

# TREKKING IN THE DOLOMITES



### About the Author

Gillian Price has trekked throughout Asia and the Himalayas, but now lives in Venice and is exploring the mountains and flatter bits of Italy. Starting in the Italian Dolomites, Gillian has written outstanding Cicerone guides to walking all over Italy as well as Corsica and Corfu. An adamant promoter of public transport to minimise environmental impact, Gillian is a member of Mountain Wilderness and in 2009 was elected as a councillor to the Venice branch of the Italian Alpine Club. Check her out at [www.gillianprice.eu](http://www.gillianprice.eu).

### Other Cicerone guides by the author

*Across the Eastern Alps – the E5*  
*Alpine Flowers*

*Gran Paradiso: Alta Via 2*

*Italy's Sibillini National Park*

*Shorter Walks in the Dolomites*

*The Tour of the Bernina*

*Through the Italian Alps – the GTA*

*Trekking in the Apennines*

*Walking in Corsica*

*Walking in Italy's Stelvio*

*National Park*

*Walking in Sicily*

*Walking in the Dolomites*

*Walking in Tuscany*

*Walking in Umbria*

*Walking on the Amalfi Coast*

*Walking the Italian Lakes*

*Walks and Treks in the*

*Maritime Alps*

# TREKKING IN THE DOLOMITES

by Gillian Price

**CICERONE**

2 POLICE SQUARE, MILNTHORPE, CUMBRIA LA7 7PY  
[www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk)

© Gillian Price 2016  
Fourth Edition 2016  
ISBN 978 1 85284 820 0  
Reprinted 2017 (with updates)

Third Edition 2011  
Second Edition 2005 © Martin Collins and Gillian Price  
First Edition 1990 © Martin Collins and Gillian Price

Printed in China on behalf of Latitude Press Ltd.  
A catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.  
All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

### Dedication

*For the one-and-only Nick, joke-teller and map-drawer supreme.  
But he has to share this dedication with dear departed Danilo and Piero,  
generous souls who actively encouraged me to discover these  
magical mountains in my infant alpine years.*

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the walkers who wrote in with  
feedback and comments on the previous edition.

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/820/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/820/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe LA7 7PY, United Kingdom.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

*Front cover:* Amazing views from Sass Pordoi (AV2)



## CONTENTS

---

Legend .....	7
Overview map .....	8

<b>PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
--	----------

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Dolomites .....	11
The Alta Via routes .....	14
Plants and flowers .....	16
Wildlife .....	18
Getting there .....	21
Local transport .....	22
Information .....	25
When to go .....	26
Accommodation .....	26
Food and drink .....	31
What to take .....	32
Maps .....	33
Dos and don'ts .....	35
Emergencies .....	37
Using this guidebook .....	38

<b>ALTA VIA 1 .....</b>	<b>39</b>
-------------------------	-----------

<b>ALTA VIA 2 .....</b>	<b>93</b>
-------------------------	-----------

<b>ALTE VIE 3–6 .....</b>	<b>163</b>
---------------------------	------------

Alta Via 3 .....	164
Alta Via 4 .....	169
Alta Via 5 .....	174
Alta Via 6 .....	179

<b>Appendix A</b> Route summary tables .....	<b>185</b>
--	------------

<b>Appendix B</b> Glossary .....	<b>187</b>
----------------------------------	------------

