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### THE BASQUE PYRENEES FREEDOM TRAILS' ASSOCIATION (BPFTA)

Registered with the Basque Government as a Cultural Association, N°: AS/G/19762/2016

President: Joe Linehan

Secretary: John Morgan

Treasurer: Felipe Etxeberria Agirretxe

#### Cross-Pyrenean WW2 historical memory trail, Sara to Oiartzun, 8 & 9 June 2024

Maria Josefa Sansberro (*Maddi*) from Oiartzun, between the peninsular Basque city of San Sebastián and the frontier with France, ran a small hotel at the Col de Saint-Ignace, between the villages of Sara and Azkaine in the French Basque Country. Since it opened in 1924 as a tourist attraction, a rack-and-pinion train has been winding its way up from San Ignace to the frontier at Larrun summit (990m).

During WWII German forces of occupation were billeted in *Maddi's* hotel, a fact that did not deter her from continuing her cross-border smuggling activities, including guiding Allied evaders/escapers and Jewish people, amongst others, as well as hiding and conveying secret documents, across the Basque Pyrenees, and in collaboration with the French Resistance.

She did all this right under the noses of the enemy, the fugitives overnighing at her hotel, *Maddi* guiding the escapers up to and across the frontier, leaving Sara at about 19.00 and arriving down in Oiartzun at about 07.00 the next morning.

She was arrested in 1944 and sent to die in the Nazi concentration camp of Sachsenhausen.

#### Our Aims

The **Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails' Association (BPFTA)** is a voluntary organisation based in the Basque Country, with an international membership and registered with the Basque Government and Hernani Town Council as a cultural non-for-profit charity. It is dedicated to the recovery of the historic memory of the WW2 Escape Lines across the Pyrenees frontier, and which helped many in their bid for freedom from Nazi-occupied Europe during that conflict. These commemorative events are aimed at paying tribute to all those involved in all the escape lines.

During WW2, clandestine smugglers' paths across the Pyrenees were a major link in the escape lines' networks. Agents of Allied governments, young French citizens escaping obligatory military service, Jewish families and Allied personnel, amongst others, escaped from Nazi-occupied Europe across the Pyrenees to the Iberian Peninsula. There were various safe-houses on either side of the border and the mountain guides were local people. Those dark times were full of heroes, many of whom remain anonymous - the Basque guides such as *Maddi*, those responsible

for logistics and those multifaceted citizens – mostly women – who acted as couriers and safe-house keepers and were responsible for communications, accommodation and the provision of food, clothing and, if needed, medical attention for the fugitives.

It is important that all those involved on both sides of the frontier are forever remembered for their brave and selfless actions during WW2, knowing that, if caught, they would be tortured, sent to die in concentration camps and/or executed. Many were.

Thus, the aims of BPFTA are to disseminate knowledge of these WWII escape lines over the Pyrenees, through commemorative walks across the frontier and by passing on the history of these clandestine fugitive routes to second and third level education students - their historic heritage.

### **Recommended reading for the BPFTA June 2024 event:**

*Maddi y las fronteras* by Edurne Portela; ISBN: 10: 8419392235 ISBN 13: 9788419392237 (in Spanish), [Galaxia Gutenberg, S.L.](#), a fictionalised story of *Maddi's* feats.

Thus, on the 8th and the 9th of June, 2024, the Basque Pyrenees Freedom Trails' Association will lead a cross-Pyrenean mountain hike to commemorate *Maddi's* work specifically and, generally, to pay tribute to all operatives, fugitives and helpers in all escape networks.

### **Programme synopsis 7 - 9 June, 2024**

International participants arrive at their hotels in Donostia-San Sebastián not later than Friday 7 June. Less than 10 minutes' walk from the famous Concha beach, a double room at the 4-star hotel NH Arantzazu costs 437,61 euros for the 2 nights with buffet breakfast and single occupancy is 397,61 euros for the 2 nights with buffet breakfast. Reserve at [nhcollectionaran@nh-hotels.com](mailto:nhcollectionaran@nh-hotels.com) or call (34) 43 219 695. Mr. Javier Fernandez is the booking manager.

5-minutes' walk away is the 3-star Olarain hotel: double room 288,20€ for the 2 nights with buffet breakfast; single occupancy 207,10 euros for the 2 nights with buffet breakfast. Reserve by calling (34) 43 00 33 00 or email [javiermarin@olarain.com](mailto:javiermarin@olarain.com) Mr. Javier Marin is the booking manager.

When booking, please quote "Pirineo Vasco" or Basque Pyrenees, under which name a group booking has been made.

After a brief meeting at about 18.30 on Friday at the NH Arantzazu hotel, we will be taken to nearby Hernani for a tribute at the monument to the Basque WW2 mountain guides there.

