



# Jusi-Adventures

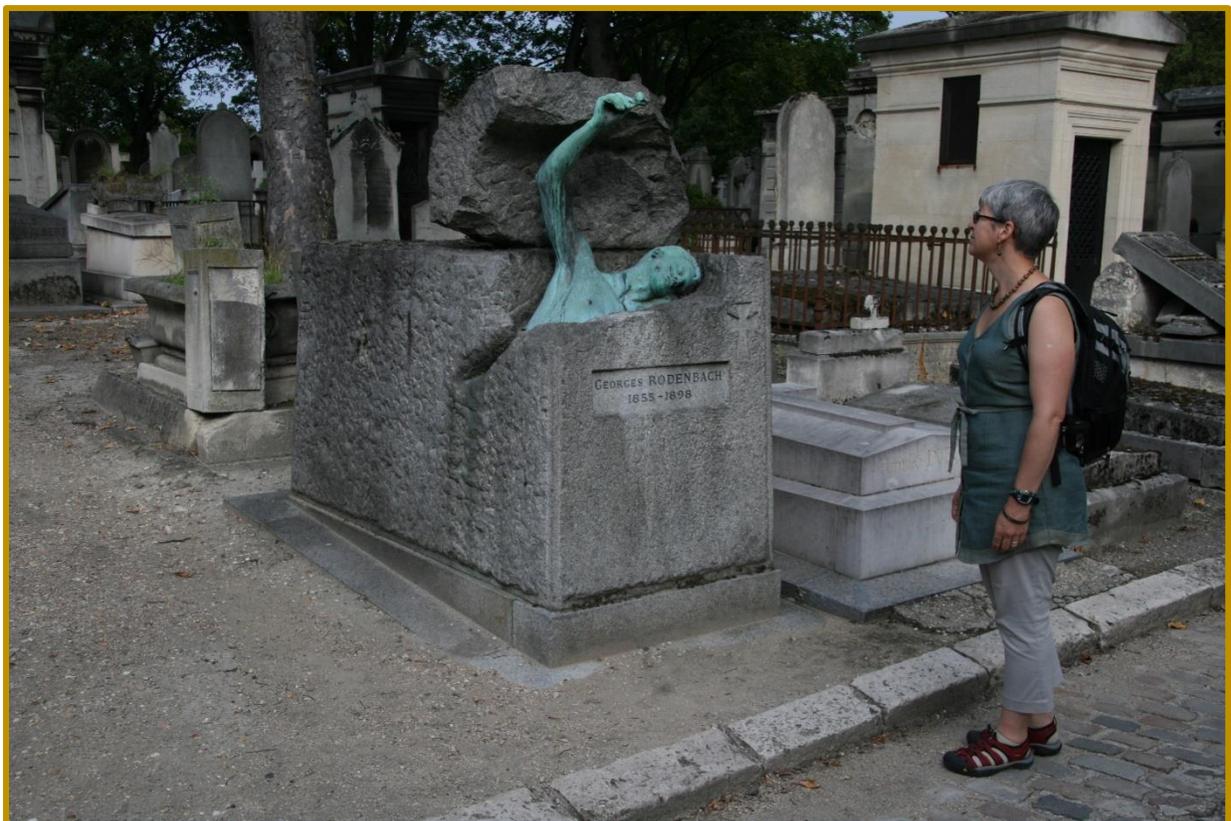


# GR20

The Grande Randonnée 20 (GR 20) was listed as one of the top 10 hikes in an Alpine magazine many years ago. It crossed Corsica, North to South, along the mountains in the center of the island for 180 kms. We were intrigued by this trail, and in true Julie/Simon fashion, once the thought came into focus, we were on it!

The fall of 2011 was perfect timing for an adventure as Simon was in between jobs (Sierra Systems and Quartech). We had enough Air-Mile points to book our flights and reserve a quality hotel in Paris for a few nights. We had never spent much time in the city of light and were looking forward to doing some sightseeing before the trek.

Using the metro, we visited the Eiffel Tower, Champs Elysée, and the Arc de Triomphe. Another sight well worth remembering was the cemetery of Père Lachaise, an amazing place with many ornate monuments and home



*The Père Lachaise cemetery*

to many historic personalities including Jim Morrison, E. Piaf, M. Proust, and F. Chopin.



*Beautiful Paris!*

The Catacombs, where 6 million souls were arranged in decorative halls, was spooky but our tour guide made it fun. The Louvre, the Ile de la Cité, Notre Dame cathedral, the Montmartre area, and the flea markets were a few areas we also toured. There were many beautiful parks and cafés where we could rest and refresh ourselves before continuing our exploration.

Several days later, we took a fast train to Marseille where a ferry got us to Corsica. It was an overnight trip and Simon had reserved a berth. The room was very small, but it provided all the necessities: bunk beds and the smallest of bathrooms. We woke up to a sunrise over Corsica. What a site!

