

STAGE 4

*Ascu Stagnu to
Auberge U Vallone*

Start	Ascu Stagnu
Finish	Auberge U Vallone
Distance	9km (5½ miles); addition for Monte Cinto: 2km (1¼ miles) return
Total ascent	1250m (4100ft); Monte Cinto: 200m (655ft)
Total descent	1230m (4035ft); Monte Cinto: 200m (655ft)
Time	8hrs; Monte Cinto: 1hr 30mins
Terrain	A forested valley path gives way to scrambling on a steep and rocky slope. The higher parts of the valley feature steep and bouldery scree slopes, leading to a high ridge. Broken rock is traversed beside the ridge. The descent includes a steep scree slope and steep rock, requiring some scrambling. Rugged paths are used later.
Maps	IGN 4250 OT
Food and drink	Water can be obtained from a couple of streams on the ascent, but may be absent on the descent. The Refuge de Tighjettu and Auberge U Vallone serve meals and sell provisions.
Shelter	Some shade in the forest at first, but none on the open slopes of the mountain, which are exposed to sun, wind and rain, and can hold snow well into summer. Do not attempt this stage in bad weather.

This was originally the variant after the Cirque de la Solitude was closed in June 2015 and is now the main route of the GR20. The route was previously marked with double yellow paint flashes, but for 2016 is to be re-painted with red and white GR marks. The ascent is based on a long-standing route used to climb Monte Cinto. Once the initial climb is completed, the route runs close to a rocky ridge from Pointe des Éboulis to Bocca Crucetta, passing high above Lac du Cinto. This runs higher than any other part of the GR20, and would be challenging if there is snow or ice around. The route is well marked and should present little problem in mist, but rain could make

THE CLOSURE OF THE CIRQUE DE LA SOLITUDE AND SUBSEQUENT RE-ROUTING

Following the serious accident in June 2015, resulting in seven deaths, the Cirque de la Solitude was closed. A geologist's report concluded it was too dangerous to visit. A variant route was marked soon afterwards, and it was thoroughly checked for this guide. At the time that this guide was being finalised (March 2016), it was announced that the Cirque de la Solitude was no longer part of the GR20, and the variant route over the shoulder of Monte Cinto was to be regarded as the main (and only) route.

It was announced that all the marking and protection would be removed from the Cirque de la Solitude. The geologist's report concluded that several tons of rubble remained poised to collapse without notice. Consequently, anyone attempting to traverse the Cirque would need to be equipped for rock-climbing, able to navigate complex terrain without markers, and be fully aware of the risk of sudden landslides or rock-falls. It is the author's opinion that the risks are too great, and that the Cirque de la Solitude should be avoided. The new route over the shoulder of Monte Cinto is a fine challenge in its own right, and is a much safer option than the Cirque. It might be the case that adventure companies might offer guided traverses of the Cirque, and trekkers might have the option of joining one of these.

Should any readers decide to risk a traverse of the Cirque, they might consider contacting Cicerone and describing what they actually find on the ground, and whether they would advise anyone else to go there. Check the Cicerone website for any further changes at www.cicerone.co.uk/852/updates.



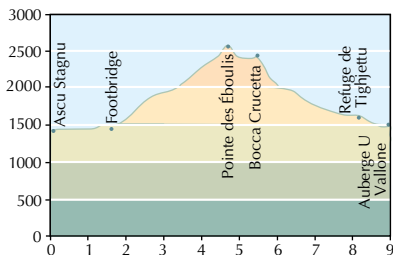
*Crossing steep rock
between Pointe
des Éboulis and
Bocca Crucetta*

the rocks slippery, and there is no easy escape in the event of a storm. In clear weather, the mountain scenery is breathtaking. If time can be spared at Pointe des Éboulis, it is well worth the extra effort to visit the summit of Monte Cinto – the highest mountain in Corsica at 2706m (8878ft).

