scale demands a car. If you fly in, hire is easy throughout the Pyrenees, with rates generally a little cheaper in Spain — especially if you can make the most of a package deal. Petrol, diesel and EV charging are also a little cheaper in Spain, but cheapest of all is Andorra. (Don't forget your driving licence, valid insurance, vehicle registration document, and, if you are taking your own car, two warning triangles, reflective safety jackets, spare bulbs, fire extinguisher, first aid kit and a GB sticker. In France you should also carry a self-test breathalyser.)

There are several useful train services, particularly those along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastal strips and in the northern foothills. These include the Perpignan/Cerdagne line with its Petit Train Jaune segment from Villefranche to La Tour de Carol, and the Paris/Toulouse/Barcelona service which also stops at La Tour de Carol, giving access to Andorra and to the rack railway into the mountains at Núria.

Buses vary in their usefulness to the walker, since the timetables are often designed for locals coming down into the towns in the mornings and returning in the evenings. We suggest a number of the more regular services.

Coach tours can be a way of seeing the countryside and sometimes getting to walks, particularly for popular beauty spots such as Gavarnie and the Pont d'Espagne — or for

shopping expeditions to Andorra.

Taxis, and their more rugged mountain counterparts, the jeep-taxis, will have to be used on some occasions by those who have no car, for example in the Parc Nacional d'Aigües Tortes

and to get to the Barrage d'Ossoue for Walk 21.

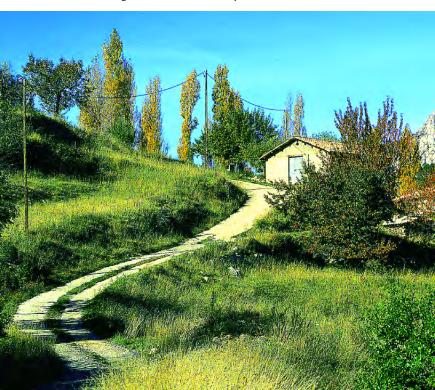
At the beginning of every walk we give details of the public transport services available and provide a telephone number or web address for up-to-date information. If you cannot speak the language, contact the local tourist office or ask your hotel to make enquiries.

Picnicking

Official picnic sites are few and far between in the Pyrenees and often, where they do exist, they are *too* accessible (just beside a main road for example) and may be sadly littered, when compared with 'wilder' sites. We have deliberately restricted suggested picnic spots on the grounds that virtually the entire Pyrenean range is one wonderful picnic setting. However we have included a specific suggestion or two at the top of each car tour, for those who enjoy a little company in their *al fresco* dining rooms; see the 'P' symbols on the maps.

Please try to take your own litter away with you — even where there are bins provided, these inevitably attract more donations than they can contain, with unpleasant results. And tidying up your deposit in a plastic bag is not the answer. We are always aware of crossing a mountain frontier even without the benefit of customs — in France they sling their bright blue plastic refuse bags, but in Spain the rubbish is less 'tidy'.

Fires: Never light a fire other than in one of the fireplaces provided at organised picnic sites. The Pyrenees have suffered some devasting bush fires over the years.



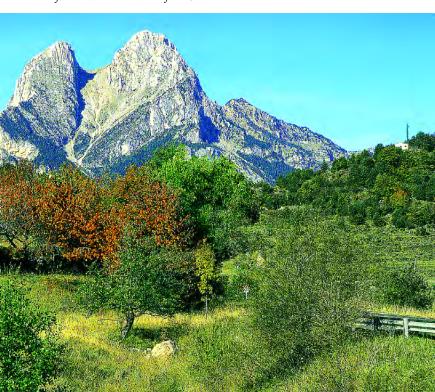
Eats: If cooking is going to be difficult — don't. Feast instead on the wide variety of continental cheeses, meats and of course breads which are readily available in the mountains. Buy your bread in good time — bearing in mind that in France many boulangeries close at 13.00 sharp, and in Spain many will remain closed for most of the afternoon. Even the largest supermarkets usually have a lengthy lunch-break, which can prove disastrous for the ravenous traveller.

Water: Drinking fountains (fonts) should be fine. Many mountain streams are not only safe, they are delicious — if you use common sense: never drink still or sluggish water; avoid any rivers where there is luxuriant water-weed growth or obvious pollution. Check your map to see if there is habitation above your stream, even a refuge or cabane. Avoid the water if there are plentiful signs of animals.