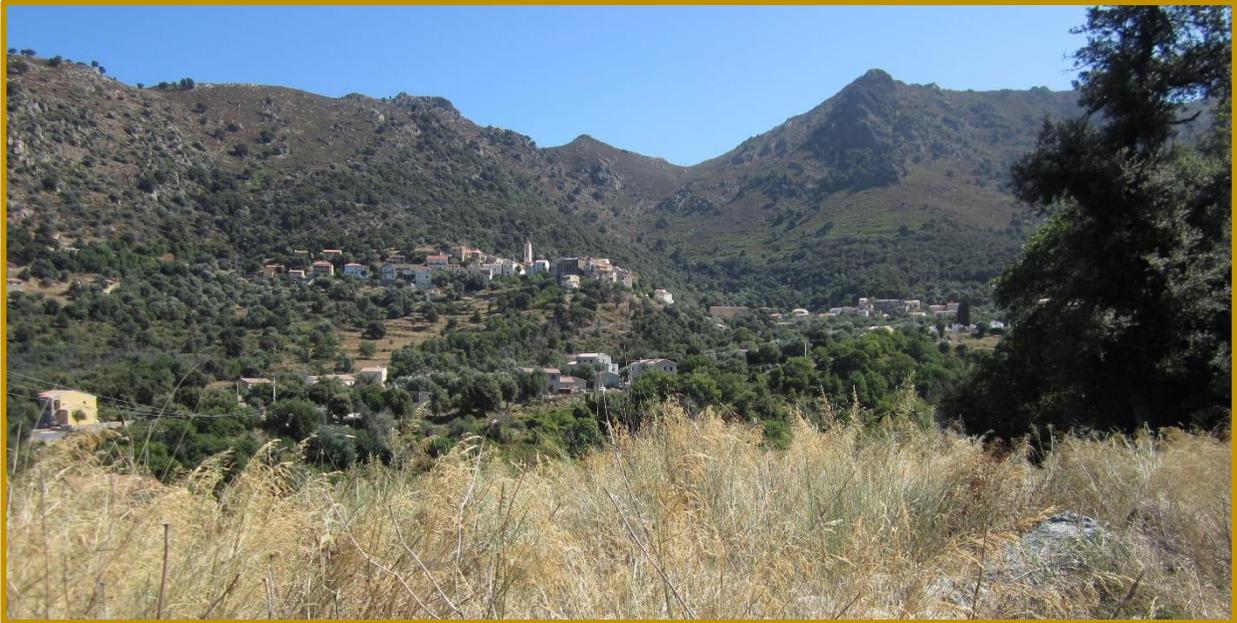


*Morning on the Ferry to Corsica*



*Morning Light on Ile Rousse*

Arriving at the city of Ile Rouse early in the morning, we went looking for a coffee. Julie stayed with the packs and Simon went into a café. He came out empty handed; the waiter had said no! It took 2 more cafés for us to understand that the concept of to-go coffees did not exist on Corsica. We entered a bistro and enjoyed a delicious coffee and croissants like most self-respecting Europeans did.



*Calenzana - at the Foot of the "Corsican Alps"*

A bus drove us to the start of the GR in the small mountain town of Calenzana. It was then that we learned that the trail was temporarily closed due to fires. We booked our pension for an additional 2 days and did some touring of the area. We witnessed how the elderly were respected in this small town. They all spent their afternoons in cafés or at the plaza and younger folks would stop by (leaving their cars running) and say hello.