*Climbing away from Pian dei Cantoni (AV2 Stage 8)*















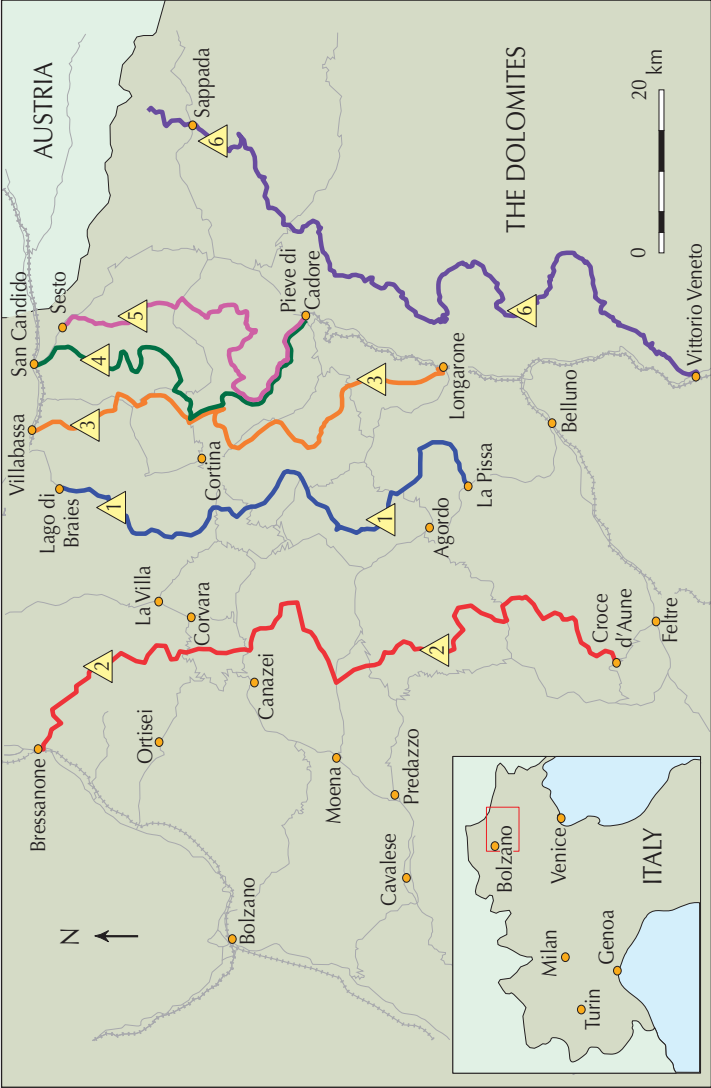
## Warning

Mountain walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, materially affecting the seriousness of a mountain walk. Therefore, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

To call out the Italian Mountain Rescue, ring the emergency number 118: this will connect you via any available network.

## Legend

	sealed road		accommodation & meals
	railway		bivouac hut
	walk route		gondola lift
	walk variant		cable-car
	crest, mountain peak		chair lift
	watercourse		bus
	pass		



## PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

---



*Vast views from Forcella Giau (AV1 Stage 5)*

After a prolonged period tramping around the western Alps and the Mediterranean, it was especially exciting being back in the Dolomites and on the memorable long-distance Alta Via trails. A very first experience back in 1981 on AV1 had been both awe-inspiring and unforgettable – not least because we'd braved a storm and lashing rain equipped with little but bin liners as innovative rainskirts. It was a landmark in our lives and we joined CAI, the Italian Alpine Club, for the occasion. Since then we've been back time and time again, and barely need an excuse to jump on the train north to breathe in more of that Dolomites magnificence. The allure of these magical mountains grows with every visit – and I can also report that comfort levels in the huts have improved.

And the icing on the cake? After steadfast campaigning by concerned environmental groups such as Mountain Wilderness, the Italian Dolomites were finally recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2009.

This new edition has updated descriptions, and the main Alta Via 1 and 2 routes have been divided into manageable stages to make the treks easier to handle and organise. In addition, individual sketch maps have been drawn, while facilities and timing can be rapidly identified thanks to route profiles.

What's more, as well as the well-trodden AV1 and AV2 routes, Alta Via 3, 4, 5, and 6 are presented. Little known and even less walked, they explore wilder ranges of the Dolomites crossing valleys and settlements where tradition runs deep. Solitude and awesome beauty are the name of the game. A great boon for those seeking adventure.

*Gillian Price*

*TREKKING IN THE DOLOMITES*



*Towers on Peralba in the mist (AV6)*

## INTRODUCTION

### THE DOLOMITES

What can visitors to the Dolomites expect? This inspirational early description from John Murray in 1840 helps set the stage:

*They are unlike any other mountains, and are to be seen nowhere else among the Alps. They arrest the attention by the singularity and picturesqueness of their forms, by their sharp peaks or horns, sometimes rising up in pinnacles and obelisks, at others extending in serrated ridges, toothed like the jaw of an alligator.*

Tucked up in the northeastern corner of Italy close to the border with Austria, the magnificent Dolomite mountains are a wonderland for summer walkers. Village resorts with facilities to suit all budgets are linked by good motorable roads and efficient public transport. An excellent web of marked pathways snake over mountain and vale, supported by a network of brilliantly located hospitable *rifugi* mountain huts that welcome walkers, feed them royally and put them up overnight. Nature lovers will be delighted by settings reminiscent of *The Sound of Music*, with vast expanses of sweet alpine meadows

transformed in summer into veritable seas of wild flowers. Magnificent dense evergreen and deciduous forests are widespread, as is plenty of fascinating wildlife.