BPFTA guides will take us on this 2-day weekend historical memory trail. On the Saturday from Sara in the French Basque Country 5km hike up to the border to the Larrun summit (950m) and then 7km down to Bera in Navarre, where there will be a tribute with local people, descendants of those involved in escape lines and the town Mayor. The Sunday trek will take us along a *Cométe* escape line route from Endarlatsa (near the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> day walk), up to Erlaitz/Elurzulo at 540m and then down to Sarobe farm safe house and Oiartzun (14km) to the final tribute. We will thus emulate the cross-frontier escape lines of 80 years ago.

Over the three days, places of historical interest will be pointed out. When hiking, only a small day pack is needed, with water and light rainproof clothing and, on the Saturday, a packed lunch as well. Other belongings can be left at our hotels in Donostia-San Sebastián, on the BPFTA coach or in the support vehicle. Boots will be required and walking sticks or poles can be borrowed *in situ*.

The nearest airports are Donostia-San Sebastián, Biarritz and Bilbao; all three Basque cities are well-connected by bus to our base in Donostia-San Sebastián city.

## **Friday 7 June, ARRIVAL OF INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPANTS**

After a brief meeting to get to know each other at about 18.30 on Friday at the NH Aranzazu hotel, we will be taken to nearby Hernani for a tribute at the monument to the Basque WW2 mountain guides there – to them and all others involved in the escape routes and who risked or lost their lives to ensure the freedom of those fleeing Nazism, and also to the fugitives themselves. Local people and descendants of those involved in escape lines will attend and the local authorities have been invited. After the group will be taken back to their hotels in DSS. Free evening. A must is a stroll along the Kontxa beach promenade to the west in the direction of the tennis club (cafeteria/bar open to the public) and the famous wind/rocks seascape sculpture by Txillida; and east to the city's Old Town for its famed gastronomic *pintxos*. For further recommendations about excursions, visits or walks in the city, ask Cristina, Sinéad or *Peru*.

## **Saturday 8 June, 08.10 – THE FIRST DAY TRAIL**

After an early breakfast (from 07.15 in Arantzazu; 07.30 in Olarain) and each walker in rainproof hiking attire and with water, some food for elevenses and a packed lunch, the BPFTA coach will depart from our hotels (at 08.10 from Arantzazu; 08.15 Olarain) to drive us across the border to the village of Sara to pay tribute at the monument there to Maria Josefa Sansberro, and to which the local authorities have been invited. The coach will then take our group the short distance to the nearby walk start point just outside the village in order to start the ascent, at about 10.15, to the frontier at Larrun where elevenses will be had at about 12.30. This is a 5km trail involving 2 hours walking + 30 minutes for rests.

After a rest at the top (there are two cafeterias) we will walk 2 hours down the 7 km to Bera where a tribute will take place, attended by the mayor and descendants of those involved in escape lines and local people. Extra water will be available from the support vehicle at access points along the way. We will eat our packed lunch in Bera after which our coach will return us to our hotels. Free evening.

A BPFTA support vehicle with extra water and first aid will shadow us in as much as road access will allow.

## **Sunday 9 June 08:10 – THE SECOND DAY TRAIL**

After breakfast in our hotel (from 07.15 in Arantzazu; 07.30 in Olarain), and each walker in rainproof hiking attire and with water and some food for elevenses, the BPFTA coach will leave at 08.10 from Arantzazu and 08.15 from Olarain for the 2<sup>nd</sup> day Trail start point at Endarlatsa (near the end-point of the 1<sup>st</sup>-day Trail). Beforehand, a tribute will be held in Irun, attended by the local authority, descendants of those involved in escape lines and local people. We begin our 5km ascent to Erlaitz/Ezurzulo (540m) at about 10.00; a 2-hour walk and where 'elevenses' can be taken. Then a leisurely 7km walk (2 hours with rests) down to Sarobe farm which was a safe house during WWII, and down to the town of Oiartzun where there will be a tribute at the birthplace of *Maddi* and to which the local authorities have been invited.

A BPFTA support vehicle with extra water and first aid will shadow us along the way, as much as road access will permit.

The BPFTA coach will take us to a restaurant lunch in Oiartzun after which we will be taken to our hotels in Donostia-San Sebastián at about 18.00. Free evening.

## **Registration**

Each participant must have their own personal accident/medical insurance cover. Registration is **90€** (see separate registration form). Please fill it in and remit to BPFTA.

Since 2015 BPFTA has been commemorating ALL the World War 2 Escape Lines which operated across the Pyrenees in the Basque country, and including those operating further along the chain (in Aragon and Catalonia). We continue to co-operate with other Historical Memory groups involved in WW2 Escape Line networks, along the Pyrenees and beyond.