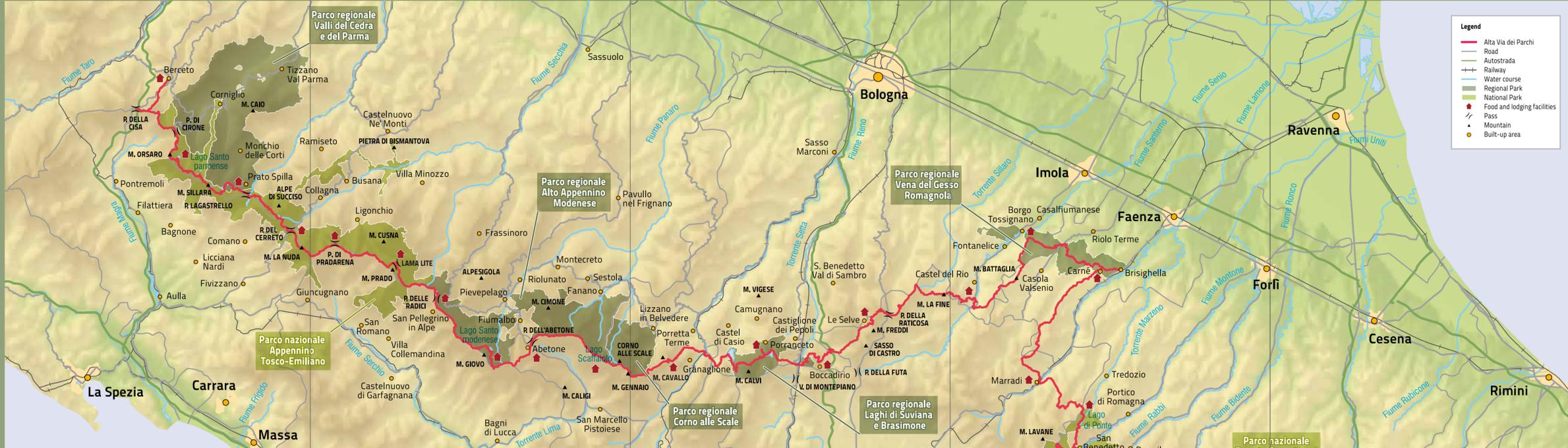


# THE ALTA VIA DEI PARCHI

A LONG HIKE IN THE NORTHERN APENNINES



**Legend**

- Alta Via dei Parchi
- Road
- Autostrada
- Railway
- Water course
- Regional Park
- National Park
- Food and lodging facilities
- Pass
- Mountain
- Built-up area

**THE PATH**  
A fantastic journey through the northern Apennines, a sequence of distant horizons and boundless vistas, an immersion in today's Apennines, the discovery of sensations and emotions one might have otherwise thought forever lost: the Alta Via dei Parchi is all of this and much more. The trail takes in all the best the Apennine mountains can offer: from Berteceto, near the Cisa Pass, to the cliffs of La Verna, stretched over the Casentino (with a detour you can reach Mount Carpegna, in the park of Sasso Simone e Simoncello) the path stretches out for about 500 km of ascents and descents which connect two national parks, one interregional park and five regional parks. The Alta Via allows a direct contact with the different environments that compose the varied Apennine landscape: glacial

cirques, lakes surrounded by the splendor of high altitude grasslands, endless forests and clear streams, volcanic rocks and gypsum cliffs. All of this can be experienced in serenity at a walking pace. The wealth of naturalistic and environmental wonders is matched by the rich historic stratification left by the passing centuries: old streets and hump-backed bridges, archaic place-names, monasteries, abbeys and hermitages. There are also the humble traces left by centuries of rural life in the harsh mountain environment, such as ruins of houses and stables, shelters for lumberjacks and shepherds, coal yards, century-old chestnut woods, and the remains of terracing. All this contributes to "make" today's Apennines, which we are observing during a very peculiar time in history. After exerting enormous pressure on

the environment for centuries, the traditional mountain economy disappeared in a matter of a couple generations; vast areas became uninhabited and free to follow their natural evolution, towards more mature and complex environmental forms. Meanwhile, the creation of a wide network of protected areas has helped encourage and guide this process, giving a substantial form to the modern feeling for environmental issues.

The Alta Via is divided into 27 stages, which end in locations equipped with facilities where one can spend the night and have dinner (refuges, hostels, guesthouses, cottages, etc.). Many facilities are open only during the summer; prior inquiry is always advisable, in order to gather all the necessary information about the facilities' availability

(Info: <http://ambiente.regione.emilia-romagna.it/parchi-natura2000/altavia>).

**THE ENVIRONMENT**  
Two thirds of the Alta Via path follow the northern Apennine ridge, through natural environments of rare beauty. The upper parts of the Emilia ridge clearly show glacial sculpting and are rich in lakes, vast grasslands and blueberry moors. Lower down the forest thickly stretches over both sides; beech trees prevail almost everywhere above 800 metres, but there also are fir woods; the Casentino Forests retain some of the most beautiful groves in Italy, including the ancient mixed forest of Sasso Fratino. In the mid-mountain the natural vegetation is rapidly reclaiming lands which used to be worked by man. In the hills of Romagna the unique microcosm of the Vena del

Gesso stands out: among its very different habitats the rocky southern cliffs are undoubtedly the most striking. Mediterranean species which adjusted to dryness and extreme isolation flourish in this area, whereas the high Apennines climatic conditions have allowed the survival of plants and animals which are relicts of the ice age.