Rather than a continuous alpine chain, the Dolomites consist of self-contained formations that rise to dizzy heights in soaring peaks, sculpted shapes of delicately pale rock spires and breathtaking sheer walls towering over high altitude lunar-like plateaux where people are dwarfed. In all, it is an extraordinary array of landscapes. Legend has it that the rock surface is covered in fine white gossamer, which shines splendidly in sunshine and assumes gorgeous hues of orange-pink at sundown, a spectacular phenomenon known as 'enrosadira'. It is said that it was woven from moon rays, to help acclimatise a princess bride pining for the lunar landscapes of her homeland.

The *Monti Pallidi* or 'Pale Mounts' as they were originally called, were renamed after French geologist Déodat de Dolomieu. Intrigued as to why they differed from other limestone ranges, he analysed their rock composition after a visit in 1788. He discovered the principal ingredient to be calcium magnesium carbonate (later called dolomite in his honour), conspicuously unlike calcium carbonate or calcite, the more widespread type





of limestone found elsewhere. Some 230 million years ago the region was covered by a shallow tropical sea where marine remains and coral were gradually deposited. This progressively compressed into sedimentary rock, often with intriguing dinosaur tracks, fossilised shells and even ripple marks embedded in it. It wasn't until 65 million years ago that land-moving tectonic events thrust the rock dramatically upwards, leading to the creation of the Alps. Subsequent ice ages and glaciers shaped the mountains, which are subject to ongoing erosion by wind, ice and rain – the vast scree flows are a clear example of this process.

During the First World War, as conflict raged between the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire and fledgling Italy, the Dolomites became a war zone, with battles contesting borders

that ran along high altitude mountain crests. Military mule tracks were constructed to supplement existing tracks trodden by herders and shepherds, and today these tracks form a valuable part of the network of pathways. Remains of fortifications, trenches and tunnels and even the occasional rusty barbed wire and boot sole still lie scattered over mountainsides, poignant reminders of the folly that saw more troops perish under avalanches and from the terrible cold in this harsh environment than in combat.

Hostilities over, the Hapsburg Empire was dismembered, a sizeable portion going to Italy in 1919, accounting for a third of the total area of the Dolomites. Südtirol or Alto Adige with its regional capital Bozen, or Bolzano, is dominated by German language speakers – 70 per cent of



the population. During the Fascist period the inhabitants were given the terrible 'choice' of moving to allied Austria, or changing their names. Every single place name – mountains included – was translated into Italian, and schooling in Italian became compulsory. Curiously, nowadays it is the old farmer folk educated under Mussolini's system who speak better Italian than the young people, who attend segregated parallel German- or Italian-language schools. However, other tongues are still heard. The ancient Rhaeto-Romanic language known as Ladin (pre-dating the Latin brought by the Romans) has survived to this day and is the declared mother tongue of just over four per cent of the inhabitants. Lastly there's an intriguing linguistic pocket in the easternmost

Dolomites town of Sappada where Plodarisch, an old Bavarian-Tyrolean dialect, is spoken.

Adjoining the Italian-speaking Trentino region centred on Trento, the remaining southeastern chunk of the Dolomites comes under the Veneto region, long administered from Venice. Centuries ago during the glorious era of the Serenissima, immense rafts of timber harvested from the republic's carefully nurtured forests were piloted downstream to the lagoon city, for use in foundations and in shipbuilding.

The aftermath of the Second World War saw many of the Dolomite villages dramatically impoverished and there was large-scale emigration overseas. Since then many villages have experienced a tourist boom

*The Pelmo appears after Forcella Giau (AV1 Stage 5)*



encompassing winter skiing, bringing with it an improvement in life style and secure jobs, not to mention crowds, traffic and pollution. Yet the Dolomites still represent a paradise and will hopefully continue to do so with more responsible management as well as environment-conscious walkers.

