

Trails in Varese, Como and Pavia

Excursions in the Pre-Alps, Mesolcina and Apennine





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and mountain refuges
and start exploring
the Lombardy mountains*

Varese, Como and Pavia

breathing the soul
of the region

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Route planning and words: Lorenzo Naddei

Art Direction: Elena Marinoni

Layout and printing: La Cittadina, Gianico (BS)

Photos by: Riccardo Agnesani, Mino Bazzini, Andrea Dones, Andrea Ferrando, Cai Luino, Matteo Manente, Lisa Mathiasen, Antonella Milone, Barbara Monti, Sergio Poli

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Trails in Varese, Como and Pavia

Dedicated to trails and mountain refuges in the areas around Como, Varese and Pavia, this publication completes the series of monographs about hiking edited by the Lombardy Regional Authorities. As well as fairly famous, popular zones, it also describes some that are decidedly less well-known that however offer a wealth of unexpected little “treasures” of history and nature, proof that all the mountains in our region are home to a surprising heritage. These few pages give some idea of the extent and huge variety of environments and scenery in these mountain chains, each one so different from the next, but all sharing infinite interesting aspects and extraordinary views that at times reach even to the sea. As always, we hope that this guide will provide a better idea of these places and a chance to appreciate them in the simplest and most natural way possible: walking.

Massimo Sertori

Lombardy Regional Councillor for Local Authorities,
Mountain Areas, Energy resources and Use of Water Resources

Varese, Como and Pavia

Breathing the soul of the region

Green and verdant, but also rocky and harsh yet always extraordinarily scenic. Thanks to their "strategic" position, the mountains in these three provinces, so different in terms of nature and landscape, share views that stretch to embrace much of the Alps and the plain and at times, as is the case for some of the peaks in the Pavia Apennines, reach right down to the sea.

The mountains in the province of **Varese** are part of the Lombardy Pre-Alps and the closest range to the plain is mainly made up of quite modest limestone mountains, between the western banks of Lake Maggiore and the western bank of Lake Lugano. Separated, almost split, by the troughs of Valcuvia and Valganna, these mountains, in the most part wooded but with numerous, tiny rocky corners, reach up to just over 1000 metres in altitude (Monte Nudo at 1235 m and Campo dei Fiori at 1227 m, are the two highest) and do not form a true chain. For high mountains you need to go north of Luino and the River Tresa, where two parallel slopes culminate in Monte Tamaro (1961 m) and Monte Gambarogno (1734 m). Both in Switzerland, they dominate green Val Veddasca. This zone is traditionally considered to be a part of the Pre-Alps, despite having a totally different appearance, with wider open environments, non-limestone



rock and slightly higher altitudes. The highest mountains in the Varese area are here, with the 1555 m of Monte Corbaro and nearby Paglione (just a metre lower), 1620 m of Monte Lema and 1630 m of Sasso della Gallina, above the Merigetto Alp, the "roof" of the entire province.

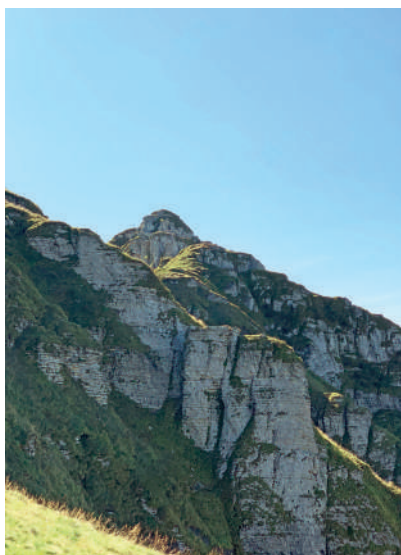
The province of **Como** has two different mountain chains, each with its own very distinct characteristics. In the southern belt are the Lombardy Pre-Alps, with more articulated mountain massifs and higher altitudes than those in the Varese area. This chain in turn has two sectors: to the south are mountains always characterised by calcareous rock, to which belong the mountains of the Triangolo Lariano, where Monte San Primo (1686 m) stands proud, those on the western shore of Lake Como, where the highest are Generoso (1701 m) , Monte Tremezzo (1700 m) and the odd pyramid shape of Sasso Gordona, and, finally, westwards, the mountains of Valsolda, on Ceresio, which ends with the peak of Fojoirina (1810 m) and the sharp rocky teeth of Torrione (1805 m). Just north of the plain that connects Menaggio to Porlezza and Lake Lugano, and similar to the situation in the Varese areas, the Pre-Alps change



appearance as, with the exception of isolated Monte Grona, the mountains give way to higher elevations featuring different shapes and geological aspects. These are the mountains of Val Cavargna and Valle Albano, which reach and often slightly exceed 2,000 m in altitude (at 2245 m, Pizzo di Gino is the highest) and are mainly rather gentle, grassy and inconspicuous. Passo San Jorio traditionally marks the end of the Pre-Alps and the start of the Mesolcina mountain chain, rich in wild rocky landscapes, with many valleys with an almost Alpine appearance. With a limited number of mountain refuges but plenty of bivouacs, these are fairly quiet mountains, their beauty enhanced by the presence of some lovely lakes. There are several of mountaineering interest that reach high altitudes, especially on the border with Switzerland and the province of Sondrio. The most representative peaks, all exceeding 2500 m, are Pizzo Ledù (2503 m), Pizzo Cavregasco (2535 m) and Monte Cardinello (2520 m), but around them are many others, often with elegant lines, coming in at between 2200 and 2400 m.



The **Pavia** area, south of the Po, is home to the only strip of Apennines in Lombardy. The gentle hills of the medium altitudes, dotted with villages and vineyards, gradually give way to the soft rolling landscape and green ridges of the region's highest mountains: Lesima (1724 m), Chiappo (1699 m, on the border with Piedmont and Emilia, and not far from Liguria), and then Cima Colletta (1493 m), Monte Bogleglio (1491 m) and famous Monte Penice (1460 m).



Behaviour in the mountains?

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

01



Respect nature and the mountain's inhabitants

Do not leave litter, do not approach animals and do not pick flowers. Respect those who live and work in the mountains, without damaging the meadows or disturbing the livestock.

02



Plan your excursion

Carefully study your route, other trails in the area, the location of shelters and support points and their opening times. Always have a "Plan B".

03



Take a hiking map with you

Even if you think you know the area of your route, it is always important to have a complete picture of the trails, which only a 1:25000 or 1:50000 scale paper map can offer. A map is also very useful for those who rely on apps, which, although increasingly more precise and easier to read, do not always give you a complete picture of the area you are in.

04



Set off early

There's a lot to see in the mountains: you must have time to walk and time to look around, enjoying your day without hurrying. Leaving early means you can take advantage of the light in all seasons and, especially in summer, avoid thunderstorms, which usually build up in the afternoon. In any case, always take a headlamp with you.

05



Check the weather forecast

Remember that in the mountains bad weather means less visibility, low temperatures, greater risk of slipping and the possibility of landslides. In winter, a hike over snowy terrain must be accompanied by careful consultation of the avalanche bulletin.

06



Let someone know where you are going

Always let someone know about your intended route, especially if you plan to hike alone.

07



Assess your physical fitness and preparation

Before setting off, choose a route suited to your ability. During the hike, do not hesitate to change plans or turn back, if the route proves too demanding for your physical fitness or technical preparation.

08



Footwear

Footwear is the basis for the success of any mountain activity: no excursion, not even the most trivial, can be undertaken without a pair of well-made, comfortable mountain shoes with a sole that guarantees grip on all types of terrain, such as Vibram. Choose a soft light shoe for low altitude outings, and a sturdier stiffer one for snow or high mountain excursions, where foot protection and grip play a fundamental role. Choose shoes that are waterproof, but also breathable: wet feet make blisters more likely.

09



Backpack, clothing, accessories

One-day hike or multi-stage route?

In the mountains, you should choose and pack your backpack based on your plans. 30- to 35-litre backpacks are ideal for day hikes, larger ones are suitable for carrying what you need for longer trips. When choosing your backpack, check the shoulder straps: they will help you to balance the weight better.

When choosing clothing, follow the rule of layers: thinner or thicker and one on top of another, to put on or take off depending on the temperature.

Your backpack should always contain gloves, a hat and a wind/rain-proof jacket, plus a headlamp, water bottle, sun cream and a good pair of sunglasses.

10



Eat enough, drink a lot

A balanced diet and proper hydration are always important, using salts and supplements (as a guide, for a 6- to 8-hour summer hike you'll need at least three litres of water).

Always take energy food such as dried fruit, chocolate or biscuits with you just in case.

In the case of an accident

**IN THE CASE OF AN
ACCIDENT, IF YOU NEED
HELP CALL THE**



for you or for other people and provide the following information:

- **your name and surname;**
- **personal details, if known, of the person requiring assistance**
- **exact time and location of the incident**
- **type and dynamics of the incident: fall or slip on trail, fall on snow, fall down rock face, sudden illness**
- **number of people involved**
- **presumed condition of the people involved**
- **weather conditions and visibility at site of incident.**

If there is no telephone coverage to contact the emergency services (and it often happens in the mountains) reach the nearest refuge or support point with a landline telephone, making sure, if possible, to leave someone near the injured person.

Key



Altitude above
sea level



Can be reached on
mountain bike



Disabled access



Beds



Dining capacity



Route duration



Winter location

HIKE CLASSIFICATION:

T = For tourists - E = For hikers - EE = For expert hikers
EEA = For equipped expert hikers

USEFUL NUMBERS: Single European emergency number **112** - Fire service **1515**

In the mountains with guides



Alpine and mid-mountain guides are the professionals to turn to for demanding ascents or easy hikes.

Day trips, multi-day hikes, via ferrata and rock routes, snowshoeing and ski mountaineering: the official website has something for all levels and all seasons, for both groups and individuals.





Parks and reserves

Many of the main protected areas in these three provinces are not in the mountains, but in areas with rivers (the Ticino and Lambro, but also a stretch of the Po), hills (Appiano Gentile, Spina Verde, San Colombano) and many of the little lakes in the areas around Varese (Biandronno, Ganna, Comabbio) and Como (Segrino, Mezzola, Alserio, Montorfano).

In the **Varese** area, the Campo dei Fiori regional park protects one of the mountains in the Lombardy Pre-Alps that is symbolic for its naturalistic aspects (this area is famous for its many caves, but also for its important wetlands and very varied flora) and for its historical features, especially the Sacro Monte via crucis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A little further north, the Natura 2000 Network protects the mountains of Valcuvia and Val Veddasca, such as isolated Monte Martica, Legnone and Sangiano.



In the mountains in the province of **Como**, important protected nature sites lie in the regional reserves of Valsolda, a corner of wilderness wedged between Lake Lugano and Canton Ticino, and in the Val Bova regional reserve, in the Triangolo Lariano, home to the famous caves around the Alpe del Vicerè. Parks of supra-municipal interest protect Val Sanagra and Valle Albano, while Sites of Community interest in the 'Natura 2000 Network' include Monte Generoso, some strips of Valsolda, Valle del Dosso and Triangolo Lariano, the latter home to the exceptional limestone zone of Sasso Malascarpa, an authentic open-air 'deposit' of extraordinary Conchodon fossils.

In the province of **Pavia**, a number of protected areas safeguard the best-preserved corners of this small Apennine world: the Monte Alpe nature reserve, in upper Val Staffora, covers an area of mid-mountain environments where oaks and chestnut trees predominate, as well as some vast black pine forests, the result of past reforestation. At higher altitudes is the Le Torraie nature reserve, near the highest part of the Pavia area, Mount Lesima with its characteristic large beech forests and a surprising wealth of flowers and butterflies, above the picturesque village of Brallo di Pregola. The Sassi Neri-Pietra Corva area has also become part of the Natura 2000 network, which identifies sites of Community importance. Despite their low altitude, these mountains hide some small, surprising rocky corners whose nature can be traced back to the oceanic crust, in contrast with the sedimentary origins of most of the mountains around Pavia. In the surrounding area there is also the beautiful Pietra Corva Alpine Garden, home to plants from various mountain chains worldwide.



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3. DUMENZA
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Mountain refuges in the
province of

varese

Discover the province
of Varese and its mountain refuges
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Exploring the forests in Val Cortesel



Technical data

Start and finish: Trezzino, in Dumenza, 450 m
 Maximum altitude: Alpe Fontana, 1142 m
 Elevation gain: 700 m
 Duration: 4 h 45 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round, not recommended with ice
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Dumenza

Sights worth seeing

The Dumenza refuge at Alpe Bous, which can be reached by car and is open all year round, is a good starting point for a hike up to scenic Monte Lema and secluded, wooded, Moto Croce, but is also a quiet destination in its own right, nestling in the silence of the dense woods of Val Cortesel on the border with Canton Ticino. An interesting fact: Trezzino, the starting point of some of the trails that reach this refuge, is the birthplace of Vincenzo Peruggia, famous for his reckless theft of the Mona Lisa from the Louvre Museum in 1911.