**THE PARKS**  
The Alta Via route crosses two national parks, one interregional park and five regional parks. All but one, the "Vena del Gesso Romagnola" park, which is in a hilly location, are located along the Apennine ridge. We will look at the parks from West to East. The "Parco nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano" extends from the Parma area to most of the high mountains of Reggio. Next is the "Parco regionale

della Vena del Gesso Romagnola", which includes part of the valleys having the same name and is joined to the previously mentioned park. Following this is the "Parco regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese" and the "Parco regionale del Corno alle Scale", which embrace the eastern side of the Emilia ridge. In the Bologna mid-mountain we find the "Parco regionale dei Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone", whereas the "Parco regionale della Vena del Gesso romagnola" protects an extraordinary outcrop of chalky rocks. Finally, the "Parco nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna" envelops the Tuscany-Romagna ridge with an unbroken mantle of forests, while the "Parco interregionale del Sasso Simone e Simoncello" protects valuable habitats among which one of Europe's largest forests of Turkey oaks.

of the Valli del Cedra e del Parma", which includes part of the valleys having the same name and is joined to the previously mentioned park. Following this is the "Parco regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese" and the "Parco regionale del Corno alle Scale", which embrace the eastern side of the Emilia ridge. In the Bologna mid-mountain we find the "Parco regionale dei Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone", whereas the "Parco regionale della Vena del Gesso romagnola" protects an extraordinary outcrop of chalky rocks. Finally, the "Parco nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna" envelops the Tuscany-Romagna ridge with an unbroken mantle of forests, while the "Parco interregionale del Sasso Simone e Simoncello" protects valuable habitats among which one of Europe's largest forests of Turkey oaks.

of the Valli del Cedra e del Parma", which includes part of the valleys having the same name and is joined to the previously mentioned park. Following this is the "Parco regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese" and the "Parco regionale del Corno alle Scale", which embrace the eastern side of the Emilia ridge. In the Bologna mid-mountain we find the "Parco regionale dei Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone", whereas the "Parco regionale della Vena del Gesso romagnola" protects an extraordinary outcrop of chalky rocks. Finally, the "Parco nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna" envelops the Tuscany-Romagna ridge with an unbroken mantle of forests, while the "Parco interregionale del Sasso Simone e Simoncello" protects valuable habitats among which one of Europe's largest forests of Turkey oaks.



**Editorial coordination**  
Regione Emilia-Romagna  
Assessorato Ambiente e Riqualificazione urbana  
Servizio Parchi e Risorse forestali  
Viale della Fiera 8 - 40127 Bologna  
Tel. + 39 051 5276080  
Fax + 39 051 5276957  
segrprn@regione.emilia-romagna.it  
<http://ambiente.regione.emilia-romagna.it/parchi-natura2000/altavia>

**Edited by**  
Enzo Valbonesi, Monica Palazzini, Antonella Lizzani and Maria Vittoria Biondi

**Texts**  
Mario Vianelli  
Stages 25, 26 and 27 were written by Sandro Bassi

**Translation**  
Russell Bekins and Silvia Rambaldi

**Photographs**  
All photographs are by Mario Vianelli, except the following:  
the cover photo is by Antonio Iannibelli  
photo credits for stages 25,26,27: Claudia Urbinati and Parco Sassi Simone e Simoncello Photo Archive

**Maps**  
Archivio cartografico Regione Emilia-Romagna - Map Service cartografia e archivi S.r.l.

**General chorography graphic processing:** Francesca Palladini - StudioIndici

**Contributors**  
trails data bank  
Servizio geologico, sismico e dei suoli - Regione Emilia-Romagna: Roberto Bertozzi and CAI Regional Group Emilia-Romagna  
Protected Nature Areas data bank  
Servizio Parchi e risorse forestali - Regione Emilia-Romagna: Marco Pattuelli

**Contributing Parks' management Authorities**  
Parco nazionale Tosco - Emiliano: Valerio Fioravanti, Francesca Moretti, Giuseppe Vignali  
Parco regionale Valli del Cedra e del Parma: Marco Rossi, Barbara Vernizzi  
Parco regionale Alto Appennino modenese: Leonardo Bartoli  
Parco regionale Corno alle Scale: Agostino Barbieri, Elisa Guarino  
Parco regionale Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone: Lucia Bolognesi, Antonella Galli  
Parco regionale Vena del Gesso Romagnola: Luca Catani, Massimiliano Costa, Emanuela Naldi  
Parco nazionale Foreste Casentinesi: Nevio Agostini, Alessandro Fani  
Parco interregionale Sasso Simone e Simoncello: Antonio Santese

**Graphic design and layout**  
Francesca Palladini - StudioIndici  
Largo Ghibellini 17, Pavullo (Mo)  
[www.studioundici.net](http://www.studioundici.net)

**Printed by**  
Tipolitografia FG  
August 2012

**1**  
**BERCETO (808 m)**  
**LAGO SANTO PARMENSE (1508 m)**  
GRADIENT: +1550 m / -850 m  
HIKING TIME: 9 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano)

*The first leg of the Alta Via is long and demanding, but offers a wide variety of environments, ranging from the agricultural landscape of the mid Apennines to the rugged peaks of the ridge.*

It starts in front of the cathedral of San Moderanno di Berteceto, a place trodden by the footsteps of countless pilgrims; it was the last inhabited outpost before Monte Bardone (now the Cisa Pass) for anyone traveling along the medieval Via Francigena towards Rome. From the village one goes up to the ridge a couple of kilometres east of the Cisa Pass, which is an alternative point of access to the path. By following the corrugated and panoramic ridge one reaches the Cirone Pass, a clear geological and geographical border, where the hard sandstones of the Emilia ridge begin: they will accompany the hike for almost two hundred kilometres. The aerial grasslands of Mount Favola allow some respite, then the ridge rears up the steep climb which leads to the summit of Mount Orsaro (1830 m), an excellent panoramic viewpoint towards Lunigiana. The name of the mountain clearly hints at the bear, an animal extinct in this area since the end of the 1700s. The rocky environment and the vast grasslands are a prelude to the landscapes to be met in the next days. While descending, one first

hikes along the ridge and then through the rocks of the Emilian side. There will be some climbing in order to overcome the obstacles posed by a complex morphology. Through beech forests and reforestation areas one gets to the beautiful marshy basin of Lake Padre, and from there in just a few minutes to the shores of Lake Santo and the historic Mariotti Refuge, which stands in the middle of an area of great natural interest. The crystal clear basin, full of trout and char, is charming, is surrounded by forests, and is dominated by the layered rocks of Mount Sterpara. With a surface area of 81,550 square metres, Lake Santo is the largest natural lake in the northern Apennines. One might arrive here in less than an hour's hike from Lagdei, where a road coming up from Bosco di Corniglio arrives.