Cross the car park in front of the Hôtel le Chalet to leave **Ascu Stagnu** at 1422m (4665ft). A large signboard points the way and the path passes a wooden building hidden in the trees. Note the paint flashes that mark the route, as well as the orange flashes that mark the way to the peak of Punta Minuta. A narrow path leads past laricio pines, roughly contouring across the slope. Pass a small water source, then cross a bouldery streambed and continue gently towards the **Ruisseau du Tighjettu**. Walk upstream roughly parallel to the river, leaving the shade of the pines and passing through juniper, alder and spiny broom scrub on rocky ground. Turn left as marked for 'Cinto' and cross a wooden **footbridge** over the Ruisseau du Tighjettu, at 1488m (4882ft). Pause to admire the fine array of peaks around the head of the valley.

The ascent becomes more difficult as it follows the paint marks in zigzags up a steep and rocky slope. Beware of any wet patches, where the rock can be greasy underfoot, and use a series of five chains for security. A long chain is followed by two shorter chains, then another long and another short chain. Those who start the ascent early in the day might find good shade on the slope before the

sun strikes the rock. Watch carefully for the paint marks, which indicate crucial turns on rocky scrambles, or show the best way across awkward gullies. Easier stretches of path rise across scree slopes on the slopes below **Capu Borba**. The steep-sided valley is surrounded by towers of rock, including the ominous overhang of La Tour Penchée.





The crest at *Pointe des Éboulis*, with *Monte Cinto* seen to the right

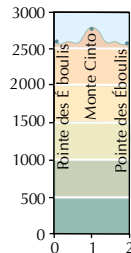
The path is quite rough and stony, levelling out as it passes a rugged, stony hollow around 2150m (7050ft). ► Climb a scree slope, following the well-trodden and well-marked path, avoiding a left turn that leads to the tiny pool of **Lac d'Argentu**. Cross a rugged hump and pass several big boulders on a slight gap. Looking uphill, massive buttresses of rock rise skywards. The scree path occasionally reaches areas of broken rock where care is needed, and one part includes a chain.

Stay on the paint-marked route, avoiding other paths. After passing the base of a buttress, split by a dark gully, keep climbing and later go up another area of broken rock bearing a chain. The scree path finally reaches a high mountain crest at **Pointe des Éboulis**. At 2607m (8553ft), this is the highest point gained on the main route, where helpful signboards are bolted to rocks. At this point, reached 4hrs after leaving Ascu Stagnu, either turn left for an optional ascent of Monte Cinto, or turn right to continue the trek.

Ascent of Monte Cinto

Turn left as signposted for Monte Cinto. The summit is clearly in view, but an older sign is soon reached, where the rugged path heads downhill, rather than following the rocky crest. White paint marks soon give way to red paint marks, and it is important to spot these to find the

A small stream might be found nearby, if water is needed.



On reaching the crest of the range, Monte Cinto is further along the ridge and is reached by easy scrambling



best route. Trodden paths alternate with bare rock, with numerous short ascents and descents. When a summit is reached at 2651m (8698ft), a sign indicates that Monte Cinto lies further ahead.

Turn right downhill, which is soon confirmed by another sign. While going down a slope of huge boulders, watch carefully for a left turn, followed by scrambles and traverses across steep, rocky slopes. Eventually, turn left and scramble steeply up bare rock, which gives way to a pleasant and easy shoulder leading to the summit of **Monte Cinto** at 2706m (8878ft).

Take in the extensive views, with particular reference to the high mountains already passed, and those still to be passed, on the GR20. There might be a visitor book to record your ascent, and a number of ruined buildings are dotted around. Take particular care to retrace steps carefully to return to **Pointe des Éboulis**.

