

Corsica River Guide - PRINT VERSION

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Corsica River Guide

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Introduction

This webpage contains the full text, in one page, of all the river descriptions in the guide. It has been put in this format to make it suitable for output to a printer. All photographs have been removed except one picture of a dangerous fall on the Travo which is worth being able to recognise.

An alternative set of webpages (accessible via the [index](#) page) has exactly the same text, but contains photographs and additional links to make browsing more convenient.

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GOLO RIVER FAMILY

The Golo is one of the longest rivers in Corsica. It starts as a small mountain stream close to the Col de Verghio, the island's highest pass across the spine of Corsica. The river initially drains the snow fields of the small Capu di Verghio ski resort. Although the skiing will be poor by Easter, there will still be enough snow to swell the river when the sun shines. In fact when last I visited the area the highest start point on the river was still above the snow line.

The river slowly drops and swells, collecting tributaries on the way. The Calasima joins high up, before the river plunges through the massive gorge of the Scala di Santa Regina. Further down the valley the Golo collects the Asco, the Tartagine and the Casaluna, becoming the islands nearest approximation to a mature river; wide, meandering, dam controlled and sometimes polluted. Nevertheless there are still many enjoyable sections to paddle, especially if a section can be found away from the encroaching civilisation.

The most scenic part of the Golo river complex is undoubtedly the highest section. The water level can be checked at a gauge where the RF9 crosses the river at the bridge west of Albertacce. The river Calasima joins just above this point (it is in fact the bigger river) and it is wise to walk up to the confluence to check the relative water levels in each stream before deciding which of the two tributaries to paddle.

CALASIMA	
From	NW of Calasima village (road D318)
To	RF9 Road Bridge (W of Albertacce)
Grade	5-6
Length	8 km

The Calasima needs a level of at least 230 centimetres, and ideally about 280, to make a trip worth while. The access point is reached by following the D318 through Calasima village to where it peters out near the river. At this point the river is shallow and wide, and the high water levels are needed to get enough water to float down the first couple of miles. The river eventually enters a gorge section, becoming much tighter, deeper, and more enjoyable. The actual grade depends on the water level, and varies between 5 and 6.

UPPER GOLO	
From	Maison Forest de Pappaghia (or anywhere convenient nearby)
To	RF9 Road Bridge (W of Albertacce)
Grade	5-6
Length	7 km

The highest normal access point is the Maison Forest de Pappaghia, where a track leads close to the river. The Golo needs a lower water level than the Calasima, and is possibly worth attempting with anything more than 2 metres

on the gauge, although checking the water levels high up the river is recommended unless the gauge shows a more acceptable level of 230 and above. An inspection to pick a different start point in low water should be possible. Due to the enclosing pine forest blanking out the maquis it is possible to get down to the river from various other points on the road.

The Golo runs at grade 5 to 6 depending on water level, but watch out for fallen trees.

I have not paddled the short stretch of river from Albertacce bridge down to the reservoir, but a quick look from a passing car certainly showed canoeable water.

SCALA DI SANTA REGINA (MIDDLE GOLO)	
From	Middle of Gorge
To	Ponte Castirla
Grade	Probably 5-7
Length	Up to 9 km

The "Stairway of the Holy Mother" is a superbly impressive gorge linking the high valley of the upper Golo with the flatter lands of the north east of Corsica. The Golo here has been dammed for a hydro electric system, and much of the water is removed at the head of the gorge to be returned near the bottom above the Ponte Castirla. This water can alternatively be piped south and discharged into the upper Tavignano.

I have not paddled this bit so I can make few recommendations, but it is easy enough to recce from the road. The upper part of the gorge section is narrow but mostly low gradient. The bottom half of the river shows most promise. The biggest problem will be finding the right level of water, as most of the water may have been removed by the hydro electric-scheme, but at a good level this would probably run at grade 5-7.

Below the hydro-scheme outlet the river changes entirely for the last 2 kilometres if you are lucky enough to find a release on. The river is still turbulent and tricky, running at grade 4-5.

LOWER GOLO	
From	Ponte Castirla
To	The Sea
Grade	3-4 (5)
Length	54 km

Once past Ponte Castirla the river bedrock changes from granite to schist, and the character of the scenery changes too. The more open and gentle character of the lower Golo produces an enjoyable and faster flowing river, with little

appreciably above grade 3. The main fall of note is the "Vacuum Cleaner" a shallow innocuous looking drop tending to suck canoes under to the occupant's great surprise. They are always released safely, but often inverted or vertical.

Below Francetta the encroachment of civilisation become evident, as well as the Corsican habit of using the river as a rubbish tip. This is normally annoying but harmless, but stay alert. In 1988 Chris Sladden was surprised to be joined in a stopper by a floating six foot fridge freezer. The river level depends almost entirely on the level of release of the hydro-scheme in the Scala. It will be paddable at any level above 1 metre on the gauge at Ponte Castirla, but really needs another 30 centimetres to become really enjoyable.