**2**  
**LAGO SANTO PARMENSE (1508 m)**  
**PRATO SPILLA (1350 m)**  
GRADIENT: +1480 m / -1640 m  
HIKING TIME: 8:30 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano e Parco Regionale delle Valli del Cedra e del Parma)

*The long stage runs along the entire "Ridge of the Lakes", a charming succession of glacial depressions, rocky ridges, polished slabs and grasslands. The harsh high altitude environment is softened by an extraordinary collection of ponds and by wondrous blooms for most of the summer. From the shores of Lake Santo one goes up to the slopes of Mount Marmagna, where the ridge path starts: it's a very scenic but strenuous route because*

of all the ups and downs. Sharp rocky ridges and very steep channels fall towards the Lunigiana territory, whereas on the Emilian side the slopes are gentler: they descend through hollows and glacial tiers separated by ridges and rocks, up to the vast forests that cover the Val Parma. After skirting the wooded valley of the Riserva Statale di Guadine Pradaccio, established over forty years ago, one can see the Capanne di Badginana, an old barn now used as a bivouac that may be useful in bad weather. Several stretches of water flow further down, below the path: the tiny Lake Bicchiere and, further away, Lake Scuro and the Lagoni, embedded in the beech woods at the foot of the Rocca Pumacciolo. At last one reaches Mount Sillara (1859 m), the highest peak in the Parma area. The nearby Sillara Lakes, just below the ridge, seem to float in the sky. On a clear day the view stretches up to the Ligurian Sea, Corsica and to the Alps, and yet the most impressive is the view below, that of the valley of the Bagnone: a green chasm dotted by lighter spots that are nothing but villages, located nearly one and a half kilometres further down. At Giovarello Pass the descent starts on the Emilian side: one touches the modest Lake Martini, then a steep stone valley leads to the Cagnin bivouac. The descent continues in the forest, grazing Lake Verde and arriving at the dam of Lake Ballano, which in the summer can also be reached via the little road that climbs up from Trefiumi, in Val Cedra. From here one gets to Prato Spilla via an easy walk in the beech forest.

**3**  
**PRATO SPILLA (1350 m)**  
**PASSO DEL CERRETO (1261 m)**  
GRADIENT: +1480 m / -1400 m  
HIKING TIME: 7:30 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano)

*A long hike connects the two lowest passes of the Emilian Apennines, both at 1200 metres above sea level and separated by the big mountainous block of Alpe di Succiso-M. Alto-Punta Buffarano.*

From Prato Spilla one goes up to the basin of Lake Verdarolo, followed by tiny Lake Scuro, which is surrounded by a beech forest, and then by Lake Squincio, more open and flooded with marsh grasses; a short descent from there goes to the Lagastrello Dam, which is an alternative access point to the Alta Via. The damming where the river Enza rises, created the Lake Paduli by submerging the wide saddle of the Lagastrello Pass, which used to be called "Malpasso" and was safeguarded by the Benedictine abbey of Linari. The climb through the woods on the slopes of Mount Acuto leads to the lake of the same name, in a valley overlooking a glacial step; the Città di Sarzana Refuge (1580 m) is located nearby and is open during summer months. A short descent takes to the Ghiaccioni, a beautiful valley full of meadows and springs, the headwaters of the Liocca stream. The valley is dominated by a large glacial cirque surrounded by the jagged ridge of the Groppi di Camporaghena. The ascent through large boulders and grasslands dominated by the bulk of the Alpe di Succiso ends in the narrow cut of the Pietra Tagliata Pass

(1753 m), a harsh environment dominated by the rocks of Mount Alto. From there, a rocky trail quickly leads to the sources of the Secchia river, at the center of a valley well known for its wild beauty. Not too far from the Pianaccio Plateau one reaches the Ospedalaccio Pass, marked by a boundary stone in memory of the borders of the Kingdom of Italy. The pass takes its name from a medieval hospital whose location was found during recent excavations. Cerreto Pass is easily reached hiking through woods and grasslands, with sweeping views of the cirque of Mount La Nuda. The latter will be ascended in the next stage.

**4**  
**PASSO DEL CERRETO (1261 m)**  
**PASSO PRADARENA (1579 m)**  
GRADIENT: +940 m / -620 m  
HIKING TIME: 5 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano)

*Even though the path goes uphill for nearly one kilometre, the stage is restful compared to the previous ones.*

From the road to Cerreto Laghi one goes up towards Mount La Nuda, bristling with rocks and towers among which is the mighty shoulder of the Gendarme. By hiking at first through the wood, strewn with moraine blocks, then along the rough stony ground of the Valle dell'Inferno in a majestic mountain habitat populated by a colony of marmots) one reaches the small Rosario bivouac, near a spring. Going up what is clearly a glacial cirque one arrives at the ridge in the saddle at the foot of Mount La Nuda (1895 m), which is topped by buildings of an old

radio station. The ridge offers sweeping views towards the Garfagnana and the Apuan Alps, by now near, while on the Po Valley side, the unmistakable outline of the Bismantova Stone stands out beyond the forests of the valley of the Riarbero stream, and dominates the mamelons of Triassic evaporates, where fluvial erosion cut the characteristic glistening spires. After the stony grounds of the Borra Grande the path becomes less rough, and it descends to Belfiore Pass through low blueberry heaths dotted with rhododendrons, an alpine plant which grows only in a few locations in the Apennines. The first twisted beeches are the spearhead of the forest that envelops the trail shortly afterwards. At Cavourella Pass, not far away, one meets a comfortable forest path that leads to Pradarena Pass, the highest vehicular pass in the northern Apennines.