Once again we advise common sense in your dress — that is, sturdy shoes for walking, cover-ups, sunhat and, particularly in high mountain areas, sunglasses (the glare can be fierce).

All picnickers should read the country code on page 37 and go quietly in the countryside.

Car tour 3: At Maçaners you have this astounding view to Pedraforca — the forked rock — landmark of the Cadí.



Touring

In the Pyrenees remote scenery can be enjoyed without even getting out of your car, especially if you are willing to drive on tracks. The Añisclo Canyon, the Yaga, the Cadí, Canigou — these and many more are places where a feeling of wilderness is preserved, despite access by road. Unfortunately that remoteness is under threat, especially on the Spanish side of the range, where EU money is helping to fund major road development.

Progress along the foothills of the Pyrenees is admittedly slow. You can drive coast-to-coast via the French motorway system in an afternoon, but to travel closer to the peaks means a traverse of three days *minimum*.

Because of the relative remoteness of many areas, there may be no snow clearance in winter on some passes. It may be June before some minor roads are open to traffic, and these may be closed again from November onwards, due to winter storms. If you are touring in early or late season, be sure to carry snow chains (available at low cost in supermarkets in France and Spain), or be prepared to modify your plans according to conditions.

The 12 tours in this book give a comprehensive picture of the entire range. The touring notes are brief: they include little



history or information readily available in other publications. We concentrate instead on route-planning: each tour is designed to give you an introduction to scenery in a particular part of the Pyrenees and to provide as much variety as possible. We want to show you our favourite landscapes in the Pyrenees and take you to the starting point of some delightful walks.

If you are touring, consider spending the night en route, rather than trying to rush back to base. Several tours cross frontiers — so although formal frontier checks are a thing of the past you should always have your passport with you. Your car documentation (see 'Getting about') should also be in the vehicle at all times.

The fold-out touring map is designed to be held out opposite the touring notes and contains, in a handy compact form, all the planning information you need to follow our suggested tours. Due to its small scale, you may wish to buy a more detailed map; if so, we can recommend 'Pyrenean Region' (Freytag-Berndt; scale 1:400,000). For even more detail, Michelin covers the range in three 1:150,000 maps. Note also: our map only shows those tracks that we have driven ourselves and found to be suitable for the majority of cars. Moreover, we suggest alternative tarmac roads for the owners of exceptionally large vehicles (or Porsches!). Average speed on tracks will not exceed 30kph/18mph.

Lack of space prevents us from printing town plans, so we give you clear guidance through all built-up areas in the touring notes. However, if you will be spending any length of time in

the Pyrenees, you will need to rely on your smart phone to navigate the towns — or carry up-to-date Michelin hotel guides for France and Spain, with their wealth of town plans

The symbols used in the touring notes correspond to those on the pull-out map; see map key.

All motorists should read the country code on page 37 and go quietly in the countryside.



A typical village of the eastern Pyrenees — Eus, near Prades and an access road to Canigou for Walk 7 La Jonquera • Vilajuïga • Roses • Port de la Selva • Llançà • Portbou • Cerbère • Banyuls-sur-Mer • Port-Vendres • Collioure • Argelès • Le Boulou

134km/83mi; about 5 hours' driving, starting on the motorway at Junction 2 (La Jonquera) and finishing on the motorway at Le Boulou.

Walks en route or nearby: 1-3 A tour accessible from anywhere on the Costa Brava, by joining the coastal toll-motorway A7/E15 and taking Exit 2 (La Jonquera) on the Spanish side of the frontier. The circuit combines the archaeologically and historically rich plains of the Alt Empordà with a long, twisty and consistently-attractive coastal drive, also providing the opportunity to compare Spanish and French wines, direct from the producers.

Picnic suggestions: Some 7km

beyond Vilajuïga, on the road to Sant Pere de Rodes you will see, on the right, Mas Ventós (\mathbf{A}) — a picnic area with ample parking. Tables and benches are shaded by pine trees with outstanding views southwards across the Bay of Roses. An excellent spot to meet up with friends doing Walk 1; see map pages 46-47. Further on along the intinerary, once on the coast, choose any beach that grabs your fancy. Your choice includes: Llançà, Portbou, Cerbère, Banyuls-sur-Mer, Port-Vendres, Collioure or **Argelès**. Sheltered coves or wide stretches of sand, plenty of nearby refreshment and WC facilities.

If you don't object to a long day, this tour gives you the chance to make some interesting detours and perhaps take a swim at one of the popular resorts along the Côte Vermeille.