The river continues from Ponte Leccia to the coast in much the same vein, although the lower Golo gorge by Barchetta does raise both the grading and the scenery by one step, possibly two in high water. The water added by the tributaries around Ponte Leccia will have some effect so it is difficult to quote helpful gauge levels. Inspection of this stretch of the Golo is fairly easy however, so you can check the river yourself. Most of the problems will come from the occasional weirs. Many can be shot, but watch the stoppers and towback if water levels are high.

ASCO	
From	Asco Village
To	Golo Confluence
Grade	3-4 (5), then 2
Length	16 km

The major tributary of the Golo, the Asco drains the northern flanks of Monte Cinto, Corsica's highest mountain, as well as other surrounding peaks and snow fields. For this reason the Asco is unusual in Corsica in that it can display a daily rise and fall in sunny conditions, like rivers in the French Alps.

The other unusual feature is that the road runs alongside the river for a large part of it's length, making reconnaissance easy. The normal stretch to run is the gorge, starting above Asco village at a Genoese bridge. The first 3 kilometres run at grade 4-5 with two portages.

A second popular start point is the lay-by just below the second blockage. This is clearly visible from the road about 2 kilometres below Asco. When flowing well the Asco below the second start point is a superb playground of a river. It runs mostly at grade 3-4. The profusion of simple drops, waves and playholes make it a good river for an intermediate group of paddlers, or ideal for a bunch of jaded big water tyros looking for a relaxing day without any waterfalls, or hard decisions to make.

It is normal for jaded tyros to get out at the end of the gorge near Moltifao. The river touring purist will want to continue down to the river Golo at a sedate pace, drifting down a river which is now a grade or two easier.

TAVIGNANO RIVER FAMILY

The Tavignano family provides a superb range of different paddling experiences in one (mostly) easily accessible river system - anything from relaxing grade three cruising to relentless, high grade expedition paddling. It's major tributary, the Vecchio, must be one of the best rivers in Corsica, providing three classic river trips of differing grades in only 20 kilometers of valley. Good things often come in small sizes.

The Tavignano, like the Golo, starts high in the mountains in the north west of the island. For over one third of it's length the river is not touched by road or track. Unless you fancy carrying your canoe or hiring mules the only way to enjoy the river is to don a pair of walking boots. This is a pity as the river is presumably similar to the neighbouring Restonica, which is well worth a visit. In my time in Corsica I did not fancy the walk, so the Tavignano guide starts where the river is accessible by road, in the mountain town of Corte

Corte provides a good base for most of these rivers, and it is itself a very pleasant place to spend a few restful hours in a bar or pavement cafe. Corte also has a rail station which gets you onto the mountain railway to Ajaccio - and peering down from a rail carriage is one of the few convenient ways of recceing the Upper Vecchio river.

(In this guide it is easiest to describe the Vecchio in reverse order, starting with the lower sections then working upstream.)

UPPER TAVIGNANO	
From	Corte
To	Pont de Piedicorte
Grade	3(4)
Length	25 km

The river becomes approachable as it runs through the high mountain town of Corte. A few tracks and paths allow access to the river, and it can be paddled through the town if the river levels are high enough.

Once below the town, and the Restonica confluence, the river eases off to become like the Golo, a long meandering but scenic grade 3. The water is probably slightly less exciting than the Golo, but the scenery more rural and pleasant. The river enters a small gorge section just above the Vecchio confluence, raising the grade level to an easy 4.

The only major tributary to join the Tavignano is the Vecchio, which can add almost as much water as the Tavignano carries, to produce a more exciting and powerful river below the confluence.

TAVIGNANO GORGE	
From	Pont de Piedocorte
To	Faio

Grade	3-4
Length	18 km

By far the best part of the Tavignano is the gorge north west of the small hamlet of Faio. Access is easiest through an olive grove upstream of the gorge, close to the Pont de Piedicorte. Normally this is clearly marked from the road by a mass of canoeists tents and cars. Camping is possible here, but is not recommended for those wanting solitude.

The gorge itself is long, narrow and steep sided. It approaches grade 4 in parts, but normally runs at grade 2-3. The interest comes mainly from the shape and structure of the river. In places a paddler with 208 centimetre paddles could easily get them trapped across the gorge walls. Although not difficult or especially tricky, the lack of places to land once in the gorge makes it quite a serious trip.

An old bridge across the gorge marks the end of the fun. A water level gauge is situated here, downstream of the succeeding new bridge on the river right. This needs about 150 centimetres or higher for ideal conditions, equating to about 160 centimetres at the Vecchio gauge at the Noceta road bridge, which is much easier to read. The easiest exit is to carry on for about 500 metres to the next modern road bridge. Exit on the left below the bridge, and follow a gently sloping path leading up the bank away from the bridge. This comes out at the obvious lay-by on the N200 about 200 yards east of the bridge.

LOWER TAVIGNANO	
From	Faio
To	The Sea
Grade	1-2
Length	18 km

Once leaving the lower Taravo gorge, the river runs into the flatter sedimentary lowlands of the eastern plains. Apart from the occasional shallows the river is calm but fast flowing.