Access to the refuge

The town of Luino can be reached by car from Varese via Gemonio and Val Cuvia or from Val Ganna, via Ponte Tresa. It is also served by the railway line that runs along the eastern shore of Lake Maggiore (Milan - Gallarate - Luino -

Cadenazzo - Bellinzona). From Luino, walk up to the village of Dumenza and continue to the village of Due Cossani along the SP 6 provincial road. A little further on, towards Agra, you will come to the winding road that climbs up to Rifugio Campiglio at Pradecolo. At Alpone, a small road branches off to the right, (not always in good condition, it is advisable to enquire about its practicability) that leads to



941 m	6	0 h	YES	20	NO	NO

Rifugio Dumenza

Access: Dumenza

Telephone: 348.4768271

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/dumenza



the refuge (if feasible, 30 minutes on foot from Alpone). Public transport (buses on weekdays, Luino-Curiglia line) only takes you as far as Dumenza and Due Cossani.

On foot, the refuge can be reached from Dumenza, the hamlet of Trezzino (500 m) with an initial stretch along the road to Pezzace, followed by a well-marked trail that climbs up the wooded southern slope of Monte Colmegnino with a few steep sections (1 h 30 min walk, with an elevation gain of 450 m, trail sign 178). Another path, trail sign 177, starts in Due Cossani, the hamlet of Stivigliano (518

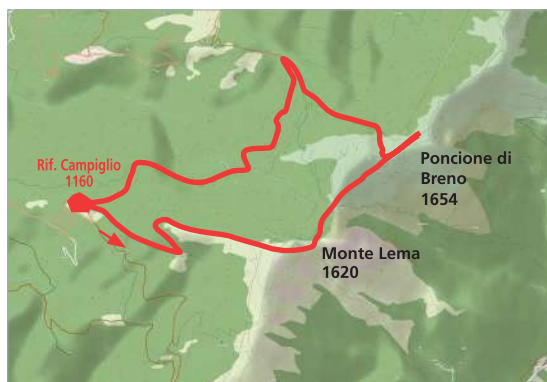
m) and brings you to the refuge in 1 h 40 min. From Switzerland, other signposted trails start in the villages of Astano and Miglieglia, as well as from the summit of Monte Lema, linked to the valley floor by a cable car.

Excursions

From Trezzino car park, trail no. 108 climbs easily up green Val Cortesel to the alp of the same name (706 m). From here, it gets steep and takes you up a ridge that, ignoring detours for Rifugio Dumenza, leads to the beautiful clearing of Alpe Fontana (1147 m), not far from the Swiss border. A gentle high-altitude crossing, trail signs 175, leads to another beautiful clearing, Alpe San Bernardo (1086 m), where you can enjoy panoramic views of Lake Maggiore and the Val Grande mountains. Quite soon after you will come to Rifugio Dumenza, slightly downhill. Trail no. 178 takes you back down to Trezzino in about an hour, completing a beautiful loop, particularly recommended in spring and autumn.



A balcony over Monte Rosa



Technical data

Start and finish: Rifugio Campiglio, 1160 m
 Maximum altitude: Poncione di Breno, 1654 m, and Monte Lema, 1620 m
 Elevation gain: 750 m
 Duration: 5 h
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuges: Campiglio, Dumenza

Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Campiglio stands on the Pradecolo plateau and is a destination for easy hikes and walks. It is also the most convenient starting point in Italy for reaching Monte Lema, a famous vantage point over Lake Maggiore, Monte Rosa and the '4000 m peaks' in Canton Valais.

Access to the refuge

By car, following the route described in the chapter on Rifugio Dumenza, and from Alpone along the road, which ends at the refuge.

The most direct route on foot reaches this mountain refuge from Due Cossani along a mule track and a path that at some points follows the road, trail sign 174 (elevation gain of 650 m, 2 h 10 min walking time). Other routes bring you here from Dumenza-Trezzino via Rifugio Dumenza and Alpe San Bernardo (750

m, 2 h 30 min, trail sign 108) and from Curiglia (650 m, 2 h 30 min). Signposted routes from Switzerland come from Astano, Miglieglia and Breno, as well as from the summit of Monte Lema, which can be reached by cable car.



1160 m



20



0 h



YES



70



NO



YES

Rifugio Campiglio

Access: Dumenza

Telephone: 347.0276901

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/campiglio

Excursions

A beautiful scenic loop takes you to Monte Lema and the Swiss mountain refuge of the same name, arrival point for the cable car up from Canton Ticino, and Poncione di Breno, quieter, but equally rewarding in terms of views. An easy path leads through a beautiful beech wood to Alpe di Runo, from where, up a grassy ridge with an ever-widening panorama, you can get to Monte Lema in 1 h 30 min. After a short descent to Forcola d'Arasio (1482 m), you go up the wide grassy ridge that leads to Poncione di Breno. Trail no. 108 E goes down towards Fonte del Tamarini (often erroneously referred to as 'Fonte dei tamarindi') and Madonna della Guardia. Before reaching the latter, take the wide, apparently level route that leads back to Predecolo in a westerly direction.



A sheer drop to the lake



Technical data

Start and finish: Vararo, 744 m
 Maximum altitude: Pizzoni di Laveno, 1035 m
 Elevation gain: 350 m
 Duration: 3 h
 Difficulty: E with a few short awkward stretches between Passo Barbè and Pizzoni
 Recommended period: all year round, not recommended in hotter months
 Reference mountain refuge: De Grandi Adamoli

Sights worth seeing

Rifugio De Grandi Adamoli is situated at Alpe Cuvignone, just below the peak of the same name, and it can be reached by road or trail. This area is at the centre of a series of easy low-altitude trails, practicable almost all year round, with beautiful views of Lake Maggiore, the mountains in the Valgrande National Park

and the Pennine Alps. Nearby Monte Nudo is popular with paragliders.

Access to the refuge

Cittiglio is on the provincial road from Varese to Laveno and it can also be reached by train, again from Varese. From Cittiglio, the refuge can be reached by car along the provincial road that passes the hamlet of Vararo and climbs up to Passo del Cuvignone. On foot, you can walk up to the refuge from Vararo (1 h 10 min, 250 m: this is the shortest route and also takes you via Passo di Cuvignone), or from the village of Laveno, or even take the Sasso del Ferro cable car to the summit. Another option is from the village of Caldé, on the eastern shore of Lake Maggiore, between Laveno and Luino.



977 m	6	0 h	YES	32	NO	NO

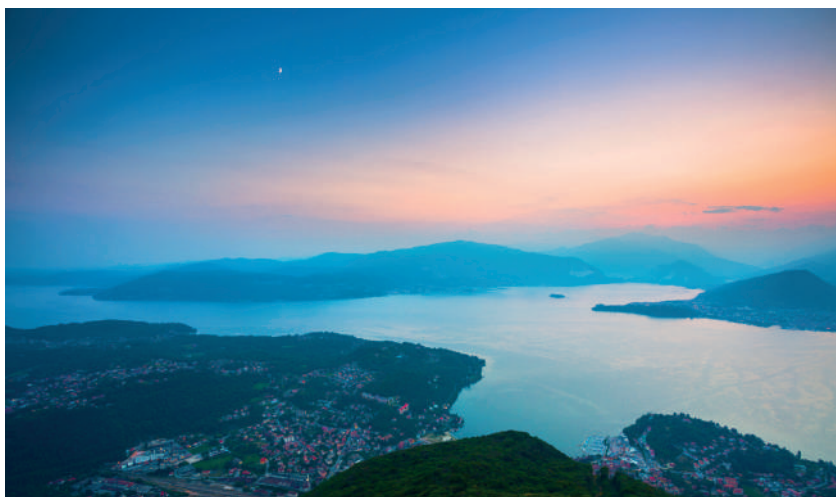
Rifugio De Grandi Adamoli

Access: Cittiglio

Telephone: 366.7012735

Complete info on website:

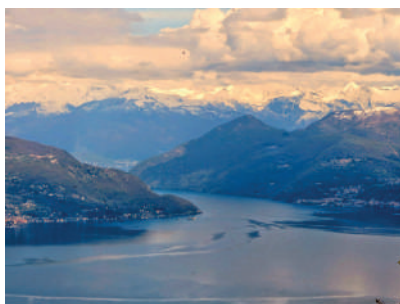
rifugi.lombardia.it/de-grandi-adamoli



Excursions

The Pizzoni di Laveno are three peaks in an extraordinarily scenic position overlooking Lake Maggiore, the Ossola mountains and Monte Rosa. They can be reached quite quick-

ly from the Passo Cuvignone road or by following the loop route explained here, which goes from the small hamlet of Vararo to the hamlet of Casere and Passo Barbé. From here, it takes you along the ridge to the three summits of the Pizzoni, via a few exposed but easy stretches. The route continues apparently on the level below Monte la Teggia and soon comes to the refuge. From here, go up the road and through Passo del Cuvignone, then at the first hairpin bend leave the road and return via Val Buseggia along trail no. 3V (Via Verde Varesina) back to Vararo. Near the pass, you can take a detour to Monte Nudo, another rather scenic relief.



A wild deep valley between the Verbano mountains



Technical data

Start and finish: Caldè, 217 m
 Maximum altitude: Pizzo Cuvignone, 1018 m
 Elevation gain: 800 m
 Duration: 5 h
 Difficulty: E – the ascent of Val Spiancarina, despite the path featuring several rocky drops, presents no particular difficulties; not recommended downhill when the ground is wet or covered in snow
 Recommended period: all year round, to avoid in the hotter months and where there is ice
 Reference mountain refuge: De Grandi Adamoli

Excursions

From Caldè, take the wide path up to Pianeggi; then follow trail signs 225 that, after a traverse, will take you up wild secluded Val Spiancarina. After recent maintenance work, the trail is quite easy and winds its way through sometimes impressive scenery, through the gaps in the rocky spurs of Pizzo Cuvignone, with drops and walls unimaginable from below, until it reaches the quiet plateau of Rifugio Adamoli: definitely one of the most 'alpine' paths in the Varese area!

Very close to the refuge, is the extraordinary Poggiolo viewing point and the large peak of Pizzo Cuvignone. To complete a beautiful loop,

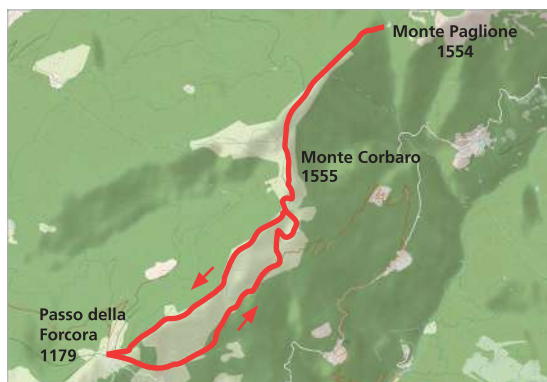


go back down the road to Pianizze and from here trail no. 225 B leads back through the woods to Caldè, taking in the Acquetta shrine and Pira di Sopra. Along the way, a signposted downhill detour takes you along tracks to the Cascata della Froda, a spectacular waterfall in a limestone environment.

For those not wanting to lengthen the hike too much, the waterfall can also be reached from the valley bottom in 30 minutes (one way), a short, pleasant hike that starts just beyond the village of Nasca, not far from Castelveccana. A lovely path through the woods follows the Froda stream with a few footbridges to the final falls, and you can get even closer along a short, elementary section with handrails.



On the Gambarogno ridge



Technical data

Start and finish: Passo della Forcora, 1179 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Corbaro, 1555 m
 Elevation gain: 400 m
 Duration: 3 h 15 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: spring and autumn, if you stay on the ridge, this hike is also feasible in mid-winter with snow
 Support points: restaurant/inn at Passo della Forcora

Sights worth seeing

Separating Lake Maggiore from Val Veddasca, the long ridge of Monte Gambarogno offers a great many extraordinary viewpoints, especially over Upper Verbano, Monte Rosa and the mountains of Canton Ticino. The peaks on Italian territory, with Monte Corbaro standing out, can be reached either from Passo della Forcora or from the villages in the valley bottom, which often take in characteristic alpine meadows of great interest.