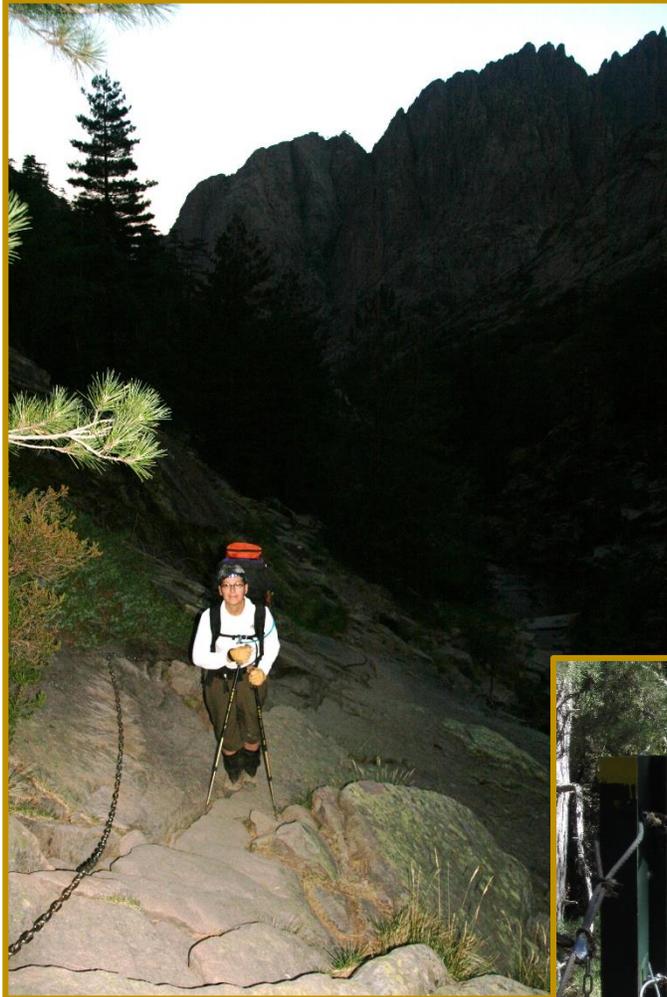


*The Brotherhood Church*

A local gentleman suggested we stop by the 'brotherhood's' church and pay (\$) our respects. This organisation kept the Corsican traditions and supported community events, but they were also known to be militant against French rule. At the time of our visit, a political figure and his family were forcibly removed from their home, which was then bombed.

That night we dined in a local restaurant. We had to wait a few hours for it to open, but it was one of the best meals ever! Terrine, salad, and wild boar slow-cooked in red wine, chestnut Crème Brûlée. Yum!

While in town, we met a few hikers exiting the trail and got some intel on the first section. Some of the Gites offered a hearty meal but had no provisions to sell. We decided to buy some bread, cheese, and sausage at a local market. Simon was thrilled about the wild boar sausage.



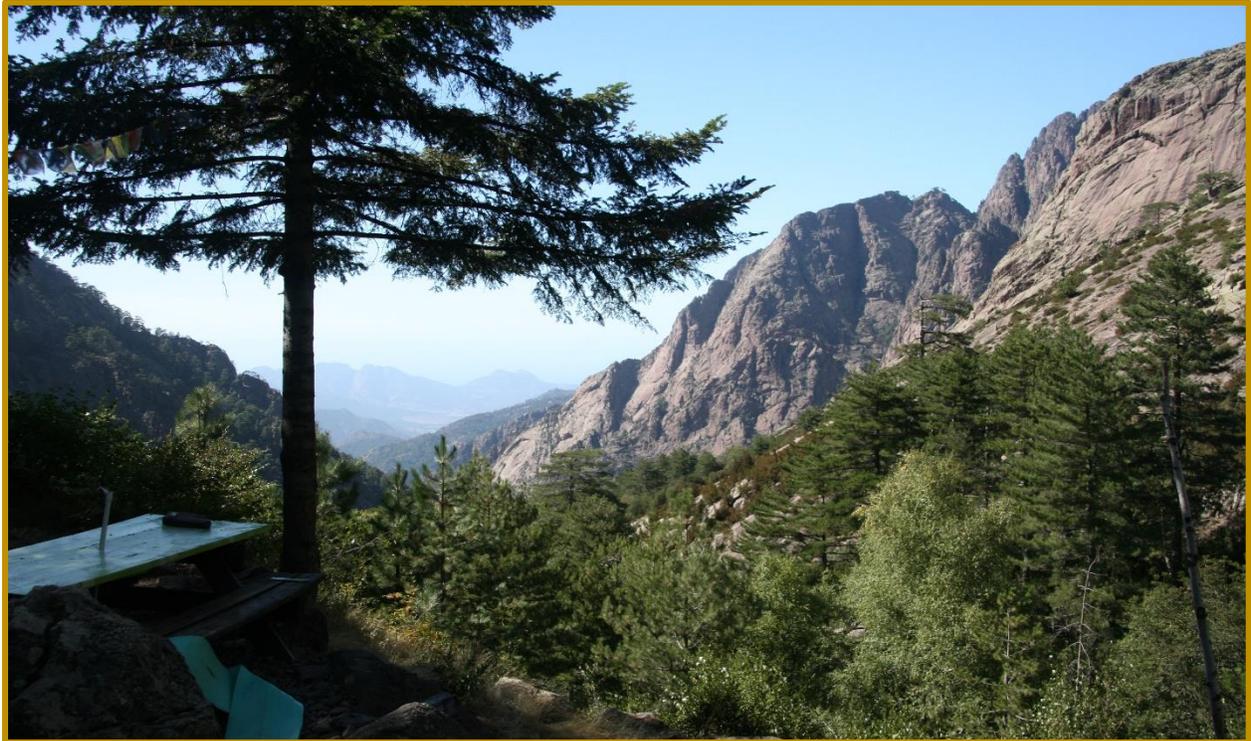
*Early Start on Technical Trail*

after a cold shower, found a shady spot for our tent. We sat on the deck and enjoyed a hearty meal with the other hikers. Some were heading out the way we came, others would continue with us south bound. There were many French and Belgian hikers, 2 young athletic Germans, and a talkative Italian we baptised