Take EXIT 2 (LA JONQUERA) off the AP7-E15 motorway, turning right (south) onto the N11, following signs for FIGUERES. After 7km/4.5mi turn left onto the GI602 (signposted 'CAPMANY, ESPOLLA'). You are now on the 'wine and olive oil route' where every village has its co-operativa. Stop and taste at Capmany, Espolla, Garriguella, Vilajuïga and Pau.

From Sant Climent an excursion is possible to the castle of Requesens, while from Garriguella you could make a short detour to the castle/casino of Perelada (III). Just beyond Garriguella you can, if you wish, shorten the tour by turning left on the N260, direct to Llançà. We continue straight ahead, to Vilajuïga, where Walk 1 begins. (From here you have the option of visiting Sant Pere de Rodes and the Mas Ventós picnic area — a detour of

14km return; see map pages 46-47.)

The main tour continues straight ahead on the GI610 for Roses (36km/22mi ▲△※♀WC), the largest resort on this stretch of the Costa Brava, at the north end of an immense curve of sand.

From Roses take the GI614 up and over the mountains to PORT DE LA SELVA. (From the summit, 12km beyond Roses, you have the option of another detour — to Cadaqués, a picturesque and very different resort, made famous by the Catalan surrealist painter Salvador Dalí. Allow 10km return.)

From Port de la Selva (56km/35mi AXPWC) you will now follow the coastal corniche to France. (Just outside the village, a turning on the left presents you with a second opportunity to detour to Sant Pere de Rodes and Mas Ventós.) After 6km, Llançà (62km/38.5mi

The rose-coloured dome of the church is clearly visible as we climb above Collioure on Walk 3.

▲△※♀WC) lies a little inland of its fishing port, an ancient defensive measure against pirates. Walk 1 ends here.

From here the road to France (N260) is increasingly spectacular. The tunnels make this a pleasurable journey even in busy peak season, with fresh vistas at regular intervals. We follow the coast to **Colera** (Δ) and then climb steeply past rocky bays, some with their architectdesigned homes, others so rugged that not even the most enterprising developer has yet had his way. Enjoy wonderful views of open sea and sheltered coves back to the Cadaqués Peninsula and Cap de Créus and ahead to the frontier at Cerbère.

There is a steep, bird's-eye view descent (⑤) into **Portbou** (76km/47mi ♠♠% ♠₩C), the final beach resort on the Costa Brava and a major rail terminus, before the road climbs again past the last petrol station in Spain to the frontier (♠; open 08.00 to 20.00 in summer and from 09.00 to 13.00, then 14.00 to 19.00 in winter).

Your road is now called the D914 and winds uphill and down for 4km to the attractive port of Cerbère (83km/52mi 🍎 🏋 🖁 WC), the rail terminus on the French side of the border, its network of bridges and viaducts providing a perfect setting for copsand-robbers film chases.

At Peyrefite, between Cerbère and Banyuls, you can follow the underwater nature trail in the marine reserve — bring your snorkling gear. Notice too, that the viniculture is far more intensive than on the Spanish side (photo on page 51). Banyuls-sur-Mer * (94km/



58mi ▲▲▲★♥WC), birthplace of sculptor Aristide Maillol (photo on page 54), is a fashionable resort. Walk 3 ends here — as does the French traverse of the Pyrenees.

Continue along the coast to Port-Vendres (102km/63mi ▲ 🖎 → WC), a major fishing harbour, and Collioure★ (105km/65mi ▲ △ △ ★ 😭 🕇 🖺 MWC), where Walk 3 begins. In the summer of 1905 Matisse and Derain set up their easels in the village and painted the brightly-coloured images that garnered them the title of 'Fauves' or 'wild beasts'. Be sure to visit Les Templiers café on Quai de l'Amirauté, by the Château Royal, where the walls are covered in paintings by the many artists who have worked in the area. (You can also see some pen and inks by Matisse in the modern art museum in Céret — Car tour 2.)

