

GR 10 Route Change

There's been a minor change to the GR10 trail leaving Bidarray (Basque Country; Stage 4) direction Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry. The trail now diverts around the edges of farmland when leaving Bidarray instead of cutting straight southwest from the Mairie (town hall). It's very clearly signed and adds little extra time or effort to your days excursions.

Refuge Changes & Covid-19 Regulations

A number of refuges are closed for the 2021 season for renovations. These include some key refuges along the GR10, HRP and on other routes.

After everything we've all gone through for the past 18 months, it's hardly a surprise to hear that the Pyrenees are proving to be a very popular destination this summer with city folk desperate to breathe fresh, clean air. This popularity is leading to problems of over-crowding. Lac Gentau, with the Refuge d'Ayous (stage 13 of the GR10), has particularly suffered. The first half of July 2021 saw huge numbers of people coming to the lake to camp for the night and sadly – with access to nightclubs and bars restricted – some were coming in big groups with beer and music. The refuge and lake shore was always a popular stop-off point for those walking the GR10 but crowd pressure has meant that the national park authorities have temporarily banned camping around the lake and refuge. Offenders are being fined €130. This ban will remain in place until September 30th 2021. Crowding is also starting to occur in other areas (the Refuge Bastan in the Néouvielle region is now very busy) and it's possible that restrictions might be imposed at short notice in these areas too.

The **Refuge Wallon Marcadau** (on the HRP route) was closed for major refurbishments for the 2020 season, it was supposed to have re-opened in time for the 2021 hiking season, but is now not due to open until the summer of 2022.

In the Gavarnie area, the **Refuge de la Brèche de Roland** (Les Sarradets) has now re-opened after avalanche damage meant it was closed for the 2020 season and the start of the 2021 hiking season.

The new **Refuge d'Aygues-Cluses**, next to the lake of the same name, south of Barèges (stage 22 of the GR10) was supposed to have been open for summer 2021, but is now scheduled to open in summer 2022. Once done, this is going to be a very stylish looking, modern refuge.

Not on the GR10 or HRP trail, but still a popular overnight halt for people exploring the lake-splattered Néouvielle region. The **Refuge Campana de Cloutou** is closed for renovations until at least summer 2022.

A case of Covid-19 was detected at the popular **Refuge des Oulettes de Gaube** (GR10 stage 18) in early August and the refuge was immediately closed for a night or two while it was sterilised. It's now open again, but such an event cannot be ruled out at other refuges. If a case is detected then the refuge in question is likely to be closed with only a few hours' notice which could be highly problematic for those walking the GR10 or HRP and reliant on refuges for food and accommodation. You may not even learn about a closure until you arrive at a refuge. Our advice is to carry a tent and enough food to last one extra day.

Covid-19 rules mean that all staffed refuges have had to reduce the number of guests they can accommodate at any one time and face masks must be worn inside the refuges. On August 9th 2021, the French government began to enforce a highly controversial Pass Sanitaire (Health Pass), which means that restaurants, bars, cafes, campsites, long distance transport and most tourist attractions

can only be accessed by people with this pass. The pass is only available to people who are fully vaccinated or have a recent negative PCR test. Huge weekly protests against the implication of the pass have been held in cities and towns across France. Its application in mountain refuges remains a little hazy. On the websites of some refuges it states that the pass is compulsory, but whether that's really the case on the ground is uncertain. The pass is digital and as most refuges don't have phone signal it's likely to be hard for anyone to enforce the rule, but you should be aware of it all the same. In towns and villages throughout the Pyrenees (and everywhere else in France) you will though require the pass if you hope to stay or eat anywhere!