RESTONICA	
From	Optional
To	Optional
Grade	6-7 ???
Length	Optional

On a sunny day, the Restonica valley is one of the most impressive sights in Corsica. Unfortunately it is also the most easily accessible of Corsica's high valleys, leading to a stream of coaches, cars and mountain bikes passing up and down the road.

If the river levels are low it is no bad thing to join them. An evening drive to the head of the valley will never be wasted, especially with a bike on the roof-rack to coast back down to Corte. There is a campsite halfway up the valley which is especially scenic, although cold in the mornings as the sun is hidden by the towering sky line.

For many canoeists a visit to the Restonica will only be by car, as the narrow catchment is less likely to provide canoeable water than many of its bigger neighbours. But if the river is flowing it provides one of the steepest gradients easily available in Corsica. It is possible to recce almost all of the river from the road, and to select the bit to be paddled depending on the water level. The highest start point is normally near the grotto about 14 kilometres above Corte, where a track leads down to the river. There is no reason why higher sections could not be attempted if water levels allow.

The river itself contains an endless succession of steep drops into narrow pools in a tight, overgrown slash of a gorge. Take your oldest paddles and equipment, and allow about 90 minutes per kilometre. It has a character that either appeals or repels you, depending on whether you like dropping over a 3 metre ledge whilst trying to avoid hitting your head on the fallen tree half way down, and then back-paddling immediately on landing to avoid a gorse thicket. (Or perhaps I could be biased against the river, having picked the wrong section to paddle).

High up in the valley the river valley is open, running at about grade 5-6, but overgrown. As the river descends it slowly closes in to a shallow gorge, with the obstacles becoming more mineral and less vegetable. As if to compensate the river grade goes up to 6 or 7. The river only eases very close to the town itself, running through Corte to the Tavignano at about grade 4.

LOWER VECCHIO	
From	Noceta Road Bridge
To	Confluence with Tavignano
Grade	3-4
Length	4 km (plus 3 km on Tavignano)

The lowest section of the Vecchio runs from the bridge over the D43 (leading to Noceta) down to the Tavignano. A gauge here is used to give the river levels described for all three sections of the river. When I paddled the river at a level of 170 centimetres it was a good fast bouncy grade 3-4. It could probably be paddled at grade 3 at levels as low as 140.

The best exit point is the D200 bridge over the Tavignano shortly after the confluence. If there has been a lot of rain and the more difficult rivers are washed out, then the lower Vecchio followed by the Tavignano gorge may be a good option for an interesting days paddle.

MIDDLE VECCHIO	
From	N 193 Road Bridge

To	Noceta Road Bridge (D43)
Grade	5 (6)
Length	8 km

As well as being good water in it's own right, the middle Vecchio provides a useful test piece for Corsican canoeing. Although difficult, running at grade 5 (occasionally 6) for much of it's length, it is user friendly. It is easily scouted (or portaged), has a few tricky falls, and access back to the road is not too difficult. If your group is not too experienced in Corsica, and wishes to work out whether you will cope with the more committing rivers such as the Travo and Rizzanese, then run the middle Vecchio. If you can run this at a level of between 150 and 170 (although probably with a few portages) and work well as a group with no problems, then you should cope with most rivers on the island.

The middle Vecchio starts close to the high road bridge on the N193 north of Vivario. Park in the layby on the south bank (about 100 metres away from the bridge) and look for the track leading down to the river. At the level mentioned above the river is mostly grade 5, easing towards the end. It runs at an easy grade 5 at 140 centimetres, and is probably not worth paddling below that level.

UPPER VECCHIO	
From	Canaglio
To	N 193 Road Bridge
Grade	7-8
Length	8 km

If the middle Vecchio is a test piece for the average Corsican paddler, then the upper Vecchio is the test piece for the true Corsican hard man. For my first time I was lucky enough to be escorted down it in low water by an experienced German paddler. That was difficult enough. Paddling this river at a good level without a guide would be quite a challenge. For a first descent, unless you are guided, I would recommend no more than 150 centimetres on the Noceta gauge.

The river can be partly reced in two ways. The D723 leading away from the north end of the high bridge over the Vecchio gives a view up the lower stretch of this section. Secondly the railway line running from Corte to Bastia passes up the valley and gives a clear view. The relevant stretch is reached by walking up the line from Vivario station. A good recce is strongly recommended in order to get a clear image of the valley's geography in your mind before attempting the river.

The access point is reached by turning off the N193 south of Vivario close to Tattone rail station. Follow the road winding north around the ridge, then down to a bridge over the Vecchio. Although the Manganello (a tributary) is the larger of the two rivers in this valley, access to it near Canaglio is through private farm land and not easy.

The river in the early stages is reasonably open, especially after the Manganello joins, with falls through boulder fields or over long series of ledges. Reconnaissance is fairly straight forward, and portages not too frequent. The

biggest problem in this section is that some of the plunge pools are quite shallow. Check them carefully and be prepared to take a few hard landings and a risk of pinning. At a gauge level of 150 centimetres this section runs at grade 6-7 .