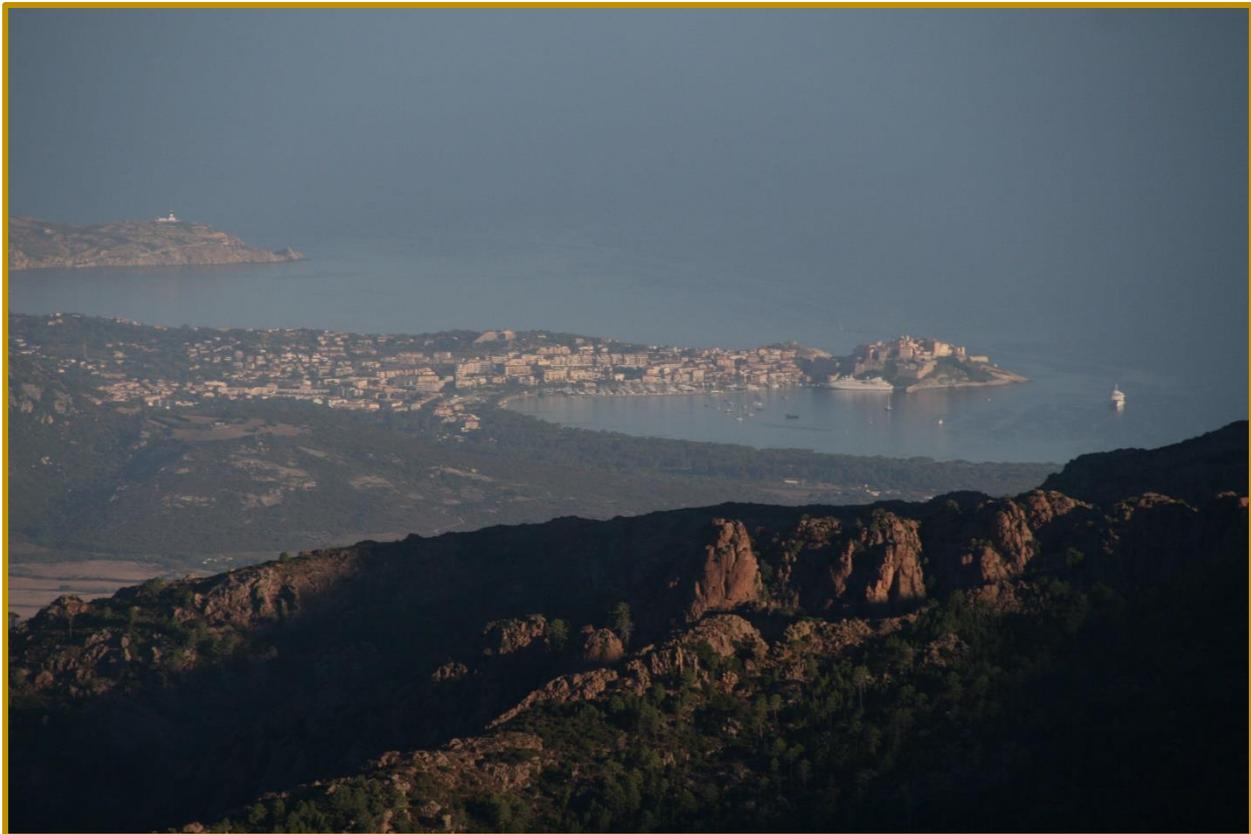
With a 06:30 start we walked in the dark through the sleeping town to the trail head. We soon reached Bonifatu and decided to walk to the next shelter. We met a hunter and his dogs walking along the trail. He told us not to be afraid but to stay on the path. These trails were multi-use. We met hikers, hunters, shepherds, and donkey trains supplying the auberges. We arrived at the Gite Ortu in the late afternoon and



Speedo-guy as he seemed to be wearing his swimsuit as soon as he got to the gites at night.

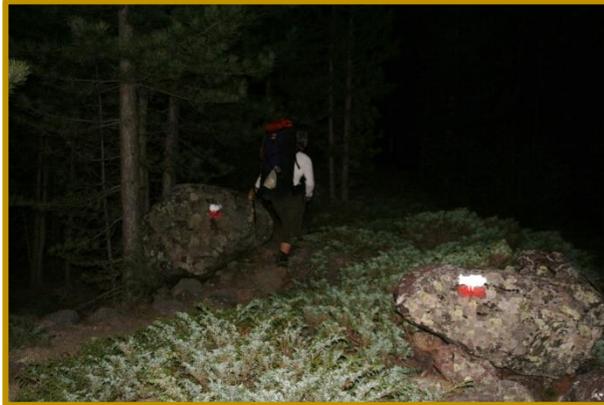


*Great views from the Gite Ortu*



*View of Calvi from Mont Oro*

Our early start was matched by the Germans and some of the French hikers. We set our pace to the technical terrain. The first section on this day was climbing over slabs of stone, the way marked by red and white slashes painted on rocks. With each pass we were treated to spectacular views of



*Another Early Start*

the surrounding mountains and the sea far below. The forested sections provided a break from the hot Mediterranean sun. Some wild goats kept an eye on our progress as we climbed further into the hills.

Haut Asco was an old ski hotel and hostel. We booked a room, had a shower, and enjoyed a communal meal with two Britts (Jackie and David) and a Canadian couple (Pierre and Chantale).