### THE ALTA VIA ROUTES

The Dolomites are justifiably popular. Once away from hot spots, however, adventurous visitors can have the natural splendour all to themselves. Here lies the beauty of the long-distance, high-level trails, the *Alte Vie*, from the singular *Alta Via* (both usually abbreviated as AV) or 'high route', *Höhenweg* in German. Six established walking trails traverse the Dolomites from top to bottom, north to south, maintaining medium to high altitude and exploring spectacular corners of the different mountainous groups – from Lagazuoi to Sella, Pale di San Martino to Puez-Odle, Sesto to the Marmarole. On any one of the routes walkers can expect to see up to 80 per cent of all the Dolomites!

The *Alte Vie* vary in length from 6 to 13 days, and range from easy ambles to difficult aided climbs. Overnight stops are made at manned mountain huts and/or guesthouses so on the whole walkers can travel light. AV3–6 use bivouac huts as well. Naturally, self-sufficient trekkers can camp out, giving great flexibility and freedom. The two main routes, AV1

and AV2, are both well walked and clear to follow and are described in detail in this guidebook.

A great dilemma is which *Alta Via* to choose, as they differ quite dramatically. Beginners need go no further than AV1. Spread over 11 days and 120km, with a highest point of 2752m, it is straightforward yet astoundingly rewarding, and perfectly suited for a first alpine experience. It visits the Fanes area, Lagazuoi and many Cortina mountains, Pelmo, Civetta, Moiazza and the Dolomiti Bellunesi. A decent choice of dormitory or more comfortable guesthouse accommodation is available. In terms of overall difficulty it rates Grade 2 (see below) with the exception of a single short section in Stage 5, avoidable thanks to a variant. On the other hand experienced walkers will enjoy lengthening Stage 6 by breaking off to traverse the breathtaking Pelmo. The final stage can also be varied thanks to a via ferrata (aided climb) variant.

**Note** AV1 has become popular with organised groups, so individual walkers are advised to book accommodation well ahead.

Naturally AV2 is the perfect 'second' Dolomites trek. Dubbed the '*Alta Via delle Leggende*', it is longer and undeniably more strenuous than AV1, and remains higher for longer. Over 13 days 160km are covered, the route straying as high as 2900m in severe environments. On the AV2 numerous aided and exposed sections are encountered, although several can be

At Forca Rossa (AV2 Stage 6)



detoured. It rates a challenging Grade 3. Walkers should consider carrying a short rope and karabiner clips for Stages 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 of this Alta Via – see What to take section.

AV2 traverses Plose, Puez-Odle, Sella, Pale di San Martino and the Alpi Feltrine and uses a choice of huts and the occasional hotel.

**Note** The climber's variant across the Marmolada and its glacier is not described here, as it requires both experience and specific gear.

En route numerous detours to villages and towns for shops or emergencies are possible, but they devour precious holiday time. These can also serve as alternative ways to enter the Alte Vie. All are explained at the appropriate point in walk descriptions.

Typical waymarking for these first routes is '1' or '2' in a blue or red triangle, but this is often faded or missing, so local path numbers need to be followed on many stretches.

Of a more demanding flavour, the remaining four AV – 3, 4, 5 and 6 – are presented in summary form giving the flavour and difficulty of the itinerary accompanied by instructive diagram maps showing facilities and transport. (The additional routes AV7 and AV8 have not been included as they are quite short.)



# ALTA VIA 1



*Vast views above Portela del Piazedel (AV1 Stage 10)*

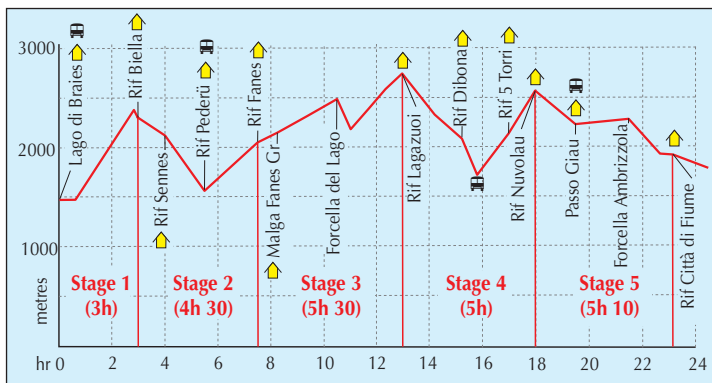
## INTRODUCTION

Alta Via 1 (AV1) begins its memorable journey from the major artery Val Pusteria/Pustertal, which draws a line along the northernmost confine of the Dolomites. It is overshadowed by the imposing giants of western neighbours the Sesto group, which soar above dark green pine woods. Dobbiaco in the northwest has a handy youth hostel Tel 0474 976216, <http://dobbiaco.ostello.bz> (with left luggage facilities), and all the local villages have grocery shops.

