

*The Artists Journey*

Roncesvalles to Viskarret

21,014 Steps, 9 Miles

April 3

As I lay in bed, I thought about the hilarious scene surrounding me—people walking around in their underwear, scratching their butts. And I am not sure who to blame for the symphony of snores, but I think that is international. We set out from Roncesvalles on tired legs but have no blisters yet. The gravel trails through the woods were gradual. We wound past dairy barns with new calves on unstable legs, then came upon a field full of small, stout, frisky horses, and stood watching them play. They looked positively prehistoric. They seemed to be a cross between a draft horse and a pony. Ponies on steroids! Yak ponies! What could they be? Many of them came to the fence, stretching their necks toward us in search of treats and pets. A large male butted in and tried to steal all the attention. Not to be intimidated, one of the smaller ones began biting his tail and pulling chunks out of it. They appeared to be smiling, adding to their unusual looks. Most were dark bay brown with black manes, tails, and stockings. Others were a rusty tan color with blond manes and tails. They had shaggy coats and short, thick, sturdy bodies. Their manes were so full that they covered half of their faces, giving them a mischievous, playful look. They resembled the horses featured in the cave paintings of this region. I believe they were Pottoks, or the native wild horses, believed to have been descendants of the Magdalenian horses of 14,000 to 7,000 BC. These horses have been an integral part of Basque life for centuries. Most are domesticated now, but until fairly recent times, some still ran wild in the mountains.



Basque horses of the Pyrenees Mountains