From Collioure the road climbs up the last headland, leaving the Côte Vermeille behind and dropping down to the huge flat sweep of the Côte Radieuse resorts, beginning with Argelès-sur-Mer★ (112km/ 69mi ▲ △ 🌣 🖹 MWC). From here you can take the main D618 back to the motorway at Le Boulou, but we recommend the more picturesque D2 among the northern foothills and vineyards of the Pyrenees to Sorède (119km/74mi), and then Laroque des Albères (122km/76mi Δ), followed by the D11 to Montesquieu (126km/78mi) and on to Le Boulou (134km/83mi



There are well over 400 kilometres (250 miles) of walks in this guide, the equivalent of a coast-to-coast traverse — one of the 'classics' for all serious walkers. But you don't have to be an expert walker for any of hikes we describe. None requires special skills (under summer conditions) and, if you are not very fit, simply turn back when you feel like it (there are short walk suggestions with most of the itineraries). Experienced and fit walkers will nevertheless find much to enjoy, for we have included some of the wildest scenery in the Pyrenees, walked pilgrim routes and World War 2 escape routes, climbed to summits (like Canigou), enjoyed the habitat of marmots, vultures and izards (the Pyrenean chamois), and not neglected the great and the famous (like the Brèche de Roland).

Crading, waymarking, maps, GPS

We've tried to give you a quick overview of each walk's **grade** in the Contents. But we've only had space to show the *lowest* grade of a *main* walk: for full details, including easier versions, see the walk itself. Here is a brief overview of the three gradings:

- Easy: good surface; limited ascent (no more than about 600m/2000ft); no technical skill or special equipment required; may still be long.
- Moderate: changeable surface; usually a steep ascent/descent; the walk may be very long.
- Difficult: may involve any or all of the following: scrambling over difficult surfaces; prolonged exposure, steep ascents/descents; poor signposting. Suitable walking equipment required.

Any of the above grades may be followed by:

danger of vertigo: you must be sure-footed, with a head for heights

Waymarking in the Pyrenees is mostly (but not always) of European standard, as described below:

- long-distance footpaths, or 'GR' routes: in Spanish 'Grandes Recorridos', in French 'Grandes Randonnées', indicated by red and white waymarks;
- day trails which may be prefaced by 'PR' (for 'Pequeños Recorridos' or 'Petites Randonnées') and indicated by yellow and white waymarks
- local walks, prefaced 'SL' (for 'Senderos Locales' or 'Sentiers Locals') and indicated by green and white waymarks.

But other walks may have idiosyncratic local waymarking colours or use special symbols (like the shell incorporated into Camino de Santiago signposts). Then there will be trails not signed or waymarked in any way and for which you will have to rely entirely upon the descriptions and maps in this book.

For all routes, horizontal stripes (=) indicate 'continue this way', angled (\angle) or right-angled stripes show a change of direction; an 'X' (\times) means 'wrong way'.

The maps in this book should be sufficient for all the walks you plan — enough for four weeks' walking every day. And you will save a great deal of money, since you would need almost twenty large-scale maps to cover walking routes throughout the range. Our maps are based on Openstreet mapping (see page 2), heavily annotated from our notes and GPS work. We have found them to be *very* accurate on the ground. It is a pity that we have to reproduce them at only 1:50,000 to keep the book to a reasonable size; some walkers buy both the paperback *and* download our pdf files so that they can enlarge the maps — or they can be enlarged on a colour photocopier.

Should you wish to buy some good large-scale area maps, showing all the GR routes and overnight hostels, Rando Editions (together with various partners) publishes maps for the entire Pyrenees at a scale of 1:50,000, providing sufficient detail for most purposes. In many cases these maps cover both the French and Spanish sides of the range on a single sheet. However, if you require more detail, there are 1:25,000 IGN maps for the French Pyrenees and Andorra (the 'TOP 25' Series). Some parts of the Spanish Pyrenees are also covered by Editorial Alpina and the Institut Cartgràfic de Catalunya.

Free **GPS** track downloads are available for all our walks: see the Pyrenees page on the Sunflower website. Please bear in mind, however, that GPS readings should *never* be relied upon as your sole reference point, as conditions can change overnight. *But even if you don't use GPS*, our maps are now so accurate that you can easily compare them with Google Maps on your smartphone and pinpoint your exact position. And it's great fun opening our GPX files in Google Earth to preview the walks in advance!