Breaking off south halfway between Monguelfo and Villabassa is Valle di Braies, named for 'trousers' as the valley forks into 'legs', each with neat villages amidst manicured meadows. The southwestern branch concludes at a beautiful emerald green lake, Lago di Braies/Pragser Wildsee, and the official beginning

of AV1. Popular for old-style boating it also boasts a marvellous alpine-style Grand Hotel built in 1899, and famous for hosting the Beatles' personal guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1960s. The Art Nouveau premises make a great place to stay and dine before setting out on the trek, and walkers are welcome. Hotel Lago di Braies Tel 0474 748602, [www.lagodibraies.com](http://www.lagodibraies.com). Alongside is a café and souvenir shop in addition to a fee-paying car park (discount for long-term stays). With time to spare, it's worthwhile following the pretty ring route around the lake – allow 1hr 30min.

The lake's crystal-clear waters are bordered by shingle beaches, but the low temperatures discourage swimming – the surface rarely



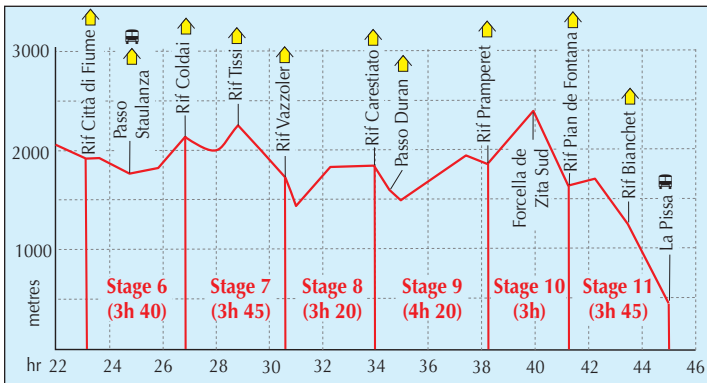


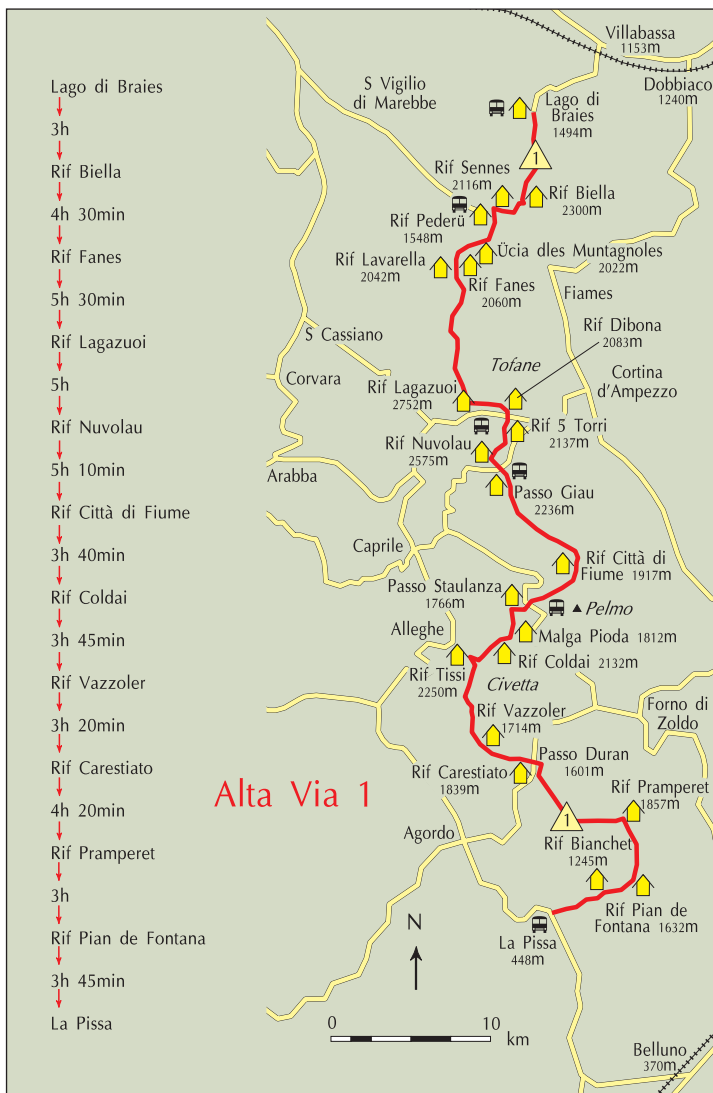


*The terrace at Rifugio Coldai (Stage 6)*

exceeds 14°C. In fact it usually ices over around November, reverting to liquid form in May but trout somehow survive in the chilly depths. Formed when the valley was obstructed by an ancient rock fall, Lago di Braies lies at the foot of sheer towering 2810m Croda del Becco/Seekofel reflected in the still waters. According to an old Ladin legend on a night with full moon once every hundred years, a curious

sight may be witnessed: two women emerge through a secret doorway in the mountain the Ladins refer to as Sass dla Porta. Leaving their subjects to slumber in rocky caverns, Princess Dolasilla rows her blind mother the Queen of Fanes across the lake in the hope of silver trumpets announcing the dawning of the promised time for their doomed kingdom to be reborn. In vain for the time being it would seem.





## STAGE 1

### *Lago di Braies to Rifugio Biella*

<b>Time</b>	3hr
<b>Distance</b>	6.5km/4 miles
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	870m/60m
<b>Grade</b>	2