A sharp left hand bend with the railway line in sight high up to the right gives a clear warning of a 13 metre waterfall situated just round the corner. Now is the time to take stock. This point is slightly over half way down the gorge in distance, but less than halfway in time or difficulty. Do you want to evacuate now if time is running out and dusk approaching, or if the river is proving too tricky? Do not be ashamed if you do. 2 days is not an unusual time for a full first descent of 8 kilometres of the upper Vecchio. Some groups have taken two days to get only this far. The way out is a strenuous scramble up the scree slope to the railway, then follow it to Vivario. Be careful on the loose scree.

After portaging the waterfall the descent continues. The 400 metres immediately below the waterfall are very tight and tricky, with an especially narrow gorge section and nasty undercut fall just before the river bends round to the right. After the bend the river opens out again to produce an amazingly jumbled boulder fall section. Most of this part of the gorge runs at grade 7-8 unless the water is low. Many paddlers will have four or five portages, some involving crossing and recrossing the river before a canoeable section can be reached again. The interminable progress of recce, bank support, carry and paddle will seem endless, and you will look in vain for any glimpse of the end of the section. Finally, around the final bend, the high bridge appears. But this is not the time to relax, as the steepness of the river continues right up to the stanchions of the bridge.

The final portage, carrying heavy canoes up the steep bank to the road, will seem the hardest one of all. For the first time in hours (or days) physical activity will not be supported by surges of adrenalin, and you will suddenly realise how tired you are. But who cares? You have canoed one of the hardest and best of the rivers of Corsica.

TRAVO AND FIUM ORBO

The Travo is another famous Corsican classic.

If the Vecchio, by presenting us with three excellent, different sections of river, provides the best total length of river water in Corsica, then the Travo must arguably provide the best single stretch of river for a one day paddle.

The amazing set piece on this river is the famous group of three waterfalls, of 6, 7 and 2 metres respectively, all stunningly situated in a massive circular amphitheatre of natural rock. But unlike the Rizzanese and its drops, the Travo also has a lot else to offer in addition to free fall water-slides - 6 kilometres of difficult gorge running at grade 7, and a secluded corner of Corsican scenery well away from the noise and civilisation on the coast only 10 miles away.

The Fium Orbo is a long drive from the major river valleys of the Golo, Tavignano and Liamone. Nevertheless, for the paddler happy on grade 5-6 water, a day or two spent in this scenic valley will be well worth while. It is not too far from the Travo to be included as one "family"

The best approach to the valley is from the top end, crossing the Col de Sorba from Vivario. If this drive can be timed to coincide with sunset on a cloudless evening then the trip will have been worthwhile even if the river is empty. The

alternative road into the valley is from the coast. Unfortunately this takes you past the site where the guts are being ripped out of the lower Fium Orbo valley to build a huge hydro electric complex. I know that in these days of the greenhouse effect we should support renewable energy, But that still does not stop the shock of seeing the destruction of one of Corsica's valleys. It is a depressing sight. Hopefully as the years go by landscaping will improve the view.

UPPER TRAVO	
From	Chisa
To	D645 Road Bridge
Grade	6-7
Length	7 km

The normal start point for this section is the bridge one mile below Chisa. This is private land, so be careful, but the owner seems to have become used to canoeists launching at this point.

The river above this point is apparently canoeable, and was used for filming the "Family Mad" videos. (We became aware of the film crew's presence when the cameraman zoomed past our camper-van, desperately trying to control his skateboard, which was being powered by a 10cc model aircraft engine. A real case of boys with their toys).

There are no convenient gauges to give river levels for the Travo, but an indication of the difficulties of the river can soon be obtained as the river drops immediately into a series of boulder falls running at grade 5-6 if the water level is good. The river is mostly at this grade for the first half of the river.

After about 2 kilometres the river bends sharp right and the famous waterfalls appear. The first two drops are in fact some of the easiest falls in the valley. They are best shot by aiming for where the water over the lip is the shallowest possible, thus aiming to land in the less powerful parts of the stopper. Take the first on the right, and the second on the left. The third (and lowest) fall is more tricky, but fairly easily blasted straight down the right hand side see Photo).

After the grandeur of the falls the river does not let up, but continues with 3-4 kilometres of unrelenting grade 6-7 water. The one fall to watch (see picture below) is about one kilometre below the triple drop. The river drops steeply both sides of two boulders jamming the gorge (which is about 6 metres wide here). More boulders in the bottom pool give a real risk of pinning. This fall has caused about 10 deaths over the years. Portage on the left, seal launching from a platform about fifteen feet above the bottom end of the exit pool. This platform has a useful groove to guide your descent.

Travo - Pinning Fall



The river eases off only when the road comes into sight on the right, giving a grade 4 wind down for the last kilometre. Exit at the bridge, where wild camping is available and pleasant.

LOWER TRAVO	
From	D 645 Road Bridge
To	Travo Bridge
Grade	3-4
Length	7 km

The Travo from the D645 road bridge down to the coast is a pleasant grade 4 with the odd good quality fall. A very pleasant trip, and quite scenic considering it's proximity to the coastal civilisation. Get out at the bridge close to the obvious roundabout, rather than half a mile downstream at the coast road.