*A Great Trail but Always Challenging*

Julie had bad dreams overnight. Maybe it was the high winds or the thought of the crux we were about to cross on the following day. We left just before the Germans and 'Speedo-guy'. The first third of the day was great, with a slow ascent in a forest and out onto an alpine meadow. We breakfasted on baguette and Boursin cheese at the Col Perdu overlooking

the Cirque de la Solitude. This precipitous descent had claimed many unfortunate hikers in the past years.

Simon led the way down this vertical rock wall. There were chains at the steeper sections for a bit of support. Julie followed and appreciated the guidance offered by Simon. Soon enough we had down-climbed the cliff.



*Simon Entering the Cirque de la Solitude*

Some hikers above accidentally loosened boulders that came crashing down near us as we ascended out of the deep valley onto a spectacular pass but luckily, we were not hit.



*In the Heart of the Circle de la Solitude*



*Enjoying the Trail after the Climb!*

Jackie and David set up next to us. This protected our gear from being eaten by the goats, but I think our new friends did not sleep well as we snored all night.

In the morning, the trail was pleasant in the forested valley bottom. As we neared the Col Bocca di Foggiole, the path became much steeper, and we crested into another valley of grassy slopes and vistas over the sea. We chose to take the longer route down toward the Refuge de Ciottulu di Mari, an ancient stone structure situated at the top of a perfect amphitheater. The trail contoured the height of land and then headed down, following a clear stream. We could hear the cow bells in the distance as we descended into the valley.

We took advantage of the cool (rather cold) water of the stream before reaching our gite for the night, Castel di Vergio. After a shower and snack, Julie had a nap. She woke up to the sound of Simon bringing her an ice cream bar! He had purchased some groceries of stinky (but delicious) cheese, sausage, and oat bars.

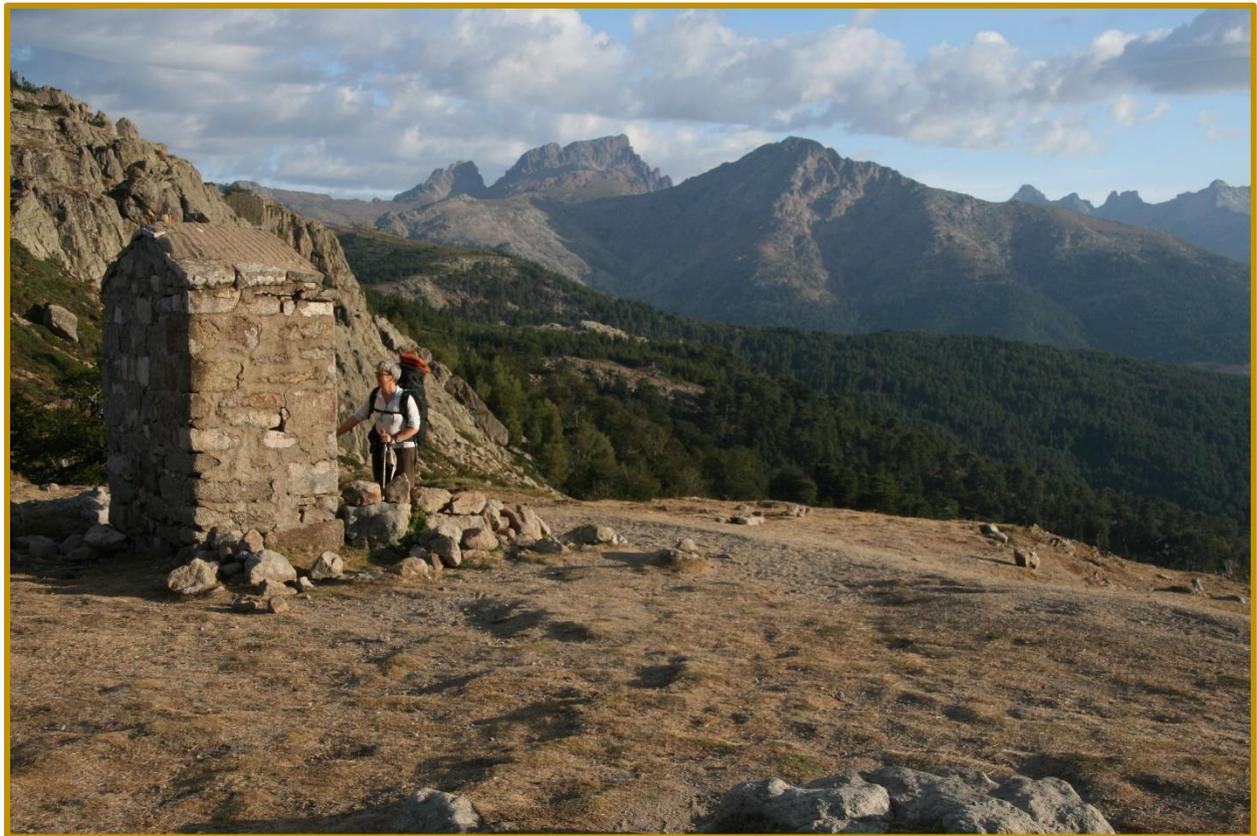
After a good break to enjoy the views, we continued to our gite for the night the Auberge U Vallone. There was a walled in spot for our tent.