Starting at a beautiful alpine lake set amidst pine forest and soaring Dolomite peaks, this is a thrilling opening to Alta Via 1. It entails a straightforward steady climb to a high altitude plateau that rewards walkers with wide-reaching vistas. In view of the relative brevity, walkers with energy to burn and a head for heights may like to fit in the ascent of 2810m Croda del Becco which flanks the hut – see below. On the other hand those desirous of a guesthouse – as opposed to the excellent but spartan rifugio at the official conclusion of Stage 1 – may care to proceed a further 1hr for Rifugio Sennes (see Stage 2).

The AV1 alias broad white gravel path n.1, makes a marvellous start from the **Hotel Lago di Braies** (1494m) in the realms of the Parco Naturale Fanes-Senes-Braies. On the lake's west bank it heads past a chapel along the water's edge, the massive bulk of the Croda del Becco ahead. This pretty stretch traverses squirrel-ridden woods close to the water's edge, the opposite shore dominated by the Grande and Piccolo Apostolo. Close to an attractive beach, ignore the fork R for **Val Foresta** and curve SE. Not far along the AV1 leaves this paradise, forking SSE (1496m, 35min) for the start of the 800m climb. The well-trodden path follows a scree river colonised by dwarf mountain pine, bilberry shrubs and mountain avens. The giant bulk of Croda del Becco towers overhead while marvellous views open up over Val Foresta W and its peaks. You wind steadily upwards, passing a 2034m **turn-off** for Malga Cavallo. Pretty shady wood precedes entry into a rock-strewn





amphitheatre. Shortly, an imposingly steep barrier is surmounted on a straightforward zigzag route aided by cables, only really necessary in wet or icy conditions. Here the sheer rock flanks bear clear signs of karstification, in the shape of grooves left by rainwater. In between are colourful patches of alpine blooms.

At a **path junction** (2186m, 1hr 35min) an abrupt fork R (W) marks the entry into the so-called '**Forno**' (oven) a heat trap as will quickly become evident to midsummer walkers. The clear path weaves its way between toppled rocks at the foot of Monte Muro on the final leg to

**2hr 50min – Forcella Sora Forno (2388m)** and a shrine. Entering the



Lago di Braies and the Grande Apostolo



Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti d'Ampezzo, the panorama is vast and breathtaking, from the most northerly Dolomite peak Sass de Putia W, close to the start of AV2, across to the Marmolada and its glittering glacier SW, taking in the Tofane pyramids, and the Pelmo S and Cristallo SE. For those who feel up to it and are not bothered by exposure, here begins the optional rewarding ascent of Croda del Becco.