Access

The road up through Val Veddasca to Passo della Forcora starts in Maccagno, a small town on the banks of Lake Maggiore just north of Luino that can be reached on the Luino-Bellin-

zona railway line. Public transport (buses on weekdays) only goes as far as Biegno.

Excursions

Near the ski lift on the Passo della Forcora plateau, take the dirt road with trail signs



110 A, that crosses the mid-slope high up Val Veddasca. Leaving the trail for Cangei on your right, take another cart track up through an increasingly open environment to the beautiful Montereccchio cabins (1347 m). After the last houses, trail no. 144 takes you to the ridge with Valle Molinera, near Passo di Fontanarossa (1394 m). It then climbs a little more steeply through meadows to below Monte Corbaro, reaching the summit along trail no. 144 A. Now continue along the ridge until you come to trail signs 144, which along a semi-level stretch below the summit of Monte Covreto (also feasible without major problems) and then along the ridge, leading to the broad scenic summit of Monte Paglione (1554 m). Retrace your steps for the return route, without passing the summit of Monte Corbaro,

to Passo di Fontanarossa. From here, follow trail signs 110 along the ridge and after the modest summit of Monte Sirti (1344 m), go back downhill to Passo della Forcora.



VAL VEDDASCA, HAMLETS AND FORESTS

On the border between Varese and Canton Ticino, where the River Giona flows, wooded Val Veddasca is one of the most characteristic and secluded corners of the Lombardy mountains. The surrounding peaks are all easily reached by good trails and offer beautiful views of Lake Maggiore, Monte Rosa and the Lepontine Alps, but the medium altitudes are where the valley is at its best, with chestnut woods and huge beechwoods. Surrounded by vegetation and silence, the villages and alpine pastures here have a feel of yesteryear that is hard to find elsewhere, and the village of Monteviasco is a perfect example. Tiny and picturesque, this little gem can only be reached on foot along a magnificent mule track, at least since the small cable car that used to connect it to the valley bottom has been out of service. In a way, it is somewhat of an emblem of this valley, where tourism has never really arrived and the mountain still belongs to those who live here, even if this way of life is not always easy. On both sides of the valley are a number of very picturesque villages (including Curiglia, Armio, Biegno, Lozzo) and several enchanting sights, such as the beautiful mills at Piero and the Alpone di Curiglia, with the nearby church of the Madonna della Guardia and some rock engravings. Further up, above Monteviasco, the pleasant clearing of Alpe Merigetto is home to a lovely unmanaged refuge that serves as a support point for climbs and traverses, especially to the peaks in Swiss territory and to the highest summit in the province, Sasso della Gallina. Around Passo Forcora, on the other hand, mention must be made of the gentle ridge from Monte Cadrigna to Paglione, with simply marvellous views of Lake Maggiore. Most of the paths run at modest altitudes and are therefore feasible all year round, making this valley worth more than one visit, especially in autumn and spring.



Explore the province of Varese
and its mountain refuges
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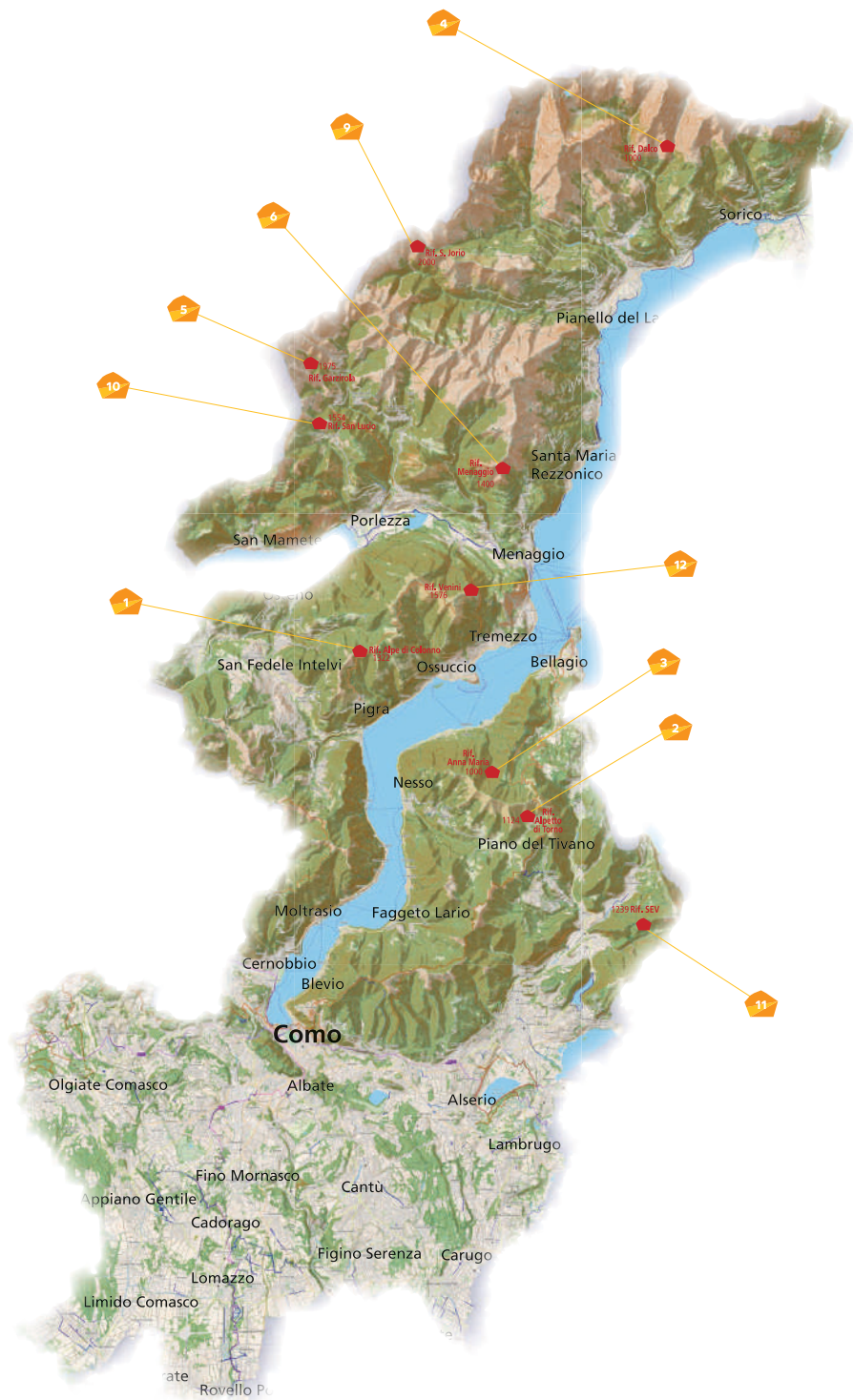


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Mountain refuges in the
province of

Como

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of Como and its mountain refuges
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A very unusual trail



Technical data

Start and finish: Posa, 840 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Comana, 1210 m (or Sasso Gordona 1410 m)
 Elevation gain: 400 m without the detours up to the peaks
 Duration: 5 h 15 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Prabello

Sights worth seeing

Converted from a Guardia di Finanza barracks, Rifugio Prabello is in upper Val d'Intelvi on the Via dei Monti Lariani route, not far from the summit of Sasso Gordona. This enchanting location offers beautiful views and plenty of opportunities for hiking and mountain biking along the ridges on the Swiss border, with interesting artefacts and fortifications dating back to the Cadorna Line.

Access to the refuge

Follow the Statale Regina state road from Como to Argegno, leaving the lakeside to drive up Val d'Intelvi. At San Fedele take the road to Erbonne, which, after the village of Casasco, leads to Alpe Cerano, also known as Pian delle Alpi. From here, a 45-minute walk will bring you to the refuge, with an elevation gain of 250 m. Whereas, to reach the village of



Posa by car, you need to drive up the provincial road just before Argegno, to Schignano, after which, you will soon come to your destination. From Posa di Schignano (840 m) you can walk up to the refuge via Treviglio in 1 h



1201 m	25	0:45 h	YES	50	NO	NO

Rifugio Prabello

Access: Pian delle Alpi

Telephone: 031.5476862

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/prabello

Trails in Como • Pre-Alps, western bank of Lake Como

30 min an elevation gain of 430 m, or in 3 h 30 min and 400 m if you follow the Sentiero delle Espressioni. By public transport, from Como (Trenitalia and Trenord railway stations) by bus or boat to Argegno and from here by bus to Schignano and Casasco and then on foot to the starting points of the itineraries.



Excursions

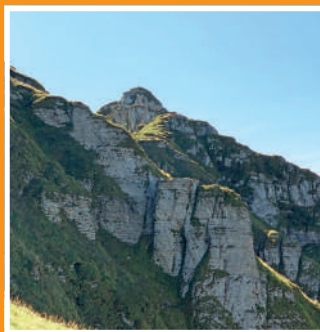
Inaugurated in 2014, the Sentiero delle Espressioni (Path of Expressions) is a curious, interesting trail created thanks to collaboration between ERSAF, the municipality of Schignano (venue of one of the most famous carnivals in Lombardy) and the local association 'la Maschera'. Along the way, you will come across a series of wooden sculptures by a number of local and non-local artists. Placed along the path or carved directly on-site on the trees, these depict faces, expressions and moods. From the hamlet of Posa, this well-signposted trail leads to Alpe Nava (950 m), then to the alp and wooded peak of Monte Comana (1210 m). In succession, you will come to Roccolo del Messo, Colma di

Binate and finally Crocette, always in the company of various sculptures and after skirting the slopes of Sasso Gordona, or climbing to its summit via the ridge (a recommended scenic route, but with some exposed stretches, through the remains of fortifications from the Strada Cadorna), you will finally reach Rifugio Prabello. To return to Posa from the refuge, you can retrace your steps back to Crocette, where a fine mule track takes you through Treviglio and back to your starting point in less than an hour.

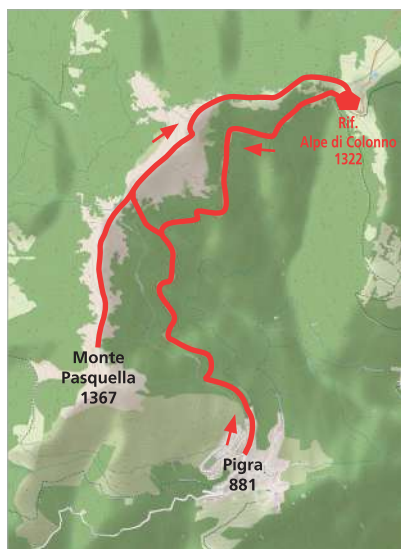


MONTE GENEROSO

This is definitely one of the most famous mountains in the whole of the Pre-Alps. Thanks to its isolated position, straddling Lake Como and Lake Lugano, on clear days it offers an extraordinary panorama of the Alps, Pre-Alps, plains and Apennines. The summit can be reached on a dense network of paths and, on the Swiss side, by the famous cog railway lift from Capolago. The Italian side of the mountain has a wealth of attractions, first and foremost the so-called 'Bear Cave' (or 'Caverna generosa'), a cave of exceptional palaeontological value where, among others, remains of *Ursus spelaeus* have been found. It can be accessed from Orimento via a short path but to enter the cave you must book one of the numerous guided tours scheduled from May to October. Other interesting itineraries allow you to explore the history and nature of this area, most of which is part of the precious Monte Generoso state forest managed by ERSAF (The Regional Organisation for Services to Agriculture and Forests). All signposted with plenty of explanatory panels, these include the botanical trail dedicated to transhumance, the 'Sentiero delle trincee' (Trail of the Trenches) along the Strada Cadorna fortifications and the 'Sentiero dei contrabbandieri' (Smugglers' Trail), which reconstructs one of the phenomena that most characterised the mountains on the Swiss border between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1970s. In addition to the paths, on the north ridge there is also the exciting option of the short, exposed Angelino via ferrata, not particularly difficult but reserved for experienced hikers equipped with appropriate gear.



On the famous "Via dei Monti Iariani"



Sights worth seeing

In a beautiful panoramic position overlooking Lake Como, recently renovated Rifugio Colonna stands on a pleasant grassy saddle on the long mountain ridge that stretches from Val d'Intelvi to Menaggio. The famous Via dei Monti Iariani multi-day route that connects the mid-altitude mountain pastures (the 'monti' of its name) on the western shore of the lake from Cernobbio to Sorico, passes through here.