*Somewhat Protected from the Animals!*

We sat on the deck drinking Oranginas. It was becoming our drink of choice as the Germans arrived generally before us and drank most of the beer. One by one, the hikers arrived hot and tired but smiling at the accomplishment of this hard but beautiful day. After supper, Julie went to the kitchen to see if the cook could bring out a cake. It was Pierre's (Canadian fellow we met earlier) birthday. He was turning 40. He was very emotional when the tiramisu came out and we all sang the happy birthday song.

The next day started with a walk under tall pines. But after a sharp turn on the path, the terrain became steep again. We crested on Col St Pietro where a shrine had been erected for the saint. We could see, through the gate, candles and dried flowers placed on the small alter.



*Julie at the Col St Pedro*

The constant winds had shaped the trees into wondrous shapes. Climbing over another pass, we arrived in a wide grassy valley and Lake Ninu. We had to negotiate passage with the many horses standing on the trail. They seemed unfazed by hikers and did not budge.



Refuge de Ciottulu di Mari



*Typical Windblown Trees*

We arrived at the Refuge Manganu first that afternoon. We beat the Germans and therefore were able to enjoy a beer at the bar. Soon they

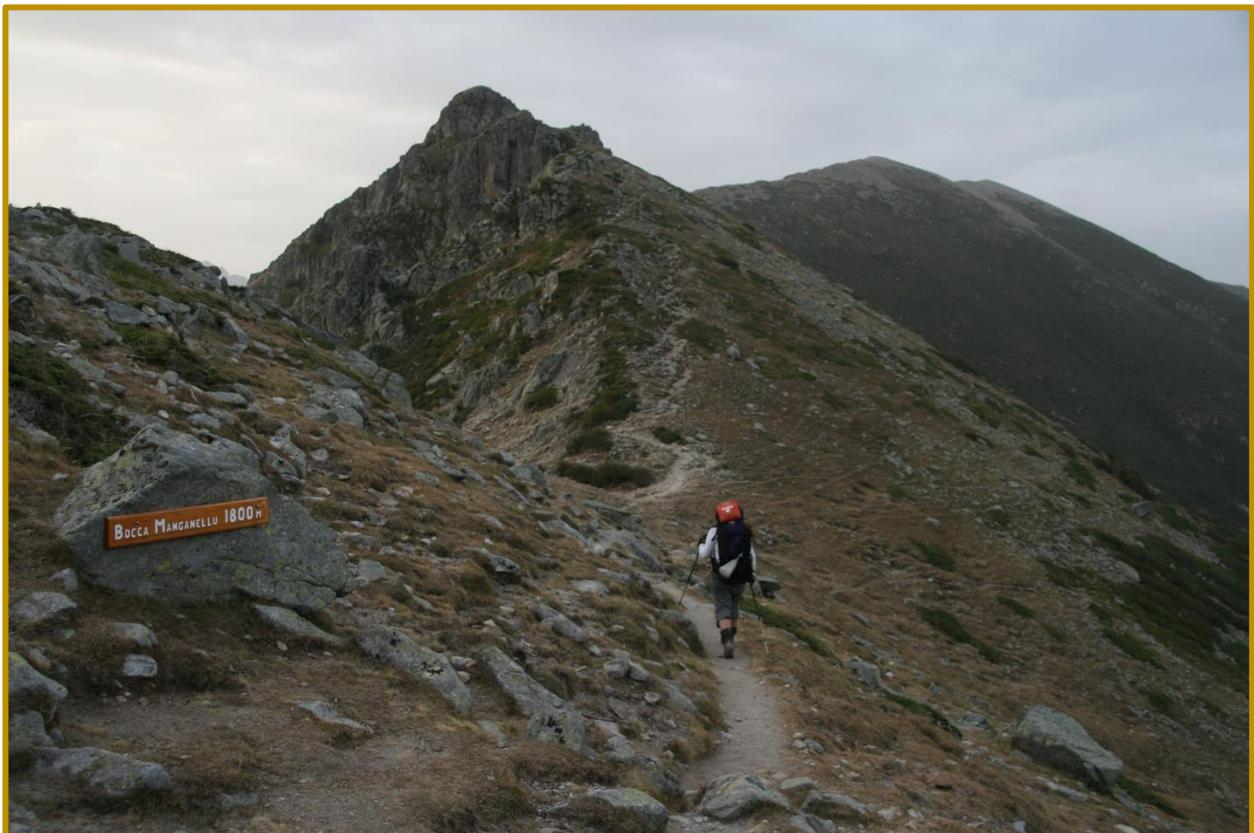
joined us, as did Speedo-guy. He was quite the character. He was chatty, but we did not speak Italian and so did not really understand anything he said. None the less, we enjoyed his cheerful disposition.

Talk that evening over dinner was the up-coming storm. It was forecasted to hit in two days. There would be an exit point there if need be.



