

Backpacks, Boots And Baguettes - , Mick Webb

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High in the Pyrenees, a full day's hike from any trappings of civilisation, is no place for a human to be - unless you are searching for the time of your life. This is the roof of a mountain range that stretches from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean coasts, and provides some of the most breathtakingly beautiful landscape to be found in Europe. It is also the place for hikers to get soaked, roasted or scared out of their wits - not by the endangered brown bear, but by rights-of-way such as the precipitous Chemin de la Mure, hacked out of a cliff by 18th century convicts and is still used in the 21st century to punish anyone fearful of heights, such as TV presenter Simon Calder. Luckily, his friend and walking companion Mick Webb has a complementary range of phobias, such as being confined with 54 fellow hikers, and their socks, in a refuge two miles above sea level. Together, they step out to conquer the roof of the Pyrenees, following the time honoured tradition of walking the GR10. the preferred route of the, at times eccentric, French Ramblers' Federation. Testing a hiker's emotional resilience as keenly as his walking boots, the GR10 is not for the faint-hearted. Weaving an occasionally treacherous, always exhilarating trajectory through a landscape of strong traditions and strange animals, Calder and Webb narrate an eventful and humorous travelogue. With their backpacks, boots and baguettes, they explore the region: meeting the people, savouring the views and the wines - and agreeing about how best to cope with the constant surprises and challenges of magnificent mountains. They also very quickly learn that la loi de l'emmerdement maximum means 'sod's law' in French.

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