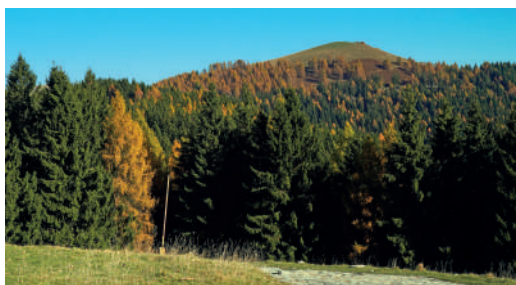


Technical data

Start and finish: Pigra (881 m)
Maximum altitude: Monte Pasquella (1367 m) and slopes of Monte Costone (1400 m approx.) for the high loop, Alpe di Colonna (1322 m) for the low one
Elevation gain: 550 m (high loop) - 650 m (low loop)
Duration: 4 h 30 min (both routes)
Difficulty: E
Recommended period: all year round
Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Alpe di Colonna

Access to the refuge

Pigra can be easily reached from Argegno by cable car or by car, with the road connecting it to San Fedele d'Intelvi (access by car to Val d'Intelvi described in the chapter on Rifugio Prabello). From Pigra, a tarmac road that follows the route of the Strada Cadorna leads directly to the refuge. As well as from Pigra, the latter can also be reached on foot from



1322 m	20	0 h	YES	60	NO	YES

Rifugio Alpe di Colonna

Access: Pigra

Telephone: 375.7380966

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/alpe-di-colonna

various villages on the shores of Lake Como (Ossuccio, Colonno, Sala Comacina) with a walking time of around three hours and an elevation gain of about 1100 metres.

Excursions

PIGRA HIGH LOOP

The route begins in the upper part of the village of Pigra and after briefly following the tarmac road towards Rifugio Colonno and Rifugio Venini, you take a small side road to the Crusia Piana cement cross and an old drinking trough. At a signposted junction just a little further on, pick up trail no. 1a along the ridge to Bocchetta di Pigra (1323 m). A highly recommended detour will bring you via the ridge to nearby Monte Sertore (1397 m) and then to Pizzo Pasquella (1331 m), excellent vantage points over Lake Como and its mountains. Returning to the pass, you join the famous Via dei Monti Lariani which takes you, almost on the level, across the slopes of Monte Costone and to Alpe di Colonno.



For your return journey, after following a stretch of road towards Pigra, pick up trail no. 1b, which skirts it a little higher up and then leads back to your starting point in about 1 h 30 min.



PIGRA LOW LOOP

From the centre of Pigra, follow trail signs 3 to the small shrine of the Madonna del Soccorso and another interesting drinking trough. Just after this, the path drops to the Lomia cabins, followed by a pleasant traverse to the delightful hamlet of Corniga, a tiny jewel nestling in the woods. After passing the houses in Solasco, the route climbs the ridge in an increasingly scenic environment until you come to Alpe di Colonno.

You can return to Pigra either along trail no. 1b, described above for the high loop, or directly on the tarmac road.

From Lake Como abbey to Monte Tremezzo



Technical data

Start and finish: Ossuccio, 270 m or Lenno, 215 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Tremezzo, 1700 m
 Elevation gain: 1st day 1300 m / 2nd day 150 m
 Duration: 1st day 5 h / 2nd day 4 h
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: autumn, spring, not recommended in hotter months
 Reference mountain refuges: Rifugio Venini, Rifugio Alpe di Colonno

Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Venini is on a saddle between the Galbigea and Tremezzo mountains, between Lake Como and Lake Lugano, with exceptional views of the Alps and Pre-Alps. A former military barracks, the refuge can be reached on foot or by mountain bike and car, and it is a stage on the Via dei Monti Lariani route and also the arrival point for many itineraries between Como and Val d'Intelvi.

Access to the refuge

Rifugio Venini can be reached by car along a road that requires care in some parts due to its condition, from Rifugio Alpe di Colonno. See relevant chapter for description. On foot, the refuge can be reached from Pigra or the villages on the lake: Ossuccio, Lenno, Tremezzo, and Griante (magnificent views, between 3 h 30 min and 4 h 30 min walking time with an



1576 m	40	0 h	YES	60	NO	NO

Rifugio Venini

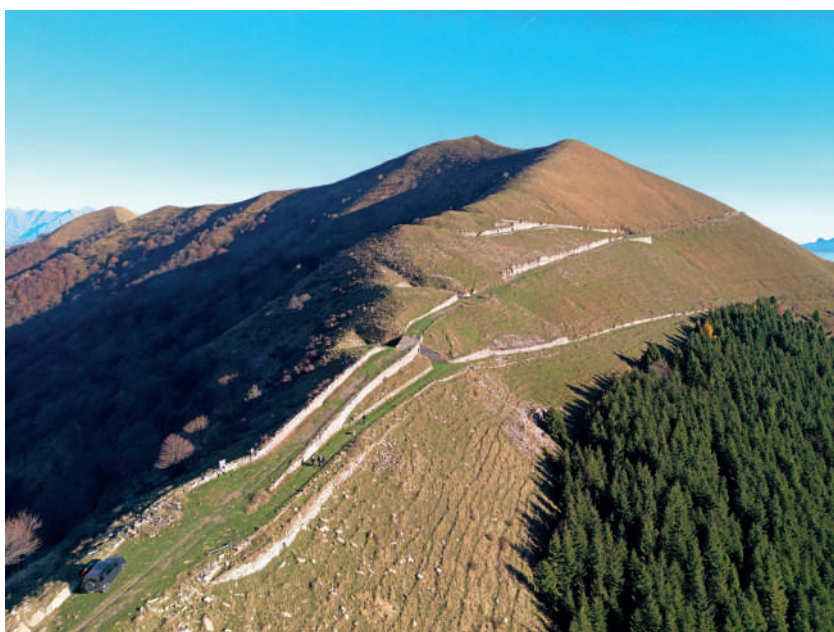
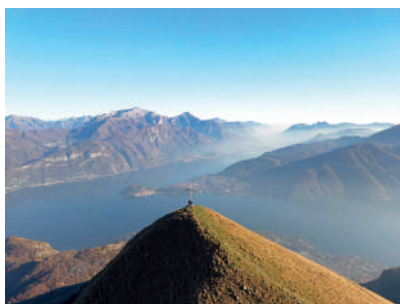
Access: Bene Lario
Telephone: 0344.56671
 Complete info on website:
rifugi.lombardia.it/venini

Trails in Como • Pre-Alps, western bank of Lake Como

elevation gain of 1300 m). Alternatively, from Bene Lario, between Menaggio and Portezza, along a less scenic but quieter and less busy route, in 3 h 30 min and with an elevation gain of 1200 m. Lenno and Ossuccio are on the Regina state road that runs along the entire western shore of Lake Como and they can also be reached by public transport (bus and boat) from Como.

Excursions

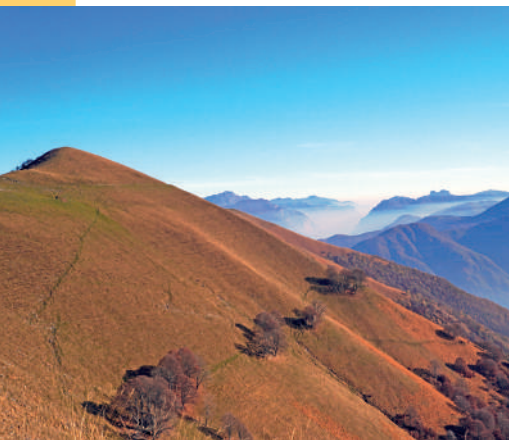
A long route of exceptional panoramic, histor-



ical and landscape interest leading to Rifugio Venini from the banks of Lake Como. A rather strenuous one-day hike, in two stages with an overnight stay at the refuge and a number of recommended detours, it becomes an easy itinerary. From Ossuccio, climb up the Sacro Monte di Ossuccio, a Via Crucis with 14 stations, to the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Soccorso (425 m). From here take the steep mule track to Preda and continue on past the hamlets of Cassina and Gravona to the wide saddle of Boffalora (1237 m). After a short uphill stretch northwards on tarmac, you will come to Alpe di Ossuccio (1305 m). Here you can choose whether to continue on the grassy ridge that rises and falls through a series of very scenic reliefs, including Monte di Lenno (1589 m) and Monte Galbiga (1698 m), or continue along the road, gentler but much less interesting. In either case, halfway along, you will come to the Alpe di Lenno saddle and the last group of cabins before Rifugio Venini. From the refuge a good track climbs the ridge to Monte di Tremezzo, an extraordinary vantage point overlooking the two branches of Lake Como and the Alps and Pre-Alps and one of the best places in the Como area for admiring a sunrise or sunset! Back down at Rifugio Venini, you return by road or ridge to Alpe



di Lenno, and here take the signposted mule track that, after Alpe Gada and the houses in Piazza and Gaggio, drops down along a wide path to Acquafredda Abbey. From here, now not far from the banks of the lake, you will soon be back in Ossuccio. This is the easiest best signposted of all the routes down to the lake from the refuge. Other more direct, scenic, but not always well signposted, itineraries go from the Alpe di Mezzegra, easily reached from the refuge or from the summit of Monte Tremezzo. If you want a "fast" route from the Alpe, you can go down the long ridge that leads to the Narro cross and then to Narro, along a rather steep track that is quite intuitive but not always very easy to spot. Gentler and with better views is the military route that leads, after a wide traverse and a series of downhill turns, to Monti di Ossino. Here you leave the cart track and take the Via dei Monti Lariani route westwards, this follows a long traverse at altitude until you come to Narro. From this hamlet, a wide mule track will take you down to Daiè and the Abbey of Acquafredda, and then it joins a wider trail that soon brings you to Lenno and Ossuccio. Although signposted, some sections of the path between Ossino and Narro are not always very intuitive and, often overgrown with vegetation, require care.



THE ABBEY OF SAN BENEDETTO IN VAL PERLANA

A tiny jewel of eleventh-century Romanesque architecture, the abbey is at an altitude of 900 m, nestling in the forests of Val Perlana. Usually closed, it is open to the public on certain days of the year and there are also guided tours. Info on the dedicated web-site. It can be reached from the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Soccorso by following the uphill route to Rifugio Venini, described in the previous chapter, as far as Preda. Here you will find signs for the beautiful path that branches off to the right and, after a long traverse, leads to the clearing and the abbey, through dense woods furrowed by several small valleys.

Slightly more scenic is the itinerary to San Benedetto from the Acquafredda Abbey, along a dirt road and path, via the Pianas cabins. Joining these routes make a beautiful loop that starts in Lenno or Ossuccio, and takes about 3 h 30 min with an elevation gain of 650 m. Highly recommended in late spring, when the woods are a riot of colourful flowers, this loop is one of the most evocative historical-naturalistic itineraries in the Como area, often with views of fascinating Isola Comacina.

From San Benedetto Abbey, you can also walk up to Pioda and in this way link the Ri-



fugio Venini loop to that of Val Perlana, but the path is not always well signposted and has some awkward stretches.



On the vast peak of Monte Bregagno



Technical data

Start: Rifugio Menaggio, 1400 m

Finish: Monte Bregagno, 2107 m

Elevation gain: 700 m

Duration: 2 h 45 min (one way)

Difficulty: E

Recommended period: all year round (in winter a stretch below Bocchetta di Amate may be hazardous with heavy snowdrifts)

Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Menaggio

Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Menaggio stands on a grassy slope of Monte Grona, on the western shore of Lake Como, in a position unparalleled for its views of the Alps, Pre-Alps and Mesolcina. The area offers numerous options for walkers, hikers and mountain bikers, as well as some rock routes and a beautiful via ferrata in a limestone environment.

Access to the refuge

Menaggio can be reached by car or bus from Como or Colico; by boat from Como and Varenna (station on the Milan - Sondrio - Tira-



1400 m



18



1:00 h



NO



35



NO



NO

Rifugio Menaggio

Access: Monti di Breglia

Telephone: 0344.1930017

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/menaggio

no railway line). From Menaggio you drive to Plesio and then to Breglia (bus service to this point, on weekdays only). To further shorten the walk, from Breglia you can continue by car to the Monti di Breglia on a toll road.

From the village of Breglia, go up to the refuge along the ridge of Monti di Breglia, through birch trees and broom, to an altitude of about 1300 m. Then take a wide, semi-level traverse westwards through meadows (an elevation gain of 600 m and 1 h 30 min walk). From Monti di Breglia, the route is considerably shorter: an elevation gain of 300 m in just under an hour. Less busy is the slightly longer but very interesting route from Plesio, which from Molino Spinzi, not far from the old mineral water plant, goes up Val di Fiume under the beautiful rocky spurs of Monte Grona.