This next stage was grueling. We ascended to the Breche de Capitellu, an exposed col and crossed into a second valley and a rocky descent. Another climb led us to Bocca a Soglia and then Bocca a Reta where the hiking became technical scrambling. We thought we were done for the day, but

there was still another pass to cross at Bocca Muzzella. Unfortunately, Julie strained her right knee and was in a bit of pain.





*A Relaxing Moment After Long and Hard Days*

At the Refuge de Petra Piana, we talked to other, less fortunate, hikers. One man had fallen 3 meters onto his head and was being evacuated by donkey. Another man had fallen and cut his hand. A woman, Marie, sprained her ankle and was barely able to walk. Her husband wanted to continue the trek, but she didn't think she could make it. They had an intense discussion. She decided to exit with the injured fellow, and her husband would carry on alone.

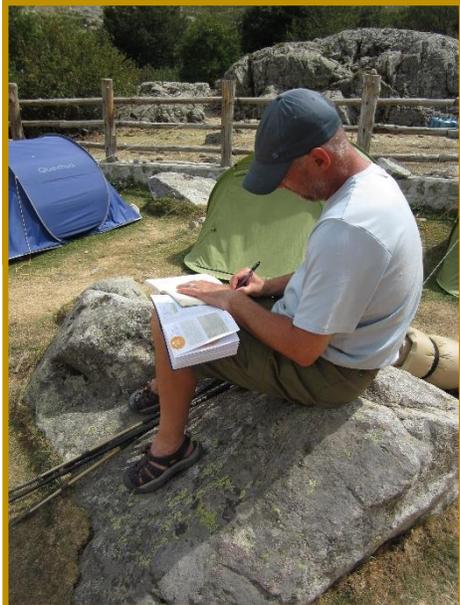


*Non-Stop Technical Ridges*

At supper there was a heated conversation about how many Corsicans equaled one Basque. We were not sure who won that argument as we retreated to our tent to sleep off the delicious meal and arduous day's walk.

We set off in the morning with grey skies and quickly gained the Sierra Bianca ridge. After crossing several saddles and peaks, we chose the high route over some technical and exposed ridges. The wind was growing in intensity, but the rain held off. After the peak of Sierra di Tenda, we descended to the Refuge de l'Ouda by mid-afternoon. We could hear in the distance shepherds calling to their herds of sheep and cows. This hostel had the campers in an enclosure to protect their tents against the goats. It

was an odd scene and we felt we were the ones being herded-not the animals.



*Refuge de L'Ouda*

Overnight the storm hit. We lay in our tent counting the seconds between the lightning and thunder. As it started to move farther away, our nerves calmed, and we went to sleep. The bad weather and Julie's knee pain suggested we get out at the next exit point.

