

Mediterranean islands evoke sun-dazzled days and wine-soaked nights, curvy women scantily clad, and bronzed men in linen shirts. While Corsica is not fashionable Capri and definitely not jet-setting Ibiza, it does have its share of white sandy beaches and sapphire-blue coves. However, a very different, untamed Corsica hides behind soaring mountain peaks like broken teeth that most vacationers only glimpse behind sunglasses lounging on the beach. “Wild Corsica” is where rushing streams tumble down cavernous gorges, and silent mountain lakes are bordered by boulders the size of Volkswagens. Dogs sleep in the road, and farm animals range free, making themselves plump for the cheese and charcuterie that are staples of the Corsican diet.

The island’s interior is also home to a desolate trek known as the GR20 (*Grande Randonnée* number 20)—often referred to as Europe’s toughest long-distance footpath. The Twenty’s reputation did not dissuade us or dampen our enthusiasm for the journey. I’m a fervent Francophile with a special place in my heart for France ever since I did graduate work in the Loire Valley in the seventies, so the fact that Corsica is one of her eighteen regions added to its appeal. If I can speak French while hiking, all the better.

Trails are blazed with white-over-red stripes and are maintained by the *Fédération Française de la Randonnée* (French Hiking Federation). We’d hiked pieces of other GR trails, including seventy-five miles of the *Tour du Mont Blanc* (TMB) through France, Italy, and Switzerland to circle Europe’s highest peak when we were fifty-six. The TMB was a difficult, sometimes grueling hike. But at the end of each day, bruised and battered, we had a hot restaurant meal, soft mattress, and warm duvet waiting. Not so with our Mediterranean adventure. We would rough it for two weeks, for at least eight hours a day on the trail, up and down elevation changes of over sixty-two thousand feet. The numbers were daunting but

guaranteed magnificent vistas from sunbaked summits and impressively muscled calves to strut on our return.

Turning sixty is a terrifying anniversary for some. For us, it meant retirement, the end of our helter-skelter, cuticle-chewing workaday lives and the beginning of unhurried adventure curbed only by our wallets and the bounds of our bodies. No longer would travel be rushed as when we had to maximize every minute of our hard-earned vacation days. Retiring also meant celebrating a high school romance that grew into thirty-five years of marriage. We were ready to mark milestones sixty and thirty-five, eager to begin the next phase of our life.