Excursions

Gentle and satisfying, the ascent to Monte Bregagno is one of the easiest, most scenic hikes in the area and is, with due precaution and snowshoes, feasible even in winter. From the refuge, a beautiful traverse trail leads to the Sant'Amate saddle (1623 m), from where you look out over Lake Lugano. You now begin

to climb the gentle slope of the Bregagnino (1905 m) and from here, with increasingly wider views, you will come to the vast grassy dome of the main summit without any orientation problems.



Dolomitic peaks bordering on a wilderness



Technical data

Start and finish: Rifugio San Lucio, 1554 m
 Maximum altitude: Cima di Fojorina, 1810 m
 Elevation gain: 270 m
 Duration: 1 h 10 min
 Difficulty: E (EE optional detour to Torrone)
 Recommended period: all year round, hazardous with ice
 Reference mountain refuges: Rifugio San Lucio, Capanna Pairolo (CH)

Sights worth seeing

Located on the pass of the same name between Val Cavargna and Val Colla (Switzerland) next to a magnificent fifteenth-century church, Rifugio San Lucio enjoys beautiful views of the Alps, Pre-Alps and Orobic Alps. The area lends itself to excursions in very different environments, as at the pass the gentle slopes of Monte Garzirola and nearby peaks merge with the impervious limestone-dolomitic area of the Valsolda Nature Reserve.

Access to the refuge

Cavargna can be reached by car from Menaggio (see the chapter on the refuge of the same name) and from Porlezza, which can be reached from Lugano, following the banks of Lake Lugano along the SS 340 state road. You can also get to Cavargna by bus (weekdays only) from Porlezza and Menaggio.

From Cavargna (1080 m) it takes 1 h 30 min to reach the refuge, with an elevation gain of 480 m. This well-signposted route starts from the centre of the village and goes through the beautiful beech forest known as the 'sacred wood'. After walking beside the River Cuccio and its gorges, you cross Marda bridge and then climb up to the houses in Monti di Colonè; and increasingly open grassy terrain finally brings you to the pass. Two other itineraries take you to San Lucio from Val di Rezzo, the more direct one starting in the village of Buggiolo takes in Monti di Dasio and follows the cart track that climbs the southern slope of the ridge separating Val di Rezzo and Val Cavargna, passing by the little shrine of Cep (1 h 15 min walk with an elevation gain of 500 m). A quieter option is the beautiful path that from Seghebbia goes through the woods below Alpe Colmine to the refuge along the ridge (1 h 40 min, 500 m). From



1554 m	32	1:15 h	YES	70	NO	NO

Rifugio San Lucio

Access: Dasio Valrezzo

Telephone: 375.6083460

Complete info on website:

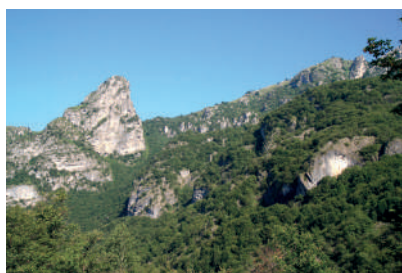
rifugi.lombardia.it/san-lucio

the Swiss side, you can go up from the villages in Val Colla, which are served by frequent bus services departing from Lugano: from Bogno it takes 1 h 50 min with an elevation gain of 600 m, from Certara 1 h 45 min and 550 m.

Excursions

From the refuge, the trail goes through vast meadows, skirting Monte Cucco as far as Bocchetta di San Bernardo (1586 m). It then follows the beautiful limestone ridge dotted with mountain pines that leads to Cima di Fojoirina (1810 m), a wonderful panoramic viewpoint overlooking the Valsolda nature reserve. An interesting, short route reserved for experienced hikers is the detour to Torrione (1805 m), a characteristic twin peak formed by two imposing rocks, with an extraordinary view of Ceresio (35 minutes there and back). A good way to complete this

excursion is to continue along the ridge, touching the summit of Monte Oress, and then walk down to Capanna Pairolo, in Swiss territory. From here, you return to Bocchetta di San Bernardo on a lower path and in this way complete a beautiful loop with views of the slender Denti della Vecchia, the famous dolomite-looking rock-climbing wall in the Ticino Pre-Alps.



VALSOLDA NATURE RESERVE

The mountains above Dasio, a small village next to Porlezza, are home to some of the lesser-known areas of wilderness in Lombardy. A small zone is covered by a beautiful forest that stretches across terrain characterised by rock faces and spires with a dolomitic feel, furrowed by steep gullies and short, spectacular canyons. The relatively mild climate and the ruggedness of the terrain have created the conditions for the establishment of a widely varied array of plants typical of different altitudes and environments in a complex forest of great naturalistic value, appropriately protected by a



precious nature reserve managed by ERSAF (Regional Organisation for Services to Agriculture and Forests). At the lower altitudes, where the 'Oriented Nature Reserve' is located, the area can be visited by means of a good number of paths; in particular, three convenient didactic itineraries lead to the discovery of some of its distinctive features: the Via dei Canti (Songs Route), the Fauna Trail and the Route in the Rock are an excellent opportunity for learning more about this unique environment. At higher altitudes, on the other hand, there are only a few hiking trails and no detours possible as the territory lies inside the 'Integral Nature Reserve', the first of its kind to be established in Lombardy, which can only be accessed for study purposes with no other

human activity permitted. A small happy island for our mountain flora and fauna.



Gentle ridges, boundless views



Technical data

Start: Rifugio Garzirola, 1974 m
 Finish: Vegna / Cavargna, 1080 m
 Elevation gain: 250 m
 Duration: 3 h 30 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Garzirola

Sights worth seeing

Converted from a Guardia di Finanza barracks and located on the Swiss border between Val Cavargna and Val Colla, Rifugio Garzirola sits on a long, extremely scenic ridge of grassy rolling peaks, ideal for leisurely hikes, mountain biking and, in winter, snowshoeing. It is also a support point for the Swiss 'Sentiero Lago di Lugano' hiking trail, which in nine stages goes from Lugano to Mendrisio with many stretches over the border mountains of Varese and Como.

Access to the refuge

The itineraries described in the previous chapter will take you to Rifugio San Lucio. From here, an easy dirt road that takes in Alpe Tabano, or the path along the ridge brings you to Rifugio Garzirola in about an hour. In total, from Buggiolo or from Seghebbia it takes 2 h

15 min and 2 h 40 min respectively, with an elevation gain of 850 m, whereas access from Cavargna takes 2 h 30 min and 900 m. The safest winter routes are from Buggiolo or from Cavargna, via Piano del Cristo; in both cases there is a 2 h 30 min - 3 h walk depending on snow conditions, with an elevation gain of 900 m.

Even from the Swiss side, from the villages of Val Colla, most of the uphill routes to the



1974 m	30	1:50 h	YES	100	YES	NO

Rifugio Garzirola

Access: Cavargna

Telephone: 0344.63253

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/garzirola

refuge go through Passo di San Lucio, with ascent times of 2 h 50 min walking from Bogno and 2 h 45 min from Certara, both with an elevation gain of 1000 m. The only route to the refuge that does not involve San Lucio is from the hamlet of Colla via Passo del Pozzaiolo and the western ridge of the mountain (again, this takes about 3 hours' walking with an elevation gain of 1000 m).

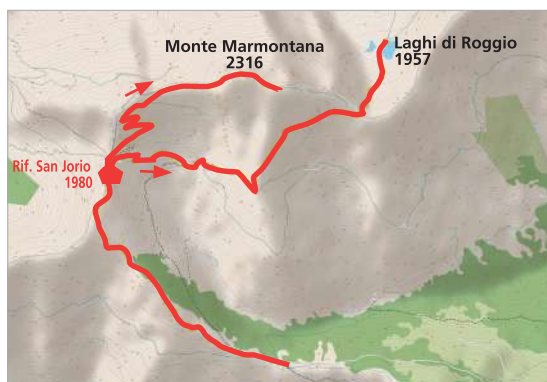
Excursions

A lovely scenic hike, completely on ridges, leads first along a good path to Garzirola (2115 m), then on tracks to the badly sign-posted grassy shoulder of Monte Segor (2097 m) and finally to the highest and most panoramic peak of the day, Vetta del Vallone (2135 m). From here the wide panoramic view takes in not only a large part of the Lombardy Pre-Alps, but also Monte Rosa, the Sempione mountains, many Mesolcina peaks, the Ma-

sino giants and a stretch of the Orobics. The descent follows the track that runs down the grassy ridge of Monte Lungo and, once past Baita della Marmotta, leads you downhill to the cabins of Monti di Pianca (1353 m) and finally, now signposted for Via del Ferro, to the houses in Vegna (1201 m). A stretch on tarmac leads back to Cavargna in about half an hour, marking the end of a loop that is highly recommended on clear late autumn days. Those who reach the refuge from Cavargna can follow this route in its entirety, thus completing a large scenic loop. Those starting from other points can simply complete the short crest itinerary to Vetta del Vallone, also extremely scenic, and then retrace their steps for the return.



Two splendid little lakes



Technical data

Start and finish: Rifugio San Jorio, 1980 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Marmontana, 2316 m
 Elevation gain: 400 m
 Duration: 3 h
 Difficulty: E (itinerary described) / EE (the alternative from the peak of Monte Marmontana to the Bocchetta di Stazzona)
 Recommended period: late spring/summer/autumn
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio San Jorio

Sights worth seeing

Converted from a Guardia di Finanza barracks, the refuge enjoys a truly panoramic position on Passo di San Jorio, which connects the Alto Lario to the Bellinzona plain. It can be reached on foot or by mountain bike, either from Italy or Switzerland, and is a starting point for hikes and gentle climbs up the many grassy peaks of this border ridge. The entire area, very interesting in terms of flora and fauna, is protected by the Valle Albano Park.

Access to the refuge

By car, follow the SS Regina state road as far as Dongo, where you leave the lakeside to drive up to the village of Garzeno (also by bus on weekdays). From Garzeno you can reach Rifugio Giovo by car along a road that alternates tarmac and dirt and must be used with caution. Enquire about conditions. From the



Giovo saddle, continue on foot along a grassy ridge, on a dirt road, arriving at Rifugio San Jorio in just under an hour. From Garzeno or from the village of Brenzeglio, a little further up, you can walk to Rifugio Giovo along the



1980 m	25	0:55 h	YES	60	NO	NO

Rifugio San Jorio

Access: Ex rifugio Giovo a Garzeno

Telephone: 349.7279924

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/san-jorio

mule track that takes in Monti Ciaccio, Piazza Cavada and Dosso Brento (from Garzeno a 3 h 30 min walk with an elevation gain of 1050 m and 3 h and 750 m from Brenzeglio).

From Switzerland, just above Bellinzona, you can reach the village of Carena (958 m) in Val Morobbia by car or bus. From here to the refuge takes 3 h 30 min - 4 hours' walking with an elevation gain of 1100 m, depending on the route chosen: at the bottom of the valley, an easy path makes a wide semicircle up to the pass, taking in Monti di Ruscada, Alpe Valletta and Alpe di Giumello, whereas a slightly more direct variant goes through the tiny enchanting alpine pasture of Giggio. A more scenic alternative, but with a greater elevation gain, climbs the ridge of Cima delle Cicogne, in a beautiful mid-mountain environment. The latter route follows a military track belonging to the Fortificazioni Ticinesi built during the First World War to defend Bellinzona. It was restored in 1939 and is dotted with panels that explain the history of these artefacts from the war.

Excursions

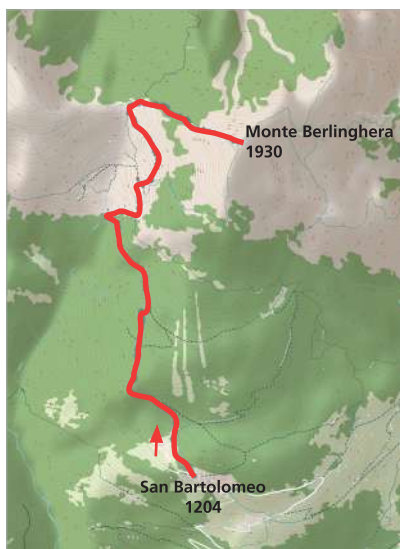
The entire area around Passo San Jorio, in the shadow of the summit of Monte Marmontana, is very interesting from a landscape point of view as it marks the start of the gradual transition from gentle pre-Alpine scenery to the more rugged rocky terrain of the Mesolcina chain. A beautiful hike leads from the refuge



to the small Rifugio delle Aquile for CAI members in Cermenate (2194 m) and then continues along a grassy ridge to nearby Cima di Cugn (2237 m) and from this to the panoramic peak of Marmontana. From the summit, you can continue along the ridge with a few exposed awkward stretches, or go down rather intuitively through the meadows on the Italian side until you come to a track that leads to Bocchetta di Stazzona. For those who do not wish to venture off the trail, it is definitely more advisable to retrace your steps to Rifugio San Jorio and from here follow the easy Alta Via del Lario, which crosses halfway up the hillside through beautiful meadows to reach Bocchetta di Stazzona. From here you make a quick descent to the two beautiful little Roggio Lakes, in their very lovely setting and then retrace your steps for the return journey. Especially from Monte Marmontana, there are glorious views out over Lake Maggiore, Lake Como, the Rhaetian Alps and Monte Rosa, with beautiful close-up views of the mountains of Canton Ticino.