**5**  
**PASSO PRADARENA (1579 m)**  
**LAMA LITE (Battisti Refuge, 1761 m)**  
GRADIENT: +740 m / -560 m  
HIKING TIME: 5:30 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano)

*This is the highest stage of the entire journey, always above 1600 metres of altitude and at one point coming close to 2000 metres above sea level.*

From the Pradarena Pass the hike continues along the forest road that touches Comunella Pass, and then runs on the Tuscan side, up to the slopes of Mount Sillano. A path in the forest and then a little trail lead to the top of Mount di Soraggio, an excellent place for taking in a great view: the

wooded valley of Ozola and, towards the Garfagnana, a wild range of landslides at the head of the valley of the Serchio di Soraggio, with the limestone walls of the Ripa that seem to block the stream's flow. After the smashed rocks of Le Porraie, the little San Bartolomeo church announces Romecchio Pass, which in the past used to be of some importance. Next is the Focerella Pass, crossed by a forest road that may be useful in case of bad weather to quickly reach the Bargetana Refuge. The Alta Via, on the other hand, continues on the ridge, going up stony ground and expanses of blueberries to the summit plateau of Mount Castellino (1952 m), the highest point of the path. The view encompasses a vast horizon, where the jagged outline of the Apuan Alps and the nearby imposing bulk of Mount Cusna stand out. Among the boulders of the almost level ridge is the saddle of Mount Prado, where one leaves the ridge to descend rapidly to Lake Bargetana, at the foot of the glacial basin of the same name. Next, one reaches the forest road that goes up the Val d'Ozola and that quickly leads to the wide saddle of Lama Lite. The Battisti Refuge, hidden by a little hill, is located near the pass.

**6**  
**LAMA LITE (Battisti Refuge, 1761 m)**  
**SAN PELLEGRINO IN ALPE (1524 m)**  
GRADIENT: +360 m / -600 m  
HIKING TIME: 5:30 hours  
(Parco Nazionale dell'Appennino Tosco-Emiliano e Parco Regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese)

*This is a short hiking day with low gradients, accompanied by*

unforgettable views of the Apuan Alps. Upon arrival the hiker is greeted by the serene beauty of the ancient hospice of San Pellegrino in Alpe. From Lama Lite the hiker goes back on the ridge, walking along the rocky spurs of Mount Prado, with sweeping views of the upper Dolo valley, covered by the Abetina Reale forests. A gentle climb leads to the wide saddle of Bocca di Massa (1816 m), then the path descends along the scenic ridge that lowers at Forlivi Pass, where it crosses the forest road that goes from Casone di Profecchia to the Abetina Reale sawmill, along the route of an ancient road. A nearby memorial stone recalls the eight partisans killed in action in August 1944. A path halfway up the mountain-side leads to Giovarello Pass; here one leaves the ridge to descend along a paved mule track to the swampy valley of Maccherie, where the portico of a small refuge can provide temporary shelter. Shortly afterwards, one meets the road that climbs from Prati di San Geminiano, retracing the route of the ancient Via Bibulca; in the opposite direction the road quickly leads to Radici pass, which is the main crossing road between Emilia and Garfagnana, and where one can stay overnight if necessary. From the pass one can walk along the asphalt road that leads to San Pellegrino in Alpe, an ancient traveler and pilgrim hospice, less than two kilometres away. Alternatively, one can follow the Tuscan side path, leading to the village through moderate gradients. San Pellegrino is the highest permanently inhabited location in the entire northern Apennines and from up there the view over the Apuan Alps and Garfagnana is striking.

**7**  
**SAN PELLEGRINO IN ALPE (1524 m)**  
**LAGO SANTO MODENESE (1501 m)**  
GRADIENT: +720 m / -700 m  
HIKING TIME: 5:30 hours  
(Parco Regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese)

*This is a beautiful stage moving towards the highest mountains in the Modena area and the renowned tourist destination Lago Santo.*

From San Pellegrino one immediately goes up through the woods along the mule track leading to Giro del Diavolo, a great heap of stones placed by pilgrims near the ridge over the centuries. From there one might take the path arriving from Radici Pass which remains close to the ridge (with many ups and downs), but it is preferable to follow the beautiful forest road that runs almost horizontally on the Tuscan side up to the Bassa del Salterello Pass. Leaving the forest, one goes up Mount Romecchio, followed by Colle delle Vacche, which is the starting point of the aerial route along the Cime di Romecchio's rocky ridge. Looking over the Modena area side one can see beautiful valleys, rich with marshes, where the vast beech forests of the Rio delle Fontanacce predominate, while farther the bizarreophilic outline of Sasso Tignoso stands out. The hike up to Cima dell'Ormo (1858 m) is strenuous but rewarding, thanks to sweeping views. At the next pass, the Colle Bruciata, one leaves the ridge (which steeply rises into Mount Giovo) quickly reaching the great glacial amphitheater of the Fontanacce, strewn with moraine blocks and full of springs. Through the stony ground

of the Campi di Annibale one reaches Boccaia Pass, then a short descent through the woods leads to Lake Santo, dominated by the large northern slope of Mount Giovo, with its series of ledges. On the banks of the lake there are four refuges, very popular in the summertime and on weekends. The road that climbs up the Valle delle Tagliole ends in the parking lot, a quarter of an hour away.