*Rifugio Biella and  
Croda del Becco*

#### **Side trip to Croda del Becco (2hr return)**

From the pass a zigzagging path NW tackles an exposed corner with the help of cables set into the rock face. There are bird's-eye views onto Rifugio Biella. The flattish top will come as quite a surprise, as will the majestic if reticent ibex that graze here in summer. Over on the northern edge is the dizzy summit cross of **Croda del Becco** (2810m) directly over Lago di Braies. Simply breathtaking. Return the same way, taking special care on the exposed corner ridge.

A short way down the slope is

**10min – Rifugio Biella aka Seekofel Hütte (2300m)**

Tel 0436 866991, sleeps 45, open 3rd week in June to end Sept, [rifugiobiella@libero.it](mailto:rifugiobiella@libero.it). This well-run hut has generous meals including a self-serve breakfast but only offers the bare essentials, which means a cold shower.

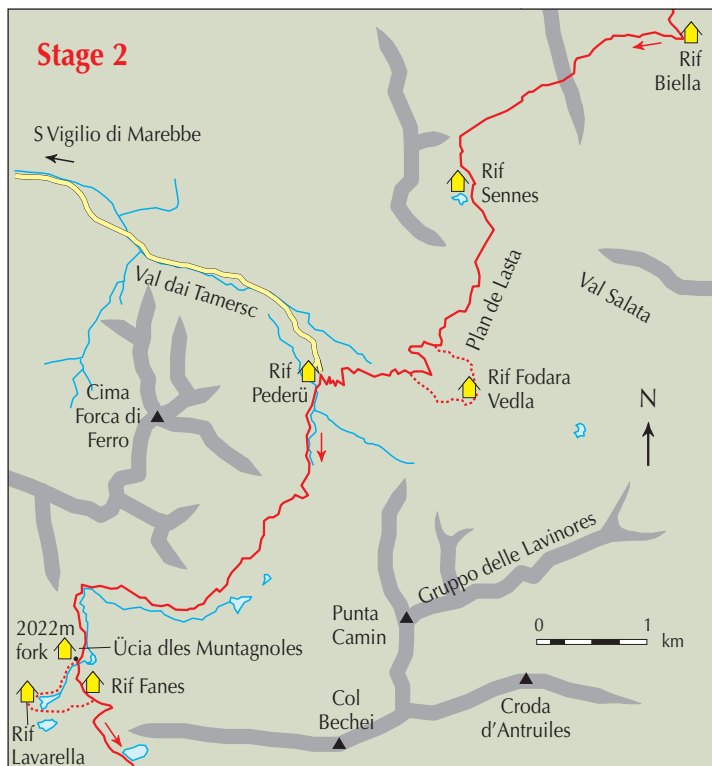
## STAGE 2

### *Rifugio Biella to Rifugio Fanes*

<b>Time</b>	4hr 30min
<b>Distance</b>	13.5km/8.4 miles
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	630m/870m
<b>Grade</b>	1

AV1 crosses undulating rocky terrain on easy paths and 4WD tracks constructed for military purposes during WW1. Several privately run rifugi are touched on before a plunge to a road head, which entails losing an awful lot of height. Here is a rifugio, where refreshments are probably in order as you need to gird your loins – the day concludes with an extended uphill stretch terminating in a beautiful pasture basin with a choice of comfortable lodgings.

From **Rifugio Biella** (2300m) set out W along the jeep route (n.6) below the remarkable onion layers that comprise the SE face of Croda del Becco. Just 10min on, AV1 parts ways with the track (which continues in a long leisurely loop stroll ESE around Col de Ra Sciores before veering due W for Rifugio Sennes – allow 1hr 15min). Branching uphill R (SW) path n.6A crosses knobbly grassy terrain punctuated with marmot burrows to reach the 2300m level. Re-entering the Parco Naturale Fanes-Senes-Braies, it drops to join another jeep track, thence L for



### 1hr – Rifugio Sennes aka Ücia de Senes (2116m)

Tel 0474 501092, private, sleeps 65, credit cards, open early June to mid-Oct, [www.sennes.com](http://www.sennes.com). This place is popular with model plane enthusiasts and pilots thanks to the proximity of an airstrip, reputedly the highest in Europe for light craft!

Past the huddle of photogenic wood-tile roof shepherds' huts the track (n.7) proceeds S. Keep R at the ensuing fork and head SW over Plan de Lasta dotted with Arolla pines, and past a turn-off to **Rifugio Fodara Vedla**.