Cafety and guides

Safe walking in the mountains is a matter of judgement, just like driving a car or crossing a road. And that judgement cannot easily be taught in books; it has to be acquired, preferably by going with other experienced walkers. If you are a novice, begin with some of the lower, shorter walks, take it easy, and build from there. Much is made of the dangers of walking alone, but also it can be dangerous to be the slowest and weakest member of an aggressive party. (It also causes no end of worry to set off in a group and then split up with the intention of somehow meeting again later.) *Judgement!* In

Organisation of the walksThere are 34 main walks in this book, spread across the entire Pyrenees (France, Spain and Andorra). Many are accessible by public transport, but for the more remote parts of the range the use of a car is essential. Ten walks are in the eastern Pyrenees and easily reached from the Costa Brava or Côte Vermeille; seven are in the western Pyrenees, for those based at resorts like Biarritz or San Sebastián; the remainder are spread among the high peaks between Andorra and the Pic d'Anie. Several walks cross the frontier, so have your passport with you (but there will only be an izard to look at it). For those with a little time, all the walks are accessible, since the chain is only 400km coast-to-coast, with an excellent motorway and railway system.

Begin by taking a look at the fold-out map and noting the walks that are nearest to you. Then turn to the route notes and the accompanying large-scale maps. Each walk is described in the direction we think the most attractive and that poses the least transport problems, but you may prefer the reverse direction. To help you get the 'feel' of the walk, there is at least one photo for each.

Every itinerary begins with planning information distance, grade, how to get to and from the walk, etc. Pay particular attention if we refer to an ascent — 1000 metres is pretty tough going for the average walker. Times are given for reaching certain points in the walk, but bear in mind that everyone walks at a different speed ... and that personal speeds will vary according to the load carried, the weather, and the time of day. As a rule of thumb, reckon on 4km/h on a good track on the flat and add one hour for every 300m/1000ft of ascent. No time is included for stops; increase the times by at least one-third to allow for lunch stops, photography and nature-watching.

These symbols are used on the walking maps:

	•		-	_	
	motorway	•+	spring, waterfall, etc	•	specific building
	main road	* *	church.chapel	00	start/end.waypoint
	secondary road	†	shrine or cross		ski lift
	minor or untarred road	+	cemetery	⅍∩	quarry, mine.cave
	track.path or trail	₽₽	picnic place	⊞	stadium
2→	main walk	(T	best views	Å	campsite
2→	alternative	#	bus stop		map continuation
2→	other walk	a	car parking	:	danger!
	park boundary	**	railway station	ıπ	prehistoric site
	national boundary	ı	ferry	á	power station
<u> </u>	height in metres		castle, fort.watchtower	Δ	rock formation

Walk 3: FROM COLLIOURE TO BANYULS-SUR-MER

See also photo on page 13 Distance: 13km/8mi; 4h15min **Grade:** • easy underfoot — but involves 600m/1970ft of ascent; PR and GR/HRP waymarking **Equipment:** sturdy shoes, picnic,

Transport: (lio-occitanie.fr, 08 06 80 03 50) or **₩** (SNCF 36 35 within France or sncfvoyageurs.com) to Collioure; or =: Car tour 1; park at Collioure, by the harbour (42° 31.339'N, 3° 5.078'E). Return by or from Banyulssur-Mer

Short walk: Follow the main walk to Notre-Dame-de-Consolation

(2) and return the same way (1h; easier ascent of 150m/490ft).

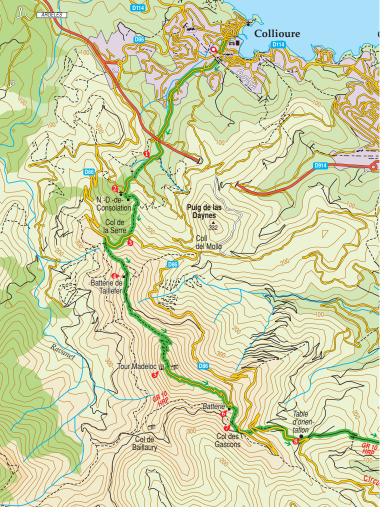
Here's a glorious high-level walk between two Côte Vermeille resorts with artistic claims to fame. Collioure was once the much-favoured summer haunt of the group of radical artists known as the Fauves ('wild beasts') because of their use of vivid and emotive colour and form. Among the more well-known members of the school were Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and Rouault. Banyuls-sur-Mer was the birthplace and long-time home of world-famous sculptor Aristide Maillol.

Start out at **Collioure** by following the RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE up from the harbour to the busy main road. Notice straight ahead, on the skyline, the Tour Madeloc, the highest point of the walk. Cross the main road by the ROUNDABOUT () and, almost directly opposite, take the RUE DU TEMPLE (signed to 'FORT ST-ELME'), passing under the RAILWAY LINE into the RUE DE LA GALÈRE and then the CHEMIN DE LA CONSOLATION.