**8**  
**LAGO SANTO MODENESE (1502 m)**  
**ABETONE (La Consoma, 1340 m)**  
GRADIENT: +960 m / -1120 m  
HIKING TIME: 7 hours  
(Parco Regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese)

*Though this is a fascinating stage in terms of environment and landscape, it is a little spoiled by the ski facilities of Val di Luce. In the valley of Sestaione one goes through the most beautiful forest along the Alta Via up to this point.*

From the shores of Lake Santo one follows the easy mule track that quickly climbs to Lake Baccio, at the foot of a wonderful glacial valley over which loom the cliffs of the Altareto's ridge. The high mountain environment accompanies the ascent to the Passetto (1850 m), an aerial incision of the ridge below the top of Mount Rondinaio, which one skis on the Tuscan side, with a few exposed passages. Returning to the ridge, the trail crosses the head of the Valley Tagliole, passing over the tiny Lakes Torbido and Turchino before reaching Foce a Giovo, a pass crossed by the nineteenth century road called



"Strada del Duca", where a small chapel can serve as a temporary shelter. Another crossing halfway up the slope on the Emilian side, leads to Annibale Pass, surmounted by a ruined building. The view opens over the valley of the Rio delle Pozze, renamed Val di Luce. The ski facilities go up to the top of Alpe delle Tre Potenze; the works of man have had a significant effect on the valley. Lake Piatto is located right below a chair lift; shortly afterwards one meets the della Vecchia Pass. It's much better to follow a different route, descending from the pass to the shores of the splendid Lake Nero, where the refuge is always open. The mountainside descent into the Sestazione valley crosses forest habitats of rare and primeval beauty, with gigantic beeches and fir trees, and rocks encrusted with moss and lichens. Now in view of the Val di Lima, one crosses a forest road that comfortably leads to Consuma, a place about one kilometre away from the center of Abetone. The renowned ski and touristic sort is a municipality and is located on the pass of the same name. It was once called Boscolungo, the name of a nearby forest. The road that goes from Modena to Lucca passes through Abetone. It was completed in 1781, then being the first modern carriage road to cross the northern Apennines.

**9** **ABETONE** (La Consuma, 1340 m) **LAGO SCAFFAIOLO** (1754 m) **GRADIENT:** +1440 m / -1030 m **HIKING TIME:** 7 hours (Parco Regionale dell'Alto Appennino Modenese)



Soon after, one descends into the valley of Tramazzo, passing the road that goes up to the hill of the same name, and quickly arriving at the shores of Lake di Ponte, a small reservoir which is placed in a natural context dominated by forests, and is the extreme northern edge of the National Park.

**19** **LAGO DI PONTE** (627 m) **SAN BENEDETTO IN ALPE** (500 m) **GRADIENT:** +440 m / -570 m **HIKING TIME:** 3 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*This very short and restful hike leads to San Benedetto, where there is a Benedictine abbey of the same-name.* From the southern shores of Lake di Ponte one goes uphill to the little valley of the Fosso dei Campacci, right away on a steep ascent through a beautiful mixed forest, where the beeches (which we haven't seen for a week now) soon reappear. After an eroded and scenic ridge one gets to the Tramazzo hill (971 m), where the hike continues on a forest trail that's almost flat. Soon the descent begins along the ridge of the Susinelli which, after the peak of the same name, decreases rapidly towards the valley of the Fosso Acquacheta, first going through groves and pastures and then across open sandstone slabs. Before reaching the road that leads to Peschiera Pass, one meets the path that runs up on the valley to the houses of Poggio at a cross-roads. This is the upper part of the village of San Benedetto in Alpe, with houses huddled around the ancient

Benedictine abbey. From there, a nice paved path leads to the village called Il Mulino, at the confluence of the Troncalosso and Acquacheta ravines, which combine into the river Montone.

**20** **SAN BENEDETTO IN ALPE** (500 m) **CASTAGNO D'ANDREA** (727 m) **GRADIENT:** +1130 m / -900 m **HIKING TIME:** 7 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*The first part of the stage is the very popular stroll leading to the Acquacheta.* Starting from the first sharp turn of the road to Marradi, one follows the easy path that goes up the valley of the Fosso dell'Acquacheta offering beautiful views of the stream. After reaching the Molino dei Romiti one gets to the base of the Caduta, the most famous waterfall in the northern Apennines. Shortly afterwards, one crosses the Fosso del Lavane and then goes up to the gorgeous plateau of Romiti, inhabited by a monastic community in the Middle Ages. Beyond the stream one continues until encountering a comfortable forest track that leads to the Crocione (976 m). Here one meets the road that climbs from the Eremo dei Toschi, visible in the lower left. From this point, the hike continues along the semi-flat ridge until Muraglione Pass, an important road pass between Romagna and Mugello. Going down on the Tuscan side, one almost immediately crosses the road to Tre Faggi Pass, then continues amid magnificent chestnut trees, coppice and old

**10** **LAGO SCAFFAIOLO** (1754 m) **MONTE CAVALLO REFUGE** (1280 m) **GRADIENT:** +450 m / -920 m **HIKING TIME:** 5 hours (Parco Regionale del Comno alle Scale)

*The last stage in the Emilian high ridge landscape, this one starts the descent towards the valley of the Reno river and the Bologna area mid-mountains.* From Lake Scaffaiolo one hikes up to the nearby Tre Termini Pass and from there, while remaining at the same altitude, one reaches Strofinatolo Pass (1847 m), crossing the last glacial cirque to be met along the Alta Via. This is the orographic hub where, pointing north, the Corno alle Scale ridge begins. Descending to Cancellino Pass, and traversing the northern slopes of Mount Gennaio, one comes to the Uccelliera spring. Here one leaves the ridge trail (number 00, to bet met again in ten days' journey) skirting along the Poggio delle Ignude, where the Porta Franca Refuge can be reached in a few minutes by making a detour. The Alta Via continues along an easy path that first crosses the upper valley of the river Causso, completely covered with woods, then meets the lovely glades of the Rombicciaio and of Pian dello Stellaio. From there an easy forest road leads to the wide wooded saddle of Tre Croci Pass, a few minutes' walk from the Monte Cavallo Refuge.

