



Giro d'Italia Colma di Arola - Traversagna

 MEDIUM

A tour between **lake**, **river**, and **hills** with the culmination of the historic **Colma di Arola Pass**, which connects **Lake Orta** to **Valsesia**, risen to cycling honors with the passage of the 19th stage of the 104th **Giro d'Italia** on May 28, 2021.

We start from **Omegna**, climbing along the western slope of Lake Orta, passing under the rainbows of the **Garden of the Pie in the Sky** (Rodari-inspired) first, then through **Brolo**, **Nonio**, and **Cesara**. After the "décolletage" of Cesara (a town of peace in name and in fact), a short descent leads to the fork on the right to Arola and its Colma.

It is a scant 8 kilometers of climbing, with its most challenging part at the exit of **Arola**, with gradients approaching 16 %. It's all condensed into a couple of kilometers, and then we are back to breathing easy until the **Colma Pass** at **942 m.a.s.l.**

From here, it's all downhill to Varallo Sesia with some brief uphill recovery at the entrance to **Civiasco**, where a memorial stone commemorates the author of this critical road artery connecting Cusio to Valsesia.

On its outskirts, the arrival in **Varallo Sesia** is characterized by a series of wide hairpin bends and the passage at the foot of Italy's first **illuminated via ferrata**, that of **Falconera**. Want to be a cycle-tourist in name and in fact? It would be worth tackling the little climb to the **Sacro Monte of Varallo**, also a UNESCO heritage site like that of Orta; it is about 5 km of easy ascent that leads to a place where we can breathe in history, art, and religion at the top of our lungs and that offers a splendid view of the city and the Sesia River.

Continuing along the established route instead, we turn left at the roundabout at the bottom of the descent in the direction of **Roccapietra**, **Quarona**, and **Borgosesia**.

At Quarona, there is the possibility of going up toward Cusio via San Bernardo, Cellio, Piana dei Monti, and Cremosina, an excellent tour to put on the summer schedule.

Still, along the **Sesia**, we come to its "Borgo," once a thriving textile center that suffered not a little from the industry crisis. Today, **Borgosesia** also focuses on tourism and plays its cards on art, sports, and the outdoors.

At the large roundabout on the way out of town, we have the second option of returning to the Cusio via the Cremosina. Still, our route involves going straight for a few more kilometers along the Sesia. The stretch is flat until the entrance to **Grignasco**, a town that we can cross immediately after the level crossing or further South via the ring road. In either case, we resume SP 32 in the direction of Boca, also called the "**Traversagna road**."

On these little more than 3 kilometers of ascent with max peaks of 9%, when in company, it is usual to test one another's remaining energy by challenging each other and giving each other a rendezvous at the top of the mountain pass over Boca amid the paradise of the devotees of Bacchus.

The descent on the **Sanctuary of the Holy Crucifix of Boca** is short and fast. Here, at various times of the year, it is easier to come across pilgrims on foot than by car; such is the appeal that this place of worship still has among the faithful and others. In fact, the imposing and striking structure bears the signature of, among others, an architect of the fame of **Alessandro Antonelli**, a native of Ghemme, who in the 19th century went on to design works such as the "Mole Antonelliana" in the Piedmontese capital and the dome of the basilica of San Gaudenzio in Novara.

Leaving the sanctuary, we continue to the town center on level ground, complete with benches and a water fountain (specific due, given where we are!). At the roundabout, we turn left toward Maggiora, which we reach after a series of ups and downs that cut the legs only if taken at speed.

In **Maggiora**, before taking the descent to Borgomanero, there is a well-stocked bakery that deserves another stop for those on a sugar high.

The descent on Borgomanero is only in the first section that it is done all in one breath, then suddenly presents an incline that forces you to put your hand on the gearbox.

Once in **Vergano**, after a couple of downhill curves, we turn left, facing a short climb on paved roads that lead to the small village center, from which you have a sweeping view of the Novara plain and the surrounding mountains.

Being careful to draw from the correct spring, the one with drinking water located toward the end of the village, complete with a votive chapel beside it, we have a chance to tuck in our water bottle and continue down the hill on SP 85 toward **Piovino**, **Gargallo** and finally **Gozzano**.

Having reached the town that housed a famous and polluting chemical company until a few years ago, we descend to the lake near the **Buccione Tower**, which once controlled and signaled those who passed this vital thoroughfare.

For the record, the Tower, now used as a museum, is worth a visit: it is a couple of