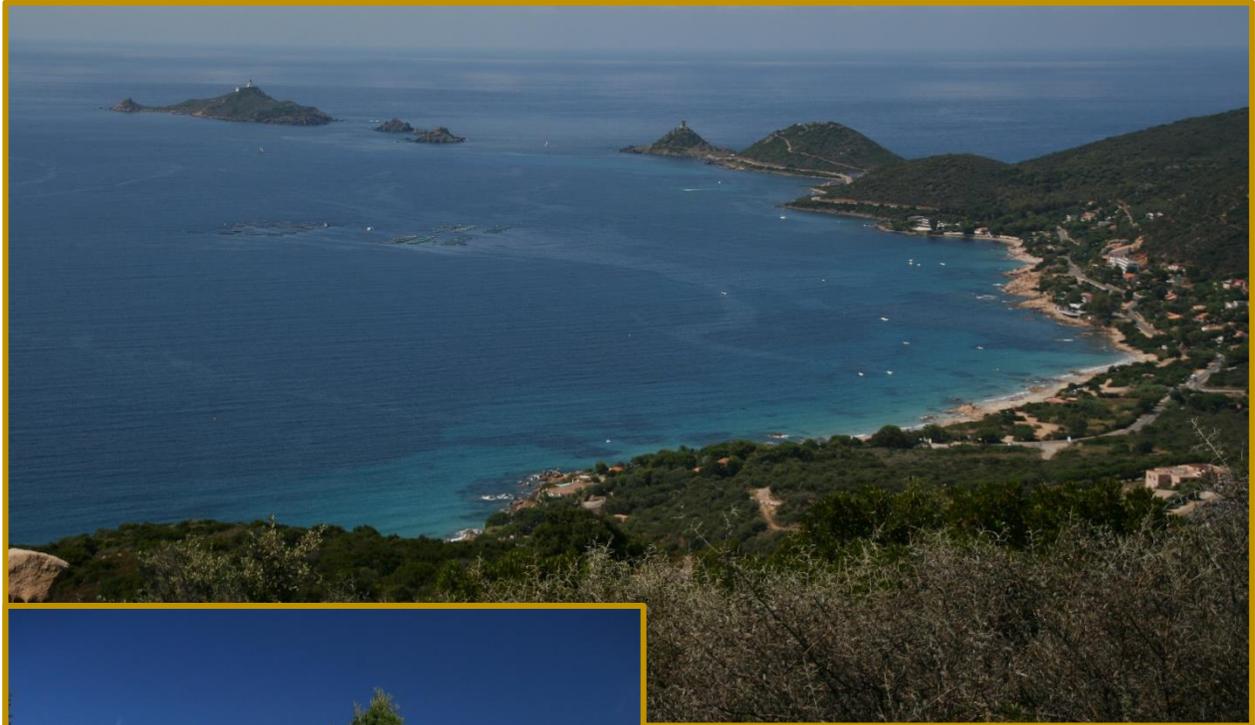
*Journaling is Critical*

There was a village where we could get a train south. We arrived in Tattone at 10:30 in the morning, ate our breakfast of pâté and baguette and waited for the train. It took us to Ajaccio (capital of Corsica). As we exited, the torrential rain started again. We were soaked.



*Waiting for the Train in Tattone*

We booked a room at the Hotel du Golfe and dried off. We stayed in this marvelous town for 2 days and visited the birthplace of Napoleon and enjoyed the best pizza (with raw egg) overlooking the Tino Rossi marina.



*4 Legged Friends Helping US!*

*Bay Vignola and the Tour Génoise de la Parata (1550)*

Next, we walked a coastal path called Chemin des Crêtes. It climbed along cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It turned out to be longer than expected. We got a bit lost in the hills, but 2 hunting dogs came by and escorted us down to a small town. They led on the trail and would stop regularly and look back at us as though saying 'are you coming?' At the bottom of the hill, the dogs' owner was waiting for them. He had 2 wild boars in his truck. His hunt had been successful. We found a beach and had a swim in the sea and drank too many Oranginas to count. A local showed us where to take the bus back to Ajaccio.

The next day, we boarded a bus to Bonifacio, where we would stay for a week. This was by far the most spectacular city we had ever seen. It was an ancient fort built atop an 80-foot limestone cliff jutting out into the sea. Walking in this historic place was like travelling through time.



*Family Gatherings in Bonifacio - Bocce Game!*

We could hear a baby cry somewhere in an apartment, some residents in heated conversation in the old quarters, smell onions cooking. People were living as they had always lived in this museum-like fort. The next few days were spent exploring the narrow, cobble stoned streets and medieval architecture.



*Military Ruins from the 15th Century*

The citadel of Bonifacio was built in the 9th century. Legend had it that king Aragon's soldiers built a staircase of 187 steps in one night to breach the defenses of this fortress. The stairs were an engineering feat. We took a boat ride to Tazzeli Island. From the water we could appreciate how imposing the tip of Corsica and Bonifacio really was.



*Bonifacio and the Stairs of Aragon*

Our holiday was coming to an end. We booked a car to drive back up to Ile Rousse and the ferry. This allowed us to see more of the island. Our first stop was at a beautiful round bay, Rondinela Bay, for a swim. It was very hot, and we spent 3-4 hours enjoying the cool water and the many colourful fish.



*2000 BC Ruins*

Next, we hiked to an archaeological site. It was the remains of a small village built about 4000 years ago. The stone rooms were in good condition and fascinating to see. Our dinner that night was a charcuterie board with plenty of cured

meats, cheeses, and olives. The food on this trip was exceptional.



*Beautiful Corte*

On to Corte and a visit to its citadel and museum. We drove to Ile Rousse to spend our last 2 nights in this beautiful ocean-front town. Our host at Hotel des Alizées gave us a suite. Our meal was rosé and a thin crust pizza on the suite's deck watching the sunset over the bay. Spectacular.

We drove along the coast and hiked up to a ghost town called Occio. It was built in the 1700's. It was eery to be in this desolate place imagining how people lived here. Once the well dried up, they all left, leaving the buildings and the fields as markers of a once loved place.

Next, we visited the town of Calvi which also had a citadel. It was built in the 1300's and still had folks living in it. We saw the home of Christopher Columbus and where Napoleon sought refuge in his last years.



*Calvi Citadel*

On our last day on Corsica, we walked down to the city center and enjoyed a leisurely breakfast and found a quiet corner of beach. The boarding of the ferry was at 6 pm. The buffet style dinner was good, and we ate too much. We reminisced about our trip and the passionate Corsicans. Their lifestyle was so enjoyable and healthy. There was no rushing, food was always fresh and local, music and song seemed a daily occurrence, and of course, the siesta.

In the morning, we found ourselves again in Marseille. What hit us were the smells, sounds, and bustle of this metropolitan city. The spice market seemed like it was coming out of Algeria. We bought some spicy spread (mouhamara) and flat bread for our lunch. It was so spicy but flavourful.



*Marseille*

Our return to Paris was uneventful. The TGV (Très Grande Vitesse) train was fully booked. Our flight took us back home to Victoria.



**“ALL TRULY GREAT THOUGHTS ARE CONCEIVED WHILE WALKING”**

**Friedrich Nietzsche**