**11** **MONTE CAVALLO REFUGE** (1280 m) **PORANCETO** (890 m) **GRADIENT:** +1260 m / -1650 m



abandoned fields. Leaving the path that leads to San Godenzo the hike descends steeply to the bottom of the valley, skirting the stream for a while, before ascending near the restored village of Serignana. After the cemetery of Castagno d'Andrea one arrives in a few minutes in the village, birthplace of the painter Andrea del Castagno and popular holiday resort at the foot of Mount Falterona.

**21** **CASTAGNO D'ANDREA** (727 m) **CAMPIGNA** (1070 m) **GRADIENT:** +1080 m / -740 m **HIKING TIME:** 6 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*This walk goes over the highest mountains of the Tuscan-Romagnolo Apennines, through expanses of woods that anticipate the forest wealth of the next stages.* From the top of the built-up area of Castagno one goes uphill to the woods, along the trail that cuts through the many swithbacks in the road to the Borbotto Spring. From the spring one continues to rise in the beech forest dotted with boulders, up to the pool of Gorga Nera, then continuing beyond the divide to a forest track that leads to the little spring of Capo d'Arno. The trail continues by crossing the southern slope of Mount Falterona, through woods and swamps, to Lake degli Idoli, a very important archaeological site. Recent works have restored the lake to its original condition of body of water deep in the forest. The

**altitude** **HIKING TIME:** 10 hours (Parco Regionale dei Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone)

*When hiking this longest of the Alta Via stages there is a considerable drop in altitude: it may be better to spend the night in Badi or on the shores of Lake Suviana.*

At the Tre Croci Pass the descent of the steep valley of the Rio Maggiore begins, entirely covered with woods up to where the sandstone rocks end. The slope then becomes softer, and the environment becomes open and dotted with buildings. One soon arrives in Borgo Capanne, then continues the descent into a labyrinth of streets and cart roads leading to Ponte della Venturina (395 m), a populous village at the confluence of rivers Reno and Limentra Sambuca, crossed by the railway line between Pistoia and Porretta. Beyond the Reno river, one goes up towards Pavana along the ridge between the two valleys, then goes down to the dam below. Following this, one begins the ascent of the right side of the valley of Limentra, touching the houses of Poggio di Badi and Campisseri. Shortly afterwards is the descent towards Lake Suviana; once arrived on the lake banks one continues towards the mountain until the end of the basin, and then along the wooded valley of river Limentra di Treppio, until reaching the bridge of Molino dei Sassi. Next is the climb to the church of Stagno, perched on a spur jutting over the valley. Above this is Belvedere, where one continues on the trail to Balignello Pass, taking a short detour to the scenic summit of Mount di Stagno (1213 m). Remaining

in the woods, with rare openings, one reaches the little road that goes from Baigno to Brasimone; then, skirting Mount di Baigno among old abandoned fields, one gets to the buildings of Poranceto, at the edge of an ancient chestnut wood, full of gigantic specimens.

**12** **PORANCETO** (890 m) **BOCCADIRIO** (719 m) **GRADIENT:** +640 / -810 **HIKING TIME:** 5,30 hours (Parco Regionale dei Laghi di Suviana e Brasimone)

*This is a day of walking almost entirely in the woods, with some stretches on minor roads.* From Poranceto there is a brief ascent, then the trail remains high above the Brasimone basin at the edges of meadows offering beautiful views of the lake up to the dam. After crossing it, take the trail coming up from Castiglione dei Pepli. Past the Enea facilities, one encounters Pian Coloré, with a spring surrounded by large beeches. From here the route heads east, down to the valley of the Montecuoco gap. After the houses of Spinareccia, continue along the lake banks one continues towards the mountain until the end of the basin, and then along the wooded valley of river Limentra di Treppio, until reaching the bridge of Molino dei Sassi. Next is the climb to the church of Stagno, perched on a spur jutting over the valley. Above this is Belvedere, where one continues on the trail to Balignello Pass, taking a short detour to the scenic summit of Mount di Stagno (1213 m). Remaining

runs alongside Mount Coroncina, and goes on to the crossing with the road that climbs from Baragazza to Valli, in this manner soon arriving at Valli. From the lower part of the built-up area the trail resolutely enters the woods, skirting the steep northern slopes of Mount Tavianella before descending into the small but rough valley where the Rio Davena rises. Shortly afterwards, at the confluence of two streams, one finds the vast complex of the Marian Sanctuary of Boccadriro, which was built on the site of an apparition that occurred in 1480.

**13** **BOCCADIRIO** (719 m) **ALPE DI MONGHIDORO** (1200 m) **GRADIENT:** +720 m / -410 m **HIKING TIME:** 5 hours

*This undemanding stage runs largely in the open landscape of the mid Apennines.*

From the parking lot of the sanctuary one descends into the woods covering the narrow valley of the Rio Davena, until arriving near Roncoblaccio, then continuing the descent to the bottom of the valley of the Rio Gambellato, in recent years quite disrupted by works to modify the route of the pass road. One goes up the opposite side of the valley, passing under the Autostrada del Sole, then continues along the large clay slope, among groves and pastures, until reaching the village of Frate, where one meets the road that goes from Futa Pass to Pian del Voglio. From there it is an easy walk to the Passегgere, a wide saddle of the ridge crossed by what is believed to be the ancient Roman road between Bononia

and Fiesole, still visible in some parts. One then descends through the thick forests of the upper valley of the Savena stream, dominated by the bulk of Mount Freddi which, by the way, is almost always hidden by vegetation. Soon one leaves the valley floor to go up the right side, always remaining in the beech forest, until reaching the buildings of Cà di Barba. From there one climbs to Poggio Turchino Pass, located along the road that connects Castel dell'Alpi with the Futa state road. Continuing to rise in the beech forest, one skirts the slopes of Mount Ogglieto to the right and of the Alpe to the left.