UPPER FIUM ORBO

From	Cavo
To	Top of Defile des Strette
Grade	5-6
Length	5 km

The highest access approach for the Fium Orbo follows a small dirt track signed to Cavo from near Chisoni. As the road peters out in a small clearing past the hamlet, park up and follow one of the many paths down to the river.

It starts as a pleasant grade 5 best at a level between 150 and 180 on the Defile des Strette gauge. A footbridge (visible from the A69) marks the only dodgy bit, a double drop totalling about 8 metres into a large cauldron. The first drop is normally portaged, but the second drop (called the Rocket) is especially photogenic. This second drop can be best protected by placing a man on the boulder in the centre of the cauldron, attached to a line held by a second man on the cauldron's edge.

The river leaving the cauldron drops sharply and contains a nasty sump, so take out on river left from the cauldron, and portage. There is a strenuous carry for about 300 metres, until a steep path can be found leading down again to the river. From this point the river begins to ease up, running at mostly grade 3-4 until the gauge at the top of the Gorge du Strette marks the end of the section.

DEFILE DES STRETTE	
From	Top of Defile des Strette
To	Sampolo Road Bridge
Grade	5
Length	4 km

The next section of river is enjoyable and challenging, falling through a steep short narrow gorge with vertical sides in places. Some falls are tricky and very demanding, but many others are great fun, with many well defined fast chutes and breakouts set into acres of waterworn limestone. The river can be scouted throughout it's length from the road. This is strongly recommended as it is often impossible to clamber along the steep gorge sides to recce once on the river.

Anything between 140 centimetres and 200 centimetres would be a good level, although the higher water levels might cause the odd portage. Grade 5, possibly 6 in high water.

The gorge becomes steeper and nastier in the 400 metres above the Sampolo bridge. Recce carefully here and pick the exit point as appropriate, probably well above the bridge. Below the bridge the Inzecca Gorge is off the scale of even my revised grading system.

Note that other parts of the Fium Orbo may well now be paddleable, depending on the progress with the hydro electric scheme. Many parts of the river used to give superb canoeing in years gone by, and may be worth another look now

even if not described here. As the river descends in the valley it was mostly grade 4 to 5 although some sections are harder. Once below St Antoine the mountains are left behind and the river becomes grade 2, with the difficulties coming from overhanging trees, especially if the river is high and flowing fast.

TARAVO AND RIZZANESE

The Taravo and Rizzanese flow out of the lower granite ridges to the south east of Corsica. Consequently the effect of snowmelt is lessened (if not entirely absent) and the rivers will depend mainly on rainfall to determine the levels.

When deciding on a canoeing programme the two rivers are best thought about as one unit because of their geographical proximity. In that way good paddling can easily be found in the area whatever the water level. Low water will bring the Rizzanese and upper Taravo into play, whilst high levels will cause you to move further down the Taravo, or enjoy the scenic but easy waters of the lower Rizzanese.

UPPER TARAVO	
From	Palneca
To	D757 Road Bridge
Grade	3 then 5 (if final section portaged)
Length	13 km

The Taravo is much longer than the Rizzanese. It starts as a small mountain stream at the Col de Verde, less than a kilometre from the start of the Fium Orbo.

The highest practical start point is at the village of Palneca. The river is initially quite small, needing a reasonable amount of water in the valley to make it canoeable. The first obstacle to cross is the town dump, which impinges onto the river. Although the dump is soon passed it's effect can sadly be seen for the entire length of the river. Plastic bags, car tyres and bottles are trapped in the undergrowth on the bank for miles downstream.

The river soon grows in size as streams join from both sides. Initially it runs at grade 3-4 with the occasional flatter bit, but beware of fallen trees. It will have become a good grade 5 as it flows past the village of Ciammanace, and continue at that grade until shortly above the bridge at the D757 north east of Olivese.

The short gorge section above this bridge is tricky, much harder than the rest of the river. It is best to inspect on foot before getting on the river. Often the whole of this short section from near the level gauge down to the bridge is portaged.

A level gauge is situated upstream of the D575 bridge, on the right bank, about two minutes walk up the gorge. A water level of 130-160 centimetres would be ideal for the entire length of river down to the D26 bridge. It could be run about 20 centimetres higher or lower, but that would be hard work.



MIDDLE TARAVO (1)	
From	D 757 Road Bridge
To	D 26 Road Bridge
Grade	3-5
Length	8 km

Below the D757 bridge the river begins to ease off, with fairly long continuous stretches of grade 3 to 4 water enlivened by the occasional more tricky fall. In particular the final two kilometres are continuous 4 to 5. The river remains fairly wide and open, so inspections and portages are easy, making the Taravo a good river for a warm up before committing yourself to the harder gorges of the high mountain rivers.

MIDDLE TARAVO (2)	
From	D 26 Road Bridge
To	Punta de Calzola
Grade	3-4 (5)
Length	18 km

A second level gauge is situated by an old Genoese bridge about one kilometre's walk downstream of the N196. This gives a good indication for paddling anything below the D757. At a level of 100 centimetres the river is just paddleable, with 160 being an optimum level for a good fast bouncy run and 190 being very hard work.

