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Swiss-German mountain guide Tim Marklowski has achieved the first-ever linkup of the GR20 trek in Corsica and the Selvaggio Blu trek in Sardinia, after combining hiking, cycling, and swimming in a grueling 'by fair means' triathlon via what he has described as the 'perfect connection.'



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Tim Marklowski: GR20 in Corsica & Selvaggio Blu in Sardinia by fair means Tim Marklowski

The GR20 in Corsica and the Selvaggio Blu in Sardinia are considered among the most difficult treks in Europe. Now, Bernese mountain guide Tim Marklowski has linked them together for the first time in a grueling "by fair means" triathlon.

Starting from the northern tip of Corsica, Marklowski cycled to the GR20's starting point at Calenzana. In 5 days, instead of the usual 15, he covered approximately 180 km with

13,000 meters of elevation gain over technically demanding terrain all the way to Conca. From there, he continued on his bike to Bonifacio on the southern tip of the Mediterranean island

After four days of anxiously waiting for the right conditions, Marklowski swam across the Strait of Bonifacio to Santa Teresa in Sardinia: 13 km in open water, in just 4 hours and 3 minutes. He then continued his journey by bike, cycling down to Baunei and Pedra Longa. This is the starting point of the famous "Selvaggio Blu", the famous trek that winds along Sardinia's wild east coast and involves numerous climbing passages and abseils. Parties usually require around 5 days to complete the trek, but after just 2 days Marklowski reached the end at Cala Sisine, where his bike was waiting for him once again.

In another day, and after 230 km on his saddle, he reached the southernmost beach in Sardinia, Su Giudeu. The feat – 900 km total, 25,000 meters of elevation gain after 12 days in motion – is quite extraordinary, and Marklowski provided planetmountain with some more information.

Tim, how did you get the idea of linking the GR20 and the Selvaggio Blu in a single journey?

I've always been drawn to beautiful and logical projects. Looking at the maps, what really struck me was the aesthetics of this project, which I like to call the "connexion perfetta", the perfect connection. What a coincidence that the two hardest treks in Europe are on two islands so close that you can swim from one to the other? I just had to go and see for myself what it was all about.

What was the best part?

It's hard for me to decide what the best part was. The water was incredibly blue and clear. Furthermore, the Selvaggio Blu is a real gem, with few people and almost no markings (no paint markers, only the occasional cairn). On the first day, navigation on the Selvaggio was tough and I was alone all day. Beautiful.

And the hardest part?

One of the toughest parts was in the last 10 km of the GR20; my left leg just gave out. I had never experienced anything like it before, I couldn't bend it anymore, there was a specific spot in the quadriceps that was just super painful. I really had to fight to get through that moment. Thankfully the following day on the bike went fairly well. During the swim, everything was fine until, in one section, the waves became very chaotic. I got seasick and had to vomit a couple of times. Fortunately, shortly after, the waves became more regular again and I managed to finish in a very good time for me, just over 4 hours.

Did you train specifically for this?

I worked a lot as a guide this season, and often had jobs where I met clients directly at the mountain huts. So, I was able to use the ascents and descents to the huts for training and to move fast. On my days off, I mainly swam in the pool in Bern, covering up to 10 km per session. The full swim training started about 9 months before the project.

Had you done any or all of the sections before?

To use a climbing term, no, everything was done "onsight"; I had never done any of the sections before.

How much gear did you carry with you and where did you sleep?

While I was on the bike, I bought the food I needed along the way. On the GR20, I slept in huts or campsites along the trek, while on the Selvaggio Blu I had to use support because there is no water along the route. So there, I received a delivery of food, tent, and water.

there is no water along the route. So there, I received a delivery of food, tent, and water, plus my rope, harness, and carabiners which I had sent in advance to the support team from Climbing Sardinia.

How self-sufficient were you?

For the most part, I moved self-sufficiently. On the fourth day of the GR20, I ran with two young French guys I befriended. After all, I'm not antisocial ;-). On the last day of the GR20, I started before them and was alone for, I'd say, 3/4 of the stage, then I met them again but had to let them pass after a while because my leg was slowing me down.

Essentially, however, I did everything solo, except the swim: I swam with a friend and we had a boat alongside us. Every 30 minutes they passed us drinks and prepared gels. We were forbidden from touching the boat, however, or getting out of the water. I swam with him hoping he'd look more appetizing to the sharks! Just kidding.



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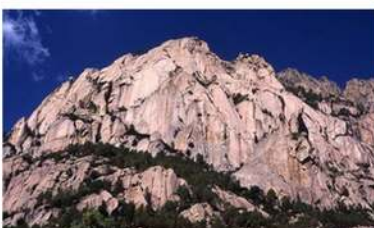
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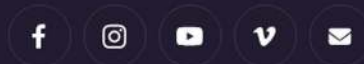
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