**14** **ALPE DI MONGHIDORO** (1200 m) **LE SELVE** (490 m) **GRADIENT:** +830 m / -1370 m **HIKING TIME:** 8 hours

*This long stage leads to the hills of Romagna, crossing remarkably different environments.*

From the end of the previous stage one goes back on the road that connects Castel dell'Alpi with the Futa state road. Continuing to rise in the beech forest one skirts the slopes of Mount Ogglieto and then descends to Raticosa Pass, along the ancient road between Bologna and Florence that we now see in its nineteenth-century form. From the pass one reaches the above Mount Candà, a good scenic vantage point over the entire Firenzuolo basin and the impressive clay landscape towards which we are heading. The route now keeps on the wide ridge between the valleys of the Idice stream and the Santerno river, dotted



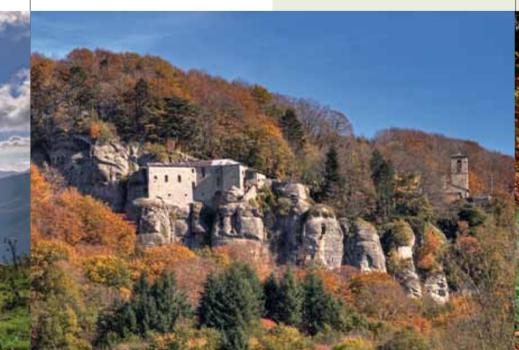
**HIKING TIME:** 8,30 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*This is a long stage that leaves the ridge heading south in the direction of Mount Penna, clearly visible from the beginning of the hike. One can shorten the hike going directly to Mandrioli Pass and avoiding the detour to Frassineta.*

From the Carbonile, one follows the road towards Mandrioli Pass for a few hundred metres, then turns left towards Lupatti Pass; from there one reaches Mandrioli Pass by going along the ridge. From the pass one goes on a rocky mule track that heads east, until skirting Mount Zucherdonate on the Tuscan side. Shortly thereafter, one meets the path that descends from Serra Pass, a mountain pass crossed by a mule track which for centuries was an important route between Romagna and Central Italy. In a landscape now more open, one follows the route of the ancient road towards Vallesanta, the valley of Corsalone stream dominated by the outline of Mount Penna. Touching first the houses of Serra and then those of Corezzo, one descends to the valley floor of the Corsalone, then goes uphill on the opposite side of the valley to Frassineta, which is in a nice, panoramic location. Shortly afterwards one goes back down to the valley bottom at Rimbochi, a place that may be reached directly from Serra, this way avoiding a great deal of difference in height. One follows the road to Chiusi for just a short distance, then crosses the stream and goes up to Casalino. Afterwards, a steep climb leads to the ridge above and then from there

**23** **CAMALDOLI** (815 m) **BADIA PRATAGLIA** (l Carbonile, 970 m) **GRADIENT:** +920 m / -770 m **HIKING TIME:** 5 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

**24** **BADIA PRATAGLIA** (l Carbonile, 970 m) **LA VERNA** (1128 m) **GRADIENT:** +1280 m / -1120 m



it passes the road that circumnavigates Mount Penna. One soon reaches the foot of the cliffs, hiking through ancient landslides shrouded by forest, until arriving at the base of the cliff of Precipizio; the buildings of La Verna appear on its top. Once through the gate, the hiker meets the old cobbled path that climbs from La Beccia, the main pedestrian access to the monastic citadel. Along this road St. Francis climbed the mountain for the first time nearly eight centuries ago, greeted by a flock of birds in celebration.

**25** **LA VERNA** (1128 m) **BIANCANEVE AL FUMAIOLO REFUGE** (1349 m) **GRADIENT:** +950 m / -700 m **HIKING TIME:** 9 hours (Parco nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*This is a long but quite fascinating stage, both in terms of forests and of landscape, due to the appearance of more open environments. This stage leads to the Montefeltra area which has become part of the Romagna Region after a referendum that sanctioned the passage of several municipalities from the province of Pesaro to the province of Rimini.* From the Sanctuary of La Verna, one takes the old mule track that branches off from the sharp turn in the road that ascends from Chiusi (trail sign 50). By following an ancient low stone wall, we begin to move away from massive beech trees covering the high ground of Monte Penna. Then from Croce della Calla, we climb towards

prominent peak of the ridge that separates the valleys of the Santerno and the Senio. One continues through moderate ups and downs along the dirt road towards the plain, always keeping near the ridge, among oak groves and sandy stratification culminating in the exceptional scenic vantage point of Mount Battaglia: from there, the Vena del Gesso reveals its full extent. On the top of Mount Battaglia lie the remains of a medieval tower, and also grave-stones and monuments that recall the bloody battles of autumn 1944. The road then descends through reforestation areas to Pruno Pass, where one meets the Strada della Lavanda, hikes on it for a short distance towards Fontanelice, and then turns right onto the wide ridge that bounds the small but charming valley of Rio Sgarba. The descent is a comfortable walk through orchards and vineyards, with stunning views of the gypsum cliffs and of the chestnut wood of Campiuno. Finally, one gets to Tossignano, an ancient village spread over a gypsum cliff and around the ruins of the fortress.

**16** **TOSSIGNANO** (255 m) **CARNE'** (377 m) **GRADIENT:** +1180 m / -1060 m **HIKING TIME:** 8 hours (Parco Regionale della Vena del Gesso)

*It is perhaps the most unique stage of the entire Alta Via, almost entirely hiking along the crest of the Vena del Gesso.*