By now the river is much less steep, and appreciably higher volume. In parts it has a character much more like an Alpine river than a typical Corsican stream. It runs in a thick wooded valley, and the pleasure is derived from the speed and power of the water, rather than the typical drops and falls of the higher mountain rivers further north.

The hardest bit of this section is a stretch either side of the bridge on the N196. This is an easy grade 5 at optimum level, grade 4 when low. The remainder is grade 3-4 and well worth a paddle, especially if the river is high. Access/egress is possible at any of the bridges.

LOWER TARAVO	
From	Punta de Calzola
To	The Sea
Grade	3 (300 metres) then 2
Length	9 km

Once below the Punta de Calzola the difficulties are almost over. A few more rapids close to the bridge run at about grade 3, then the river eases off to give about 9 kilometres of grade 2 down to the sea. Egress can be obtained at the D157 road bridge, or on the beach itself.

UPPER RIZZANESE	
From	Zoza
To	Footpath near N94
Grade	5 (6)
Length	7 km

A justly famous (or infamous) classic, known throughout the canoeing world for the 10 metre waterfall in the gorge section. Less well known is that the gorge also contains other falls of 6, 4 and 3 metres, and 4-5 kilometres of good grade 5 paddling. Not to be missed.

The standard start point for the Rizzanese is the bridge on the D120 near Zoza. A gauge here should ideally read between 60 and 90 centimetres. Alternatively the 1 kilometre section above the bridge can be paddled at grade 5 if a warm up is required. Start by a right hand bend just below a not very obvious grade 6 fall.

Below the bridge the river opens out, and becomes more pleasant and scenic. The river runs initially at grade 4, soon increasing to grade 5. There are probable portages at two 6 metre drops about one kilometre apart. In both case the river has cut back into the rock to produce very enclosed drop pools with big tow backs.

A wide sloping 6 metre ledge marks the start of the real fun. 100 metres below this is a 2-3 metre drop, and it is best to recce this and the succeeding 10 metre drop at the same time. A path on the left bank leads to a place where it is possible to scramble down to a water level platform near the exit of the big drop pool. This platform and beach is good for photographs and portages, although a bit distant from the fall for throw bag support

Shoot the 2 metre fall on the right at speed. The stopper is powerful. The route over the lip of the 10 metre fall is normally over the shallow patch on the extreme right, close to the rock wall. The aim is to avoid the bottom stopper, and a suspected rock to the left in the plunge pool. The drop pool is exited by a further 2 metre drop, normally taken on the extreme left.

Below this the river begins to ease off, but there are still two falls to note. Firstly a simple looking 2 metre drop which washes onto a deeply undercut rock below and to the right. Secondly a 6 metre drop into a very boily pool which is very reluctant to give up swimmers. In the last three years it has released one dead body and one swimmer alive but unconcious. There is a sloping chicken chute to the right which is much more fun and less nerve wracking.

MIDDLE RIZZANESE	
From	Footpath near N 194
To	D 69 Road Bridge
Grade	3
Length	8km

It is possible to get to the road from near the 6 metre drop, point by carrying up a footpath on the right bank to the N194. But it is often best to paddle the 8km

of grade 3 river to the bridge on the D69 below Arbellara. This provides a much less strenuous carry and a shorter drive. This stretch of river is especially pleasant, and is worth paddling in it's own right if the rigours of the upper Rizzanese are not wanted. Simple rapids and a few broken weirs enliven a pleasant run through a scenic wooded valley. There is a campsite close to the exit bridge.

LOWER RIZZANESE	
From	D 69 Road Bridge
To	The Sea
Grade	2
Length	14 km

On the East coast of Corsica, many of the grade 2 touring rivers run through flat sedimentary landscapes, and are not especially attractive when compared to the scenery of the mountainous areas further upstream.. On the West coast however, the lower stretches of most of the rivers are much more attractive, although these easier stretches are often quite short.

The Rizzanese does provide one of the longer and more attractive of the grade 2 stretches on the island. A total length of 14 kilometres of river can be paddled, starting at the D69 road bridge. If a longer journey is wanted then a continuation round the coast into Propriano harbour is easily planned. For some reason completing a river trip at it's meeting with the sea always adds an indelible sense of satisfaction to the day.

GRAVONA AND PRUNELLI

Close to Ajaccio, the Gravona is a good river for warm up/work up on first arrival. A gradual transition from grade 2 to grade 5 with no nasty surprises. A gauge at the bridge on the D1 gives an indication of level. 55 centimetres is a good medium level, but it could be paddled at least 30 centimetres higher or lower.

The Prunelli is similarly a good warm up river, although a grade or two harder, and with one or two bigger falls in the lower section.

UPPER GRAVONA	
From	Ucciani Bridge
To	Canale
Grade	2-3 then 4-5 (6)
Length	17 km

The normal access is Ucciani bridge on the N193, or from a minor road bridge about 1 kilometre above this point alongside a small cafe.

