

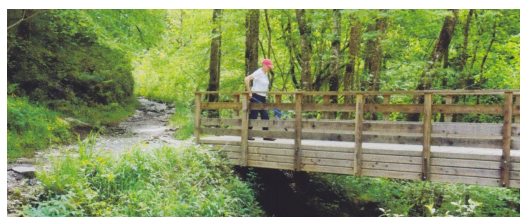
Pyrenean Valleys

The fast way to travel from Western France to Northern Spain is via the (Atlantic) coastal motorway. The next major crossing of the Pyrennees, 100 miles to the south-east, is the 5-mile long Somport Tunnel, opened in 2003. In between there is a succession of minor passes. Most are closed in winter, but all are pleasant routes in summer if speed is no object. And the entire region is an attractive destination in itself – far more so (to us) than the congested Biarritz area. The following will give a flavour.

This is the road down from the Porte de Larrau. We remember once driving from Spain in brilliant sunshine, reaching the top – to be confronted by near-zero visibility

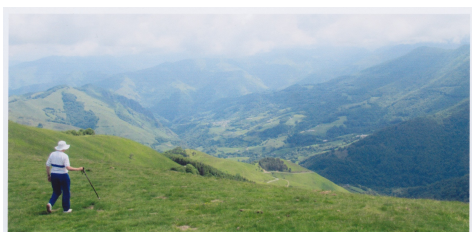


for the drive on to Larrau and its logis.



Larrau itself is at a crossroads. A succession of linked minor roads

runs along the line of the Pyrenees. East of Larrau this leads to the Defile de Holzarte, Gorges of Kakuerta, and isolated Ste Engrace. West of Larrau is the Iraty Plateau.



From there one can

continue directly to St Jean Pied de Port, or explore a network of minor lanes around Esterencuby. One lane leads to the remote logis “Sources de la Nive”, which is actually very close to the border.

St Jean de Pied de Port is a bustling town, the pausing point for pilgrims taking the traditional route to Roncevalles in Spain and then onward towards Santiago de Compostela. Another way into Spain is via St Etienne de Baigorri, where one can either go directly over the Col de Ispéguy, or drive via the Aldudes. Part of the Aldudes is the ‘Pays Quint’, which has a strange status.



That area is part of Spain but is administered by France. The inhabitants are French Citizens by default but have the right to dual citizenship. Moreover, France pays rent to Spain for the use of pastures in this area.



After entering Spain itself one can continue far on traffic-free roads into northern Spain.