At 14min, at a narrow U-fork, take the road to the left signposted 'CONSOLATION'. This lane climbs gently through vineyards to the bypass flyover. Carry on under the FLYOVER, keeping left at a fork and keeping the stream to your left initially; then, after some 300 metres, cross the stream on a little BRIDGE (1) to the opposite side. Just beyond the bridge take the lefthand fork and, a moment later, on the right, the distinctively cobbled

Approaching the Tour Madeloc through rock roses and gorse





old pilgrimage trail, marked 'ERMITAGE BAR/HOTEL'. The path, later concreted, climbs steeply to the SHRINE OF 'STE-ANNE' (27min), beyond which descend the tarmac road. Just before a sharp bend, take the stone steps on the left and, then, the little path that leads to the old hermitage of Notre-Dame-de-Consolation (2; 32min), a favourite barbecue and boules spot. Telephone (01 43 80 46 93) if you would like to stay.

To continue, ignore the clear, wide path ahead; instead, ascend a few steps on the left and pass behind 52

a derelict building. After a steep, rocky climb, reach a RIDGE (40min) and ascend to the right (south). The path now runs amongst low scratchy bushes, climbing gently before zigzagging up to a wide tarmac road (D86; **3**; **1h05min**). Turn right, following YELLOW ARROWS for 450 metres, until you come to a long bend with low brick bollards; there take a track running obliquely back to the left, marked with the YELLOW PR SIGNPOSTS marking this walk. There is usually a metal barrier preventing vehicles using this track.



Climb to a saddle and ascend the steep ridge to the signposted

Batterie de Taillefer (4);

1h45min). Beyond this battery, the track merges in four minutes with another coming up from the left. After five metres, leave this vehicle track and take the well-maintained path to the right; it climbs gradually.

At 2h10min an old watchtower comes into view and the path zigzags sharply up to it through some hairpin bends. The Tour Madeloc (6; 2h20min) was built by James I of Mallorca at the end of the 13th century as part of a

lookout/communication system. While the tower is closed to the public, the spectacular views remain — all along the Côte Vermeille and the Costa Brava, inland to the Col de Banyuls, and to another tower further west, the Tour de la Massane

From the Tour Madeloc descend on a narrow tarmac road to another BATTERY (6; 2h40min). Just beyond the main gates, take the narrow footpath indicated by a YELLOW SIGNPOST. The path itself may be marked with blue and white flashes. You drop down steeply



Maillol's La Pensée, at his tomb near Banyuls (a short taxi journey from the front)

towards Banyuls-sur-Mer, which you can see on the coast.

In five minutes you meet a path coming from the right. This is the famous GR 10 (7; 2h45min), here combined with the more demanding Haute Route Pyrénées (HRP), the final leg of an adventure that for some will have begun over 400km away — at Hendaye on the Atlantic

You will be following this path, marked clearly with RED AND WHITE FLASHES, down to the coast. At **2h50min** a vehicle track, also marked with red and white flashes, joins from the right, and you emerge on tarmac (again the D86, the 'CIRCUIT DE VIGNOBLE' - route of the vineyards).

Turn right along the road for 50 metres, then take a clear red-andwhite-marked path on the left, short-cutting hairpin bends, to regain tarmac and reach a TABLE D'ORIENTATION (8; 3h05min). Beyond it, the road sweeps round to the right in a hairpin bend, but you continue straight ahead — on the right-hand, slightly higher of two earthen tracks. From here on the number of side-turnings is too great to show on the map or describe. Carefully follow the well-marked but convoluted GR on its descending course, at 3h40min meeting a surfaced road. Turn left and, almost immediately, right. Very soon bear right on a signposted unmade vehicle track along a low ridge until, at **3h50min**, you reach a house with a 2m/6ft-high wire fence. Here you will see your path running between the vineyards.

Descend towards the RAILWAY LINE and pass through a TUNNEL underneath it (4h). Turn left for the RAILWAY STATION (1); signposted 'GARE'), otherwise continue straight ahead on the path along the gully which brings you out on AVENUE PUIG DEL MAS, one of the main streets in Banyuls-sur-Mer, at 4h05min.

Turn left to the beach. Just before reaching the sea front, look out for a plaque on the building at the left (No 6) where the sculptor Maillol was born. The BUS STOP and taxis are on the seafront, to the right, in front of the Office de Tourisme (**9**; **4h15min**). The RAILWAY STATION is close by and clearly signposted 'GARE'.

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