Initially running as a small reasonably shallow grade 2-3, the river slowly steepens and increases in difficulty. The main challenge early on is from strainers and trees but this gives good practice for much Corsican paddling. By

a campsite close to Tavaco the river has become 4-5, although giving few falls that cannot be attempted on sight.

The crux of the river is the stretch close to the D229 road bridge, and this should be reced beforehand. After a series of steepish falls, one nasty S bend is marked by a stream joining from the left immediately above it. This is often portaged on the left bank. One other fall 200 metres below the bridge is also reasonably turbulent but canoeable. After another 500 metres a 6 metre weir can be shot over a small depression in the lip 5 metres from the right bank. This whole section is about grade 5, but would vary quite a lot with the water level.

After the weir the river eases down to grade 4. The exit point near Canale at the D1 road bridge gives an interesting choice of routes. The right bank gives a climb graded at about V Dif. The left bank is technically easier but much less pleasant, being an easy scramble up the Canale rubbish dump. Not an easy choice to make.

LOWER GRAVONA	
From	Canale
To	N 196 Road Bridge
Grade	2
Length	9 km

On the day after my ascent of the Canale tip (not being a climber) I was informed that the section downstream to the N 196 brige is pleasant, although reasonably flat, and gives a much more civilised exit. It may be worth considering, especially in high water. I have not paddled it myself, so I can give no further information apart the facts given here, told to me a friendly French paddler in a bar.

UPPER PRUNELLI	
From	Occana Hydro Electric Station
To	D 103 Road Bridge
Grade	3-4 (6)
Length	4 km

In three years of Corsican paddling I can only think of one trip when I finished the day in a foul mood. The trip on the upper Prunelli started well, but soon degenerated due to the overgrown nature of the river. We were able to cut our way through some thickets, but this stopped when the saw blade snapped. It's a bad river that causes Fred Wondre to run out of gadgets.

Pushing our way through the undergrowth I was then caught by a branch and capsized into a thorn thicket. When I checked my equipment after sorting myself out I realized that I had left the car keys back at the start point near the farm, and I would have to walk back to get them. The final indignity, and the most frightening part of my time in Corsica that year, was edging gently through the farmyard, past eight yelping guard dogs, trying to work out how long the dog's chains were, and were they longer than the distance between my

legs and their teeth.

It is only now, looking back after a few years, that I can bring myself to say that the Prunelli is quite a pleasant river, although nothing exceptional, as long as the right start point is chosen.

Access is possible from the hydro-scheme close to Occana. Take the road down to the dam, then turn right down a farm track 50 yards above the dam gates. The river is initially steep, shallow, narrow and infested with overhanging branches. One grade 5 and one grade 6 fall are both also tree festooned. Thankfully a disused railway track on the right bank gives good portages.

LOWER PRUNELLI	
From	D 103 Road Bridge
To	D 203 Road Bridge
Grade	3-4 (6)
Length	6 km

After the D103 bridge close to Eccica (possibly a better start point) the river is mostly grade 3, with the occasional good grade 4 stretch to awaken interest. One pleasant gorge is enlivened by the addition of dumped cars providing interesting breakouts padded by tyres. The only difficulties are a 6 metre fall half way down, and the falls for 300 metres above the exit point. The two final drops have rocks in the middle of both, but both can be shot on the right. Exit at the bridge under the D203.

LIAMONE RIVER FAMILY

Each Corsican river and valley has a different character and image in my mind. Some rivers are defined by the scenery, such as the upper Golo and Calasima. Others by the exceptional quality of the canoeing. The Travo is a good example here. To me the Liamone valley is memorable through it's interplay of history and geography.

For centuries invading armies and administators would come and go on the coast and on the flatter lands to the east; collecting taxes, trading, and importing new customs. For most of them it simply was not worth bothering with the high Liamone valley. Agriculturally destitute, away from the trade routes, and ruled from Vico by a powerful feudal lord who liked his independance, the massive valley of the Liamone remains undeveloped, underpopulated and hauntingly impressive.

Water Levels

The biggest river in the high Liamone valley is in fact the Fiume Grosso, and strictly speaking the whole valley should bear that name. This river joins the Liamone shortly above the D23 bridge close to Vico. River levels in the valley are dependant on both snowmelt and rain. They can be checked at two positions. A gauge at the Punta de Truggia gives the most accurate indication. Alternatively the water level at the D23 can be checked by looking for the depth of water flowing over a wide flat boulder about 70 metres above the bridge, at the end of a small rapid, just to the river left of centre.

UPPER FIUME GROSSO	
From	Guagno
To	Bains de Guagno
Grade	3
Length	5 km

The high Fiume Grosso above Bains de Guagno is a straight forward grade 3-4. Access to the water can be tricky, being a case of searching out a suitable footpath leading down to the river. Once on the water the difficulties are over, with simple rapids and drops leading pleasantly down to the exit bridge.

FIUME GROSSO / UPPER LIAMONE	
From	Bains de Guagno
To	Pont de Belfiore
Grade	7
Length	8 km

Below Bains de Guagno the fun starts. I have not paddled this section, but I vividly remember seeing three members of the 1990 BCU rally sat in a Vico cafe, staring into space, totally wasted, after a day on the Fiume Grosso with a lot of water in it.

Phil Blain paddled it the following week, most of it solo after his colleague lost his boat - another casualty of high water levels. When I discussed the trip with Phil five weeks later I could still feel the adrenalin surging at me down the 'phone lines. This is Phil's description.

"If the truth be known this is another Corsican classic depending on your taste. Lacking any one memorable stretch or the grandeur that the other rivers seem noted for, it's continuity of grade and difficulty should put it high on the list of those seeking true adventure. A good level is when the slab above the bridge at Vico is only just awash, stoppers and backtows being more manageable. we paddled with 5 to 10 centimetres flowing over it when it was a difficult but excellent trip.

For most of it's length the river follows a deep gorge, but the difficulties are obvious and can be scouted. Allow 6-7 hours for a first attempt at this section. The river starts pleasantly, and gives ample time for a warm up till it drops into a small gorge littered with boulders and a right angled turn. The route is all too obvious. For the faint of heart the portage goes high on the right bank. The difficulties then become very continuous and consistent, rather than excessive. The Liamone creeps in almost unnoticed, swelling the river.

At one point it runs through a steep sided gorge, the entry rapid proves quite difficult. The river resumes it's wild rush through a boulder strewn bed before the last problem, a steep right angled bend. The river, wide at this point, proves difficult to portage. It is possible to portage on the right over large

boulders. The river, having given up it's secrets, relents and rapids become more spaced. The bridge at Vico will be met with relief or jubilation. Whichever it is you will have completed one of the finest trips Corsica can offer.

MIDDLE LIAMONE	
From	Pont de Belfiore (Vico)
To	Pont de Truggia
Grade	4-5 (6), Continuous 5-6 (7) in high water
Length	9 km

The most popular section of the Liamone runs from Vico to the Punta de Truggia. This section can be run at 30-70 centimetres/rock shallowly washing over (see [advice on water levels](#) in introduction above)

The river starts with wide fairly shallow falls in quite a wide gorge. If the water is low these will be no more than grade 3-4, but high water will transform them into good surging and flowing falls approaching grade 5. The river slowly steepens and closes in to become more difficult and powerful. In higher water inspections will become fairly frequent and portages around the more vigorous of the falls not unusual. There is only one steep drop in the first half of the river. A sloping double step falls about five metres, easily shot down the left side.

A sloping 2 metre weir-like drop into an enclosed plunge pool marks the start of the hard work. About 200 metres below this fall is the start of the short Liamone gorge. Exit on the right to inspect. The entry fall into the gorge is normally considered unrunnable. Almost the whole of the rest of the gorge is often portaged, although all but the first fall can be shot, seal launching into the gorge from the chosen point along it's side after careful inspection.

The strongest argument to run the gorge is that the portage is fairly arduous. Follow the track on the right bank, leading up the slope to parallel the gorge about 50 metres above the water level. Crossing a small ridge after a few hundred metres will require an awkward jump. The track will then start to slowly descend, and after another hundred or so metres look down to the river, and you should see a large rock platform situated about 5 metres above the water. Your task now is to lower your canoes and paddlers onto the platform, then seal launch into the water. It is in fact a lot easier than it looks. You will be seal launching into a grade 3 rapid at the tail of the gorge, so check your gear carefully before leaping into space. This is not the place to follow Greenslime's example and have your deck pop off as you land in the rapid.

Once round the corner the gorge peters out. The river from here down slowly eases off into a grade 3-4 approach to Punta de Truggia, which only about 2 kilometres away. Egress is possible at the bridge, but is less strenuous if you paddle down about 100 metres to get out by a small rock stump on the right bank. A path follows a winding but much flatter course up to the road.

From here the Liamone continues down to the sea at grade 2.

UPPER CRUZZINE	
From	Frassetto

To	East of Lopigno
Grade	3-4
Length	13 km

Above the boundary the river runs mainly at grade 3, with the occasional harder stretch. A level of at least 50 centimetres at Punta de Truggia is really needed to make this worth while. Another 30 centimetres would dramatically improve matters. The highest canoeable point depends on the water level, and will have to be determined on the day by inspection, but it has been paddled from as high as Frassetto.

LOWER CRUZZINI	
From	East of Lopigna
To	Pont de Truggia
Grade	4-5
Length	7 km

The boundary between the easy and more difficult stretches of the Cruzzini comes where the road stops running close to the river. There is a convenient spot here for camping, frequently used by canoeists.

Once on the water the river slowly increases in difficulty to become a good grade 4-5, with portages unlikely. Any water level above 40 centimetres would be runnable, although a bit more water would vastly increase the pleasure.

The Cruzzini in this section is fairly user friendly, making it a good option for a warm up, or an alternative if the Liamone is washed out. Short simple rapids, easy to inspect, and not too many hard decisions to make. Nevertheless the river offers some interesting boat control challenges, mainly due to the tight nature of the rapids.

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