The Alto Lario classic



Technical data

Start: San Bartolomeo, 1204 m
 Finish: Monte Berlinghera, 1930 m
 Elevation gain: 730 m
 Duration: 2 h (one way)
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Dalco

Sights worth seeing

The refuge stands in a beautiful panoramic position among the chestnut groves of upper Lake Como, facing Monte Legnone. Accessible by car, it is a starting point for walking, hiking and mountain biking and also a launch point for paragliders.

Access to the refuge

From Gera Lario (on the SS Regina state road from Como or Colico, or by bus) you drive up to Montemezzo and continue on a good road to the refuge. From Gera Lario the refuge can be reached on foot in about 1 h 45 min with an



990 m



17



0 h



YES



40



NO



YES

Rifugio Dalco

Access: Montemezzo

Telephone: 335.363984

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/dalco



elevation gain of 800 m, or from Montemezzo, 1 h 20 min and 500 m.

Excursions

The walk up to Monte Berlinghera is an easy, not very strenuous route that brings you to a magnificent viewpoint, feasible even in the winter with all due precautions. From Rifugio Dalco, a tarmac road takes you to San Bartolomeo, where you can park. A signposted road climbs easily up to Alpe Pescedo (1559 m), continuing through meadows to Bocchetta di Chiaro (1666 m), where there is a bizarre, enormous, and quite honestly, rather questionable, wooden swing. The panorama, already vast and particularly lovely towards Lake Como, opens up even more as you go up the path along the grassy ridge to the summit of Monte Berlinghera (1930 m), looking out over the Orobics, Mesolcina, the Rhaetian Alps and Pre-Alps. Retrace your steps for the return journey.



One of the Mesolcina rocky peaks



Despite its modest altitude, this route has a high-mountain feel and, following a stretch of the first stage of the Alta Via del Lario, it leads to the lovely summit of Sasso Canale, an excellent viewpoint “freed” a few years ago from the presence of several repeaters that spoilt its peak and the surrounding scenery. From San Bartolomeo, as with the previous itinerary, you go to Alpe Pescedo and Bocchetta di Chiaro, and then follow the ridge westwards up to an altitude of 1854 m. You can also reach



Technical data

Start: San Bartolomeo, 1204 m

Finish: Sasso Canale, 2411 m

Elevation gain: 1200 m

Duration: 3 h 15 min (one way)

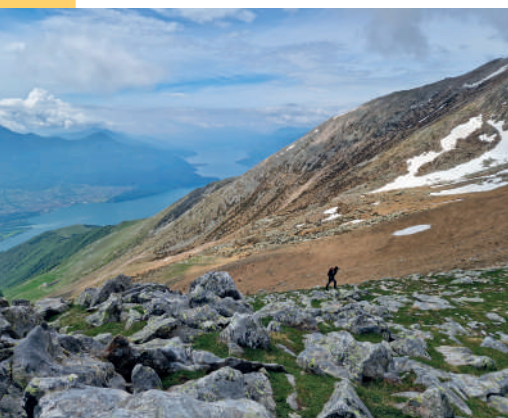
Difficulty: EE

Recommended period: summer/autumn – avoid with snow or ice

Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Dalco



this point by following the Alta Via del Lario trail signs, which take in Alpe di Mezzo and follow the characteristic boundary wall between the meadows known as ‘il Termenone’. Over surprisingly rocky terrain, the path now crosses the mountain on the Chiavenna side with a few detrital stretches requiring care. After going up a small gully of scree and rocks, with some easy climbing passages, you will come to a narrow opening that allows you to return to the Como side. You will soon pass the inconspicuous peak of Sasso Bianco (at 2397 m little more than a stony plateau), from which a final traverse takes you just below the cross and summit marker of Sasso Canale (2411 m), which can be reached with a very short climb over loose rock.



THE MOUNTAINS IN ALTO LARIO: LAKES AND BIVOUACS

The mountains of Alto Lario, on the border with the province of Sondrio and Canton Ticino, are home to the most “alpine” landscapes in the Como area; the beautiful basin of Lake Darengo, nestling between the rocky walls of Cresta della Gratella and Pizzo Campanile, is certainly the most famous and most visited place in this remote, fascinating area. Valle del Dosso, Val di Bares and Val Darengo run between these rugged lonely mountains, dotted with unmanaged support points such as Capanna Como, the Ledù bivouac, Rifugio Pianezza and the new Zeb bivouac, but completely lacking, at least at altitude, any “traditional” refuges: a consequence, and in some ways also the cause, of their scarce number of visitors. In particular, the ridge on the watershed with the Sondrio area is among the most isolated and relatively unspoilt places in the massif, and it reserves solitude and fantastic views for the few hikers and mountaineers who venture here. The peaks in this area (Pizzo Ledù, Motto Rotondo, and Cavregasco) are close to the first stage of the challenging Alta Via del Lario, the stretch from San Bartolomeo to Capanna Como. Reserved for expert hikers capable of tackling steep rope-and-chain stretches without any problems, this route offers what is probably the most beautiful complete view of these mountains and is a two-day enterprise. Among the one-day hikes, mention must be made of the classic ascent to Lake Darengo, and the much more “selective” one to tiny Lake Ledù. Both quite strenuous but very rewarding, they are among the excursions that best reveal the beauty of the Como side of the Mesolcina.

Even further south, at least up to Monte Cardinello, these mountains are also home to other very unusual rocky parts; beyond which, the landscape gradually becomes more open, gentle and grassy. The contrasts offered by this mountain range are best appreciated, once again, along the Alta Via del Lario and the second stage, slightly less arduous than the first, covers a traverse to Rifugio San Jorio, with some very varied, surprising views. More tenacious hikers can conclude this highly satisfying endeavour by tackling the third and final stage, which takes you to Rifugio Menaggio along the long ridge between Pizzo di Gino and Monte Bregagno, in the now typically pre-Alpine environment of the mid-lake mountains.





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Your adventures in the Mountain Refuges in Lombardy



An extraordinary panorama



Technical data

Start: Rifugio S.E.V., 1239 m
 Finish: Corno Orientale di Canzo, 1232 m
 Elevation gain: 150 m
 Duration: 45 min (one way)
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round, even with snow
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio S.E.V.

Sights worth seeing

At the base of the Corni di Canzo, in the Triangolo Lariano, is the Rifugio Società Escursionisti Valmadreresi (Valmadreresi Hiking Society), which can be reached on numerous paths or a comfortable mule track. From the large terrace, you can admire a superb special panorama sweeping from the Alps to Mesolcina, with exceptional views of Grigne, Resegone and Lake Como.

Access to the refuge

From Valbrona, which can be reached by car from Lecco or Asso and by bus from Asso. The shortest route to the refuge is from Alpe Oneda, just above Valbrona, where a part-tarmac, part-dirt road takes you to the refuge in 1 h 30 min, with an elevation gain of 500 m.

From Valmadrera, between Milan and Lecco, which can be reached by car (exit signposted on the SS 36 state road) or by train on the 'Be-

sanino' or by bus from Lecco, two paths lead to the refuge via the Sambrosera and Luera passages (both take 2 h 30 min with an elevation gain of 1000 m). The classic path to Terz'Alpe and Colletta dei Corni (3 h with an elevation gain of 750 m) starts in Canzo (which can be reached by car from Erba and is easy to reach with public transport on the Trenord Milan-Asso railway line).



1239 m



50



1:30 h



YES



100



YES



NO

Rifugio S.E.V.

Access: Oneda di Valbrona

Telephone: 338.5063747

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/sev

Excursions

An easy semi-level itinerary skirts the beautiful limestone wall of Corno Centrale and leads to the Luera pass; from here, without any difficulty, you will soon reach the cross at the top of the Corno Orientale di Canzo, the ideal place to quietly enjoy the magnificent view of the Lario and its surrounding mountains.



In the daffodil mountains



Technical data

Start and finish: Rifugio Riella, 1275 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Palanzone, 1436 m
 Elevation gain: 350 m
 Duration: 2 h 45 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Riella

Sights worth seeing

Situated below the summit of Mount Palanzone and a stage point on the Como-Bellagio traverse, Rifugio Riella is a popular destination in the Lombardy Pre-Alps, in an area where the much-loved 'narcisate' or daffodil picking walks were held in the past. Located in the Triangolo Lariano, in the middle of a network of paths and mule tracks arriving from Erba, Canzo and the shores of Lake Como, it is accessible all year round on foot and by mountain bike.

Access to the refuge

Good well-signposted paths bring you to the

refuge from either Caslino (850 m, 2 h 30 min) or Asso (800 m, 2 h 15 min) and both towns are on the Valtassina provincial road and the Trenord Milan-Canzo-Asso railway line. Other itineraries with even smaller elevation gains start in Sormano (450 m, 1 h 50 min) and Rezzago (650 m, 2 h 20 min), which can also be



1275 m	24	1:20 h	YES	60	YES	NO

Rifugio Riella

Access: Colma di Sormano

Telephone: 031.378600

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/riella

reached by bus on weekdays from Asso. Even less strenuous are the routes from Alpe del Vicerè, above Albavilla, to the historic Capanna Mara (420 m, 1 h 30 min) and from Pian del Tivano, by far the shortest (250 m, 1 h 20 min). On the side facing the lake, from Como you can reach the village of Palanzo di Faggeto Lario by car or bus. From here, a 2-hour walk along a mule track brings you to the refuge, with an elevation gain of 750 m. Much more strenuous is the uphill route from the village

of Nesso, rewarded however by the initial view of the beautiful Orrido di Nesso, which can be enjoyed from Civera bridge on the banks of Lake Como.

Excursions

A lovely hike on the ridges to the west of Monte Palanzone takes you over many modest peaks offering ever-changing views of Lake Como, as well as vast panoramas of Mischabel and Monte Rosa. From the refuge, the route leads to Bocchetta di Palanzo (1210 m) and from here you will quickly come to Monte Palanzone (1436 m). Along the ridge you drop down in the direction of Monte Bul, but before going up again to the summit, you turn decisively westwards and take in, one after another, Bocchetta di Nesso (1313 m) with Cippo Marelli, wooded Monte di Faello (1337 m), Bocchetta di Sciff (1255 m), Monte di Palanzo (1391 m), Bocchetta di Lavignac (1331 m) and Monte Preaola (1417 m). Back in Lavignac, a path halfway up the slope leads back to the Sciff pass and the refuge. You can of course, climb only some of the summits listed, going around the others on paths on their slopes.



Headwater springs of the Lambro



Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Anna Maria is located in the Triangolo Lariano at Piano Rancio, not far from Ghisallo, made famous by the cycling exploits of the Giro di Lombardia, and the headwater springs of the Lambro. Accessible also by car, it is a base for easy walks and hikes in the Monte San Primo area.

Access to the refuge

Magreglio can be reached by car from Erba or with public transport, arriving in Asso on the Trenord railway line, and continuing to Magreglio by bus (weekdays only).



Technical data

Start: Magreglio 737 m
Finish: Piano Rancio, 969 m or detour to Monte Ponciv 1453 m
Elevation gain: 230 m + 500 m for Monte Ponciv
Duration: 50 min + 1 h 30 min
Difficulty: E
Recommended period: all year round
Reference mountain refuge: Anna Maria

Excursions

From the centre of Magreglio you either drive or walk up Via dei Castagneti until it ends in a large square. Along a mule track and path, following signs for the Sorgenti del Lambro (Lambro springs), you will come into a beautiful wood along the course of the Lambro and its small waterfalls, where panels explain the route that features erratic boulders and the



1000 m



6



0 h



YES



50



NO



YES

Rifugio Anna Maria

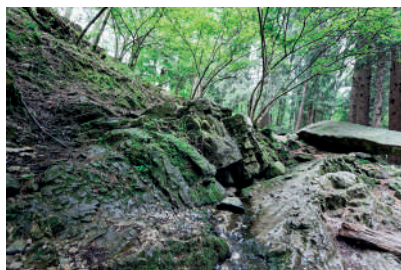
Access: Piano Rancio

Telephone: 031.963589

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/anna-maria

potholes known as "marmitte dei giganti" or giants' pots. Less than an hour's walk will bring you to a coniferous forest and soon after to the wonderful Sorgente della Menaresta spring, whose name illustrates its intermittent character, since in some periods the spring "mena" in the sense of bringing, generating, water, while in others it "resta" or remains dry. The spring is also linked to a legend according to which, at the time of the Lombards, thanks to the work of Queen Theodelinda and her consort Autari, it was here that the waters sprung from the ground that put an end to a long period of drought. Not far from the spring are other natural curiosities: the small cave known as 'Bus di pegur' (sheep hole), which



has two cavities, and a little granite boulder with numerous, ancient engravings. Beyond the springs, a small road leads in a few minutes to Piano Rancio, where there are some refreshment points and the Anna Maria refuge. Near here, it is worth a visit to two truly remarkable erratic boulders: Pietra Luna, in gneiss, is nearby, inside a private property, and can be contemplated 'from a distance', then along the carriage road leading to Bellagio, the enormous, spectacular Pietra Lentina, in magnificent granite, the largest find in the whole of Lombardy, deserves to be admired from all sides.

From Piano Rancio, it is also possible, and entirely advisable, to continue your hike to Bocchetta di Spessola. Following the Via all'Alpe, on your left you will come across signs that lead first through a beautiful beech wood and then across meadows to the saddle, which has a very panoramic view over much of the Triangolo Lariano. From here, a final effort will take you to the modest but even more scenic peak of Monte Ponciv, partly unfortunately occupied by a repeater, now near the ridge of Monte San Primo.



On the highest summit in the Triangolo Lariano



Technical data

Start: Rifugio Alpetto di Torno, 1135 m
 Finish: Monte San Primo, 1686 m
 Elevation gain: 550 m
 Duration: 2 h (one way)
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Alpetto di Torno

Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Alpetto di Torno is located near Pian del Tivano, a large plain in the heart of the Triangolo Lariano between the Bolettone-Palanzone ridge and Monte San Primo. A stage point on the path linking Como and Bellagio, this welcoming, recently renovated structure serves as a base for walks and hikes in all seasons. The nearby Sormano Astronomical Observatory, managed by the Gruppo Astrofili Brianza (Brianza Astronomy Group), is open to visitors at different times of year, and in addition to observing the sky, both at night and during the day, it also organises popular activities and guided tours.



Access to the refuge

The refuge can be reached by car from Asso and then Pian del Tivano, via Sormano, or from Nesso, between Como and Bellagio.

Pian del Tivano can also be reached by public transport, but only in certain seasons, by bus from Nesso. From the bus stop, you can reach the refuge in about 40 minutes on foot, following the road from the old, now decommissioned ski lifts. There are also trails from Sormano, Barni and Magreglio.



1135 m



24



0 h



YES



50



YES



YES

Rifugio Alpetto di Torno

Access: Pian del Tivano

Telephone: 031.672000

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/alpetto-di-torno

Excursions

One of the shortest and easiest routes to Monte San Primo starts at Rifugio Alpetto di Torno and it mostly follows a wide cart track. Halfway up the slope through meadows and pastures, you cross a secondary valley and climb up Valle di Torno. You then reach a wide dirt road that takes you up to Alpe Spessola and, in a generous semicircle on the southern slope of Monte Ponciv, it will lead you to the Terrabiotta saddle (1435 m), where there are the remains of an old ski lift. From the saddle, take the long ridge of Monte San Primo. The very wide main route keeps to the southern slope, while another, much more enjoyable and scenic, track stays on the ridge, going uphill and down before it rejoins the main path just below the peak (1686 m). Due to the gentleness of this route, it can normally also be used in snow, provided there are no particular avalanche hazards forecasted. As this is nor-

mally a well-trodden route even in the winter season, it can also be hiked using snowshoes. With ice and hard snow, crampons may prove useful.





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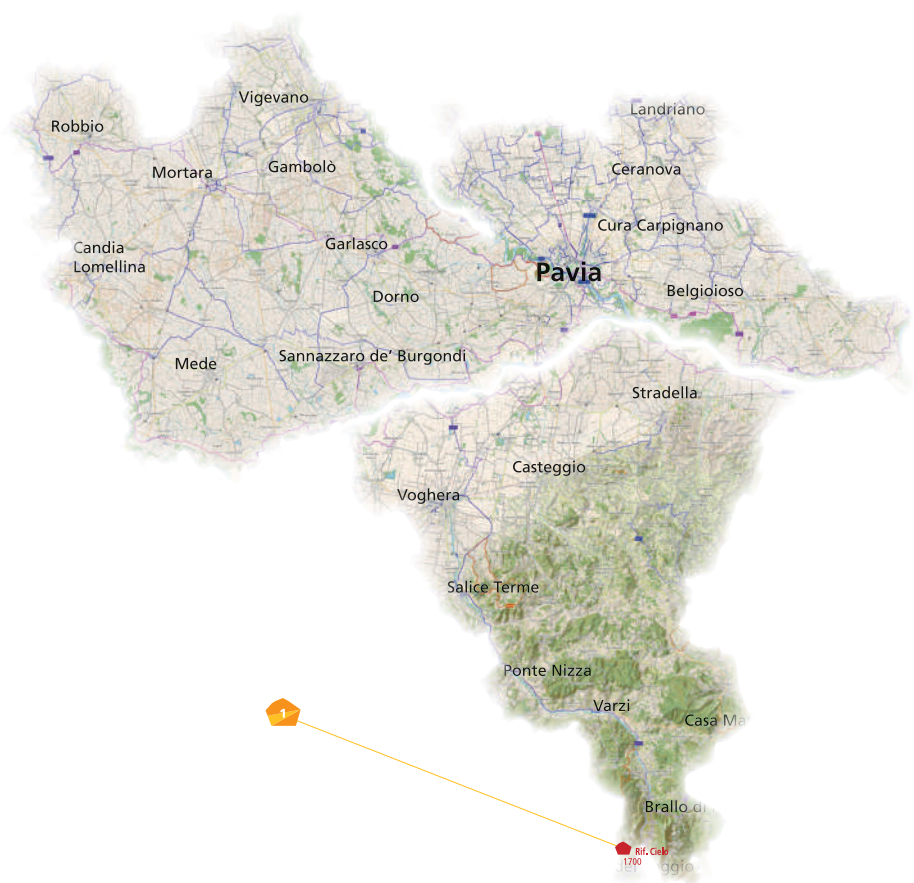


1. CIELO
Pian del Poggio - pag. 66

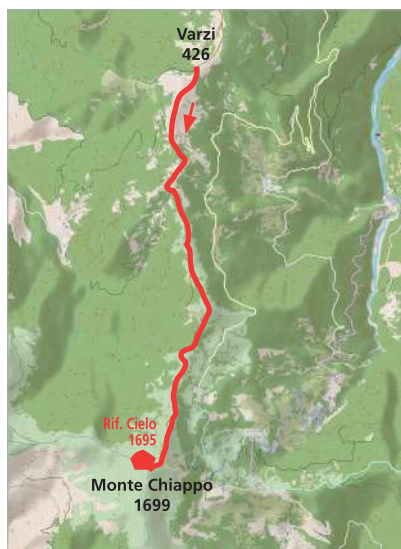
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pavia

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With sea views



Sights worth seeing

Rifugio Cielo stands just a few metres below the summit of Monte Chiappo, in the Pavia Apennines, on the border with Piedmont and Emilia. Reachable on foot or by chair lift, the surrounding area lends itself to hiking or snowshoeing for much of the year thanks to the gentle contours of the landscape. The vast panorama from the summit alone makes it worth a visit!

Access to the refuge

From the Lombardy side, take the A7 motorway as far as Casei Gerola; then continue to

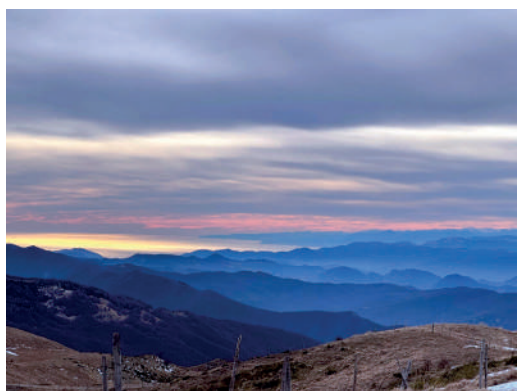


Technical data

Start: Varzi 426 m
Finish: Monte Chiappo, 1699 m
Elevation gain: 1550 m
Duration: 6 h 30 min
Difficulty: E
Recommended period: all year round
Reference mountain refuge: Rifugio Cielo

Voghera and Varzi. You can also reach Varzi by public transport (train to Voghera, then bus).

From Varzi, the starting point for the hike described below, which follows the first stage of



1695 m	4	0:50 h	YES	40	YES	NO

Rifugio Cielo

Access: Pian del Poggio (Santa Margherita di Staffera)

Telephone: 351.796 5973

Complete info on website:

rifugi.lombardia.it/cielo

the Via del Sale, you can continue by car to Pian del Poggio and reach the refuge by chair lift (check when the lifts are open) or on foot (1 h 10 min walk, with an elevation gain of 50 m). The refuge can also be reached from the Piedmont side: take the A7 motorway to Serravalle Scrivia, then to Viguzzolo and drive up Val Curone to Bruggi. From here, after parking near the cemetery, a good path goes up to the summit and the refuge with an elevation gain of 700 m and a 2 h 30 min walk. Again from the Piedmont side, an even shorter route is from Capanne di Cosola (50 min).

Excursions

To reach the refuge, the first stage of the 'Via del Sale' is without doubt the longest and most difficult route, but also the most fascinating and rewarding in terms of views. It goes through woods, farmed fields and tiny villages until it reaches the panoramic border ridges in a succession of isolated green landscapes. From Varzi, having crossed the

Staffora River, you walk up through the vegetation to the small, practically uninhabited village of Monteforte (697 m) and from here to the village of Castellarò (760 m). You then continue through beautiful beech woods to the stopping point of Pian della Mora (1380 m) and, in an increasingly open and grassy environment, to Monte Bogleglio (1491 m). After a few up and downhill stretches, passing the spartan Bivacco Laguione (1365 m) and Colle della Seppa (1481 m), the itinerary takes in the rounded peaks of Monte Garavè (1547 m), Monte Rotondo (1568 m) and finally the refuge and summit of Monte Chiappo. The route is marked with trail signs 02 up to Monte Rotondo.





FROM VARZI TO PORTOFINO, ALONG THE “SALT ROAD”

Since antiquity, various routes throughout Italy were used to transport sea salt, a key element in the preservation of many foods, inland from the coast. Many of these valuable trade routes from the past have become today's popular hiking routes, offering countless points of historical and scenic interest.

The 'Via del Sale' (Salt Road), which connects Varzi to Liguria in three or four days' walking, is one of the most fascinating routes of this kind. This strip of the Apennines encompasses areas with a completely different climate, vegetation, history and traditions, and this tiny piece of land that however straddles four regions, features hills, mountains and the sea with a truly extraordinary variety of landscapes. Thanks to its modest altitude, this itinerary is practicable for most of the year, with the exception of the periods (increasingly shorter, at least in recent years) when snow covers the ridges included in the first two stages. The hike proposed here to Monte Chiappo, rather strenuous and involving a considerable elevation gain, constitutes the first stage, which is also the Lombardy section, of the Via del Sale. The other stages involve smaller

elevation gains, but the length of the route (each stage exceeds 20 km and takes at least 8 hours) makes it an itinerary reserved for very fit hikers. The presence of numerous hamlets and support points does however allow you to split the hike into more stages and make easier, with various detours possible to peaks, hamlets, sanctuaries and other places worth



visiting, just off the main route.

In general, this route is characterised by gently rolling landscapes, a mood of fields and abandoned hamlets and the silence of the great forests. Some of the villages are however very charming and it is hard to imagine their past importance, attested by many historical remains from different eras. Your arrival at the sea, of which a good part of the route offers extraordinary views, is of course the crowning glory of this hike, but also, inevitably, a kind of abrupt transition from the tranquillity of the Apennines to the 'cosmopolitan' atmosphere of the resorts on Italy's eastern riviera. The traditional route of the 'Via del Sale' has four stages:

1. Varzi to Monte Chiappo, with a possible further continuation to Capanne di Cosola;
2. via Monte Carmo and Monte Antola to the hamlet of Torriglia;
3. via the ridges to Colle Caprile;
4. Colle Caprile to Portofino.

Some variants bring you to the sea in just three stages, with different final destinations (Sori, Recco and other towns on the coast), but Portofino is decidedly the best epilogue possible for this itinerary.



The Monte Lesima loop, the mountain in the legend



Technical data

Start and finish: Piani di Lesima, 1180 m
 Maximum altitude: Monte Lesima, 1724 m
 Elevation gain: 600 m
 Duration: 4 h 30 min
 Difficulty: E
 Recommended period: all year round
 Support points: Sport Hotel Prodongo and Agriturismo Via del Sale at Piani del Lesima

Sights worth seeing

At 1724 m, Monte Lesima is the highest peak in the Pavia Apennines and, consequently, also one of the best viewpoints in these mountains. Precisely with the aim of getting a good visual and find his bearings, Hannibal decided

to ride up the peak on horseback, but fell and injured his hand, leading to the name of the mountain, mons lesae manu, "the mountain of the wounded hand". This is an appealing but unfounded legend, although the great leader might indeed have passed at least nearby, in Val Boreca, as some toponyms still under studied would seem to suggest.

Access





From Varzi, which can be reached as explained in the previous chapter, drive up to Passo del Brallo and then continue to Corbessassi and Piani del Lesima.

Excursions

From Piani di Lesima, a little dirt road through the wood takes you across the slope to Passo La Colla (1356 m) and then trail no. 101 stays more or less on the long southern ridge of Monte Lesima. After the ups and downs past the modest peaks of Monte La Colla, Monte

Terme and Monte Tartago, the trail comes out on the access road to the dome of the radar installation that has infamously characterised the summit for some years now. Carry on past the installation and soon after you will come to the cross on the summit. Having admired the views, you start back down on trail no. 123, which offers unusual views of Rocca del Lupo, the most beautiful rocky part of the Lesima, as it drops into the wood. At an altitude of 1461 m, near a fork in the road, leave trail no. 123 for Zerba and follow a wide path that leads uphill and down to a tarmac road back to the Piani.



The Monte Vallassa archaeological site with caves, walls and ravines



Technical data

Start and finish: San Ponzo Semola, 300 m

Maximum altitude: Monte Vallassa, 756 m

Elevation gain: 550 m

Duration: 4 h 30 min

Difficulty: E - especially on the ridge, care must be taken with the signage in some parts, but it is however a fairly intuitive route

Recommended period: all year round

Support points: there are bars and restaurants in the valley bottom at Ponte Nizza, an inn at San Ponzo Semola, and Agriturismo Guardamonte, already in Piedmont, is situated not far from the summit of Monte Vallassa

Sights worth seeing

On the border between Piedmont and Lombardy, scenic Monte Vallassa is a tiny treasure chest. At the top there is a very important archaeological site with the remains of settlements from different eras spanning from neolithic to Roman times, with proof of the passage of the ancient Ligurians and the Etruscans. No less interesting are the slopes of the mountain, covered in woods of chestnut, oak and hornbeam trees, where rocks stand

out (rich in fossils), unusual ravines and the popular Grotte di San Ponzo caves, linked to the figure of the saint who spent part of his life as a hermit here. Several nature trails evidence the most relevant geological, paleontological and floristic aspects of this area, while a new trail allows you to visit what remains of the ancient fortified walls that surrounded the peak, the so-called Castelli di Guardamonte. With its historic buildings, the tiny hamlet of San Ponzo Semola is on its own worth a visit.





Access

Following the explanations given in the chapter on Rifugio Cielo, walk up Valle Staffora towards Varzi, but just after Ponte Nizza take the turnoff on the right for the little hamlet of San Ponzo Semola.

Excursions

From San Ponzo Semola, tiny trail no. 07 rises gently to the bridge over the River Semola at an altitude of 340 m. After a few hairpins on a dirt road through the wood, you will come to a clearing from where a short detour leads to the two characteristic caves of San Ponzo. A lovely little shrine is set into the larger of the two, while the other, more austere, is home to the rocks that were used as a bed by the hermit himself. To get here, follow the easy, very short handrailed path over the difficult rocky part. Back in the clearing, continue to follow trail no. 07 and you will come to a three-way junction. Leave trail no. 195 on your right and follow the left-hand trail up to the ridge of Monte Vallassa. The route is fairly intuitive up through loose rock, copses and grassy terraces until you come to a repeater and, finally, the cross at the summit. A highly recommended short detour takes you to the edge of the rocky south wall, interrupted by a characteristic ledge. From the top, continuing



along the ridge or going down the slope on the Piedmont side, you will end up on trail no. 103, which goes uphill and down and finally arrives at a cross and the astronomic observatory of Cà del Monte (691 m). Now follow the tarmac road towards the tiny hamlet of Serra del Monte, but just before you get there take trail no. 194, not always easy to spot, that covers a lengthy traverse of the northern slope of Monte Vallassa and then takes you through the valley of the River Semola, with some lovely views into ravines. Just below the caves of San Ponzo, the trail meets up with your outward one, which will bring you, after a short downhill stretch, back to the village of San Ponzo Semola.



On the Monte Alpe ridge

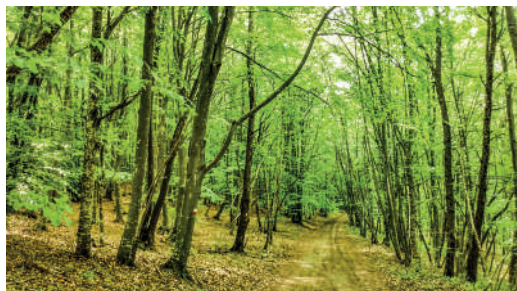


Technical data

Start and finish: Casa Matti, 971 m
Maximum altitude: Monte Alpe, 1248 m
Elevation gain: 300 m
Duration: 2 h 45 min
Difficulty: E
Recommended period: all year round
Support points: Bar Hotel Restaurant Penice in Casa Matti

Sights worth seeing

The Monte Alpe Nature Reserve protects a valuable area on the Pavia Apennine, where the hills become mountains, not far from Monte Penice and Val Tidone in the province of Piacenza. Most of this area is covered in a large exciting black pine forest, planted in



the thirties to stop landslides and washouts. After past attempts to preserve this forest as best possible, even including the introduction of numerous populations of red wood ant (a tireless antagonist of the parasites of these trees, especially the pine processionary), today a gradual return to the original woodland is being adopted. Beech, ash, oak and hornbeam trees are therefore being planted, which also favour the return of autochthonous animals. At the same time, the black pine is being joined by white and Scots pines, with the intention of expanding the variety of conifers present and promoting the continuation of the valuable work done by the red wood ant. To give visitors a better awareness and appreciation of these environments, paths and teaching trails have been introduced, as well as a visitor centre in the village of Menconico.

Access

From Varzi (see chapter on Refuge Cielo), drive along the provincial road for Monte Penice until you come to Passo delle Tre Strade, from here down towards Romagnese until you come to the tiny hamlet.

Excursions

From Casa Matti, follow the road up to Passo delle Tre Strade for a short stretch, until you pick up, on the right, trail no. 18 that goes through the woods high up on the northern slope of the reserve, over the Rio dei Novelli. Once you get to the wide ridge, you will come to the Strada dell'Alpe cart track, trail sign 01, which you follow eastwards. Easy and characterised by vast panoramas over the entire Pavia and Piacenza Apennines, this wide trail, also possible in snow, will bring you without any problem to Passo delle Tre Strade (1101 m), not far from famous Monte Penice and the border with the province of Piacenza. From the pass, pick up the trail and, staying to the right of the tarmac road down to Casa Matti,

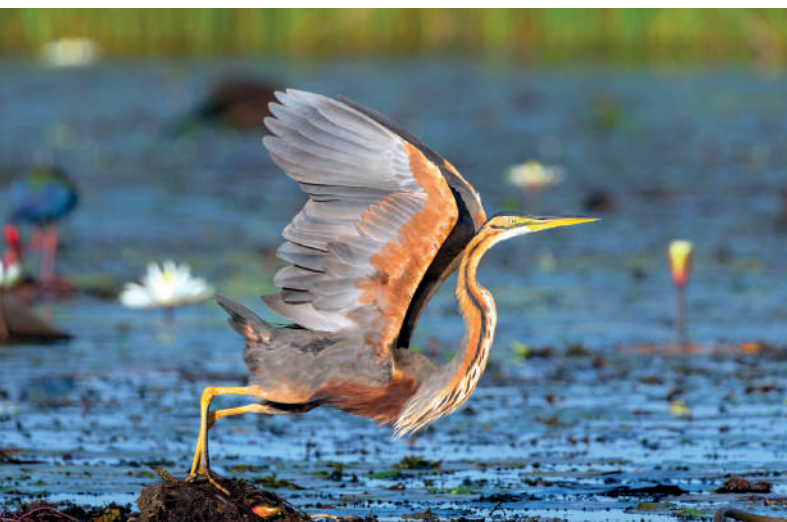
you will soon be in the village.

This fairly short itinerary offers a good many detours that will give you a better idea of this nature reserve.

From the point where trail no. 18 reaches the Strada dell'Alpe, for example, you can prolong your hike and, still following trail signs 18, walk along the Castelvecchio ridge to the pleasant summit of Monte Calenzone (1150 m), overlooking the hamlets of Zavattarello and Romagnese. This variant takes about 1 h 30 min there and back, and you retrace your steps for the return journey.

Along the ridge, you will also meet signposted forks for some short, themed routes that wind cross the southern slope of the mountain and can be combined as liked, usually quite easily. Finally, the short uphill stretch to the modest summit of Monte Alpe is also recommended, the highest point in this area and the perfect way to crown the hike proposed here.





Explore the province of Pavia and its mountain refuges

www.rifugi.lombardia.it



The Lombardy Hiking Network (REL)

Who looks after the trails in Lombardy?

A trail that can be hiked without any problems, well signposted and in good condition is the result of the complex efforts of professionals and volunteers who monitor, plan and carry out small- and large-scale maintenance work, which often goes unnoticed by hikers themselves.

In order to organise all this and “keep a finger on the pulse” of the situation in a hiking area as vast as Lombardy, the first requisite is an official list of trails that must of course be kept up to date. This is the responsibility of the ‘Rete Escursionistica della Lombardia’ (REL), the Lombardy hiking network, established in 2017 with the aim of:

- promoting knowledge of the environmental, landscape and historical-cultural heritage of our region;
- developing the attractiveness of rural areas in the plains, hills and mountains;
- enhancing hiking and mountaineering activities;
- disseminating eco-friendly forms of tourism;
- maintaining the full usability of the trail network through funding for maintenance work.

The trails in the REL are archived and organised in the “Catasto regionale della Rete Escursionistica della Lombardia”, the computerised regional register of the Lombardy hiking network, a tool that provides information about the condition of the trails, their classification and monitoring. Trails are proposed by the territorially competent bodies (management bodies of protected areas, mountain communities, municipalities) and included if they have at





least one of the following characteristics:

- they are included in the regional protected areas, Natura 2000 Network sites, local parks of supra-municipal interest (PLIS), the Lombardy portion of the Stelvio Park or in the territories that are part of the agro-forestry heritage of the Lombardy Region (regional property managed by ERSAF – the Regional Agency for Services to Agriculture and Forestry)
- they are of historical-cultural, religious, sporting or landscape-environmental interest
- they are functional for the realisation of the network system of routes.

To date, about 13,000 km of trails of all kinds through mountains, hills and plains, from tourist trails (T) to those for expert hikers with equipment (EEA), plus the vie ferrate (fixed-rope routes), sport-climbing crags, paths, and historical routes. The levels of difficulty are validated by the Collegio delle Guide Alpine (Board of Alpine Guides), while the routes shown on maps are verified to guarantee the smallest margin of error of no more than 10 metres. This tool is constantly updated with the inclusion of new trails because many organisations, realising the importance of the trail network for tourism, are requesting their inclusion, in this way increasing the information available to users. The register is in fact designed with a strong management vocation, constituting a working tool for the bodies responsible for planning and carrying out trail maintenance: the register is therefore an indispensable tool for managing the complex system of the network of trails in Lombardy.

However the register is not only useful for those in charge of maintenance as it can be consulted by anyone who wants information and documentation, and is available for download thanks to two mapping services by the regional Geoportal:

Viewer 2D

www.cartografia.servizirl.it/rel/

Viewer 3D

www.cartografia.servizirl.it/rel3d/



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