To continue the trek from Pointe des Éboulis, spot the signboard for Bocca Crucetta and Tighjettu, and follow the paint-marked path along the stony crest. As the path descends it crosses bouldery ground. Looking ahead, the rocky tower of Paglia Orba is seen beyond the nearby peaks of Punta Crucetta and Capu Falu, and those two peaks are separated by Bocca Crucetta. Broken rock is reached on the way to a gap, and the paint-marked route drifts down to the left as it prepares to cut across the steep, broken, rocky flank of **Punta Crucetta**. Take this stretch slowly and carefully, and exercise extreme caution if the rock is wet and slippery. **Lac du Cinto** sits in a bouldery hollow, and it may be frozen well into the summer. A rocky scramble leads up to the gap of **Bocca Crucetta** at 2452m (8045ft), where helpful signboards point back and ahead. It should take less than an hour to reach this gap from Pointe des Éboulis.

An obvious, well-trodden path makes a broad loop as it descends a long scree slope, with a fine view through a valley dominated by the rocky buttresses and summit of Paglia Orba. Simply follow the path downhill and keep to the left of a bare hump of rock. Afterwards, take care where the scree rolls onto bare rock, then descend another short scree slope.



Descending from Bocca Crucetta on scree, looking to Paglia Orba



Keep an eye on the paint marks, which show the way down a succession of bare rock outcrops. Juniper, thrift and parsley fern fill gaps in the rock, and short scrambles lead down a rocky cleft and a gully. Rather surprisingly, on a stony, level area, a small space has been cleared as a tent pitch.

Continue down bare rock and broken rock, passing a jammed boulder. Scramble down a rocky cleft and pass through an area of alder bushes and lush vegetation, around 2000m (6560ft). These are fed by damp patches and there might even be a stream trickling through a stony riverbed. This might be a handy water source, but don't rely on it. If the sun is setting, note that there are nearby places where tent pitches have been cleared, including one with an exceptional view down the valley. However, only use these if there is no hope of reaching the refuge far below.

Continue down slopes of bare rock and boulders into the **Ravin de Valle di Stagni**, briefly levelling out around 1800m (5905ft). More bare rock leads down to a stream where a little dam might be spotted. This impounds water for use at the Refuge de Tighjettu, and throughout the rest of the descent, which is much gentler, black plastic water pipes might be seen snaking across the slopes. Pass a little stone hut and continue to a signposted path junction beside a couple of tall laricio pines. This junction should be reached 2hrs 30mins after leaving Bocca Crucetta. At this point, either turn right to reach the **Refuge de**

Tighjettu with a very short ascent, or turn left to descend to the Auberge U Vallone in another 30mins.

The PNRC **Refuge de Tighjettu** isn't built in the usual stone bergerie style, but is a curious timber chalet construction, at 1683m (5255ft), partly supported on stilts. It enjoys a fine view down the valley and is couched on a rugged spur between the Ravin du Stranciacone and the Ravin de Valle di Stagni. The building has three dormitories with 36 beds and a large kitchen/dining area. The gardien's quarters are part of the building. Meals, food and drink are available. The showers are underneath the refuge, where there is a good sheltered space with a wash area, and there is a separate toilet block just downhill. Hire tents and small camping spaces are dotted around the steep slope below the refuge.

Follow a stony, bouldery path with red/white GR20 markers down through juniper and spiny broom scrub, or walk across bare rock, and cross the **Ravin de Valle di Stagni** at a cascade. Continue along the path, taking the time to look back at the refuge clinging to the steep and rocky slope. Cross the **Ravin du Stranciacone** and walk further down through the valley into an area of young pines. Keep to the marked path to reach the Bergeries de Ballone, also known as the **Auberge U Vallone**, at 1440m (4725ft).

The **Auberge U Vallone**, tel 06 12 03 44 65, operates a basic bar restaurant and offers meals, food and drink. Camping spaces are dotted around the area and there are also tents for hire. There is a shower, a toilet and a water source. Trekkers can sit at tables and chairs on a terrace and admire the surrounding mountains while eating and drinking, with the bongling bells of grazing cattle sounding nearby. Rock pools in the river are most welcome on hot days. There is an easy route leading away from the site, down through the valley to the little villages of Calasima, Pietra and Albertacce (see the Link from Auberge U Vallone to Albertacce for details).