From the remains of the fortress of Tossignano one first descends to the gorge of Tramosasso, carved by the Rio Sgarba into gypsum, and then

goes up to the foot of the layered cliffs of the Riva San Biagio. At the next saddle the path on the ridge begins, on the extraordinary rocky ground made of translucent gypsum crystals, where the sunny valleys facing south are in sharp environmental contrast with the shadowy chestnut woods covering the slope that faces the plain. After Mount Casino one meets the broad saddle of Cà Budrio, clearly set on a doline, then one continues along the moderate ups and downs of the ridge, until reaching the church of Sasso Letroso. This overlooks the valley of the river Senio, in front of the giant quarry of Mount Tondo. Once down the road in Borgo Rivola, one touches the lowest point of the entire Alta Via route, by hiking the 98 metres of the walkway on the Senio, then one rises again, touching the tiny village of Crivellari and going up the barren slopes of Mount Volpe. From the summit one follows the ridge to the saddle of Cà Faggia, with beautiful views of the blind valley of the Rio Stella, barred by an imposing series of cliffs. One continues on rocky ground, eventually meeting the road that goes up to the panoramic summit of Mount Mauro which is the highest elevation of the Vena at 515 metres. The ancient parish church of S. Maria in Tiberici, recently renovated, is located nearby. The last descent of the day is steep and leads to the bottom of the valley of the Sintria stream, then one goes up again, through orchards, vineyards and groves, until reaching the north entrance of Carne' Park, and from there the buildings of the Visitor Center of the same name. The Carne' can also be reached from Brisighella (train station) in about an hour's walk.



caves. These hollows may be considered modest from the speleological point of view, but they are interesting in terms of the fauna that may find refuge inside them: insects, mollusks and, among vertebrates, Chiroptera and amphibians, including the Fire salamander and the rare Italian cave salamander. However limited, the Buca del Tesoro has fascinated the imagination of mountaineers and woodsmen who, not coincidentally, have created the legend of the same name.

**26** **BIANCANEVE AL FUMAIOLO REFUGE** (1349 m) **BASCIO** (624 m) **GRADIENT:** +400 m / -1100 m **HIKING TIME:** 8,30 hours (Parco interregionale Sasso Simone e Simoncello)

*This is a long stage where problems in finding the path are likely. One might shorten the hike by spending the night in the charming village of Gattara.*

The route is varied and descends to Balze from the ridge of Mount Fumaiolo. It features the evocative detour to the ancient hermitage of Sant'Alberico, along the grand-ducal nineteenth-century "road" (with traces of the original ponderous paving) that linked Balze to Capanne. From Balze, after two short stretches of asphalt road, one goes back on the 00 ridge trail, an earthen track that gets to Poggio Tre Vescovi, once more among the beeches. Approaching Mount Loggio the path becomes less defined, because of the concatenation of several paths which cross vast clearings



**17** **CARNE'** (370 m) **MARRADI** (328 m) **GRADIENT:** +1260 / -1300 **HIKING TIME:** 8 hours

*A long hilly stage, this one mainly keeps on the ridge between the valleys of the Senio and Lamone.*

From the Cà Carne' visitor center one goes uphill to the asphalt road above and then continues along the ridge into the open hilly landscape, dotted with pine trees and the silvery patches of olive groves, passing the road that descends to Fognano, and passing near Torre Pratesi. Shortly afterwards, the asphalt road goes downhill, whereas the Alta Via follows the forest road that skirts Mount Gornetto. It continues with long ups and downs among increasinglly wooded hills, bypasses some hill tops by way of little trails, and finally gets to the buildings of the Cà di Malanca, which have been restored and turned into a Museum of the Resistance. Shortly afterwards the route takes a detour down the wooded valley of Sintria, where one touches the church and buildings of Fontana Moneta before going back up to the ridge. Going on, one passes close to Mount Gamberaldi (828 m), enjoying beautiful views of the village of the same name, and then reaches the fork in the mule track that was for centuries the main link between Palazuolo sul Senio and Marradi. At the junction of Cà Mondara one leaves the ridge to start the descent towards the bottom of the valley of the Lamone, which ends near the railway station in Marradi.



bordered by oaks and maples, on the south side. The place is lonely, scenically vibrant, but it requires careful attention not to miss the trail signs. One must pay maximum attention when on the top of Mount Faggioia where the route bends sharply to the north, with a reversal of almost 180 degrees. The path is to be found in the beech forest below, on the side of a paleo-landslide in the wilderness. With the aid of a map and the trail signs one finds the old trail that goes to Castelletci. One leaves this track shortly afterwards going down to the right and arriving at the picturesque mountain village of Gattara. One can stop there, should one by now be tired (the stage is rather long); otherwise the hiking stage will be completed by going down to the Marecchia valley floor, and then up the opposite side to the picturesque Bascio hill, which has by now been visible for some time because of the medieval tower that dominates it.

**27** **BASCIO** (624 m) **HERMITAGE MADONNA DEL FAGGIO** (1266 m) **GRADIENT:** +800 m (without the detour to the Sassi) / -150 m **HIKING TIME:** 6,30 hours; 7,30 hours (if one passes by Carpegna; the detour to Sassi Simone e Simoncello takes two additional hours (Parco interregionale Sasso Simone e Simoncello)

*This is a powerfully fascinating environment, from the sea of clay outcrops to the ancient forest of oaks and stretches of open meadows. The*

**18** **MARRADI** (328 m) **LAGO DI PONTE** (627 m) **GRADIENT:** +980 / -680 **HIKING TIME:** 6 hours (Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna)

*This easy stage moves towards the Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi.* In Marradi town-centre, one passes beneath an arch and, in front of the Badia del Borgo, starts to go up the ridge. The landscape is typical of the Romagna mid Apennines: narrow valleys between layered ridges, chestnut woods and coppice, ruins of houses and abandoned fields. The route is scenic and later on enters the valley of the Acereta, where the woods thicken, and then goes downhill, reaching the charming Eremo di Gamogna (793 m), founded by St. Peter Damian in the mid-eighteenth century. This complex was recently renovated and includes a nice little Romanesque church with a dome vault belfry and a large building around the cloister. From the little cemetery one goes downhill to the bottom of the valley, touching the Ponte della Valle and going up to the opposite side, until reaching the edifices of Trebbana, another ancient monastic center whose church (which we today see in its eighteenth-century form) is the only surviving part. One of the biggest oaks in Romagna is just a few minutes' walk away. Then, after reaching the ridge between the valleys of the Acerreta and of the Tramazzo, one heads south, bypassing Mount Caibano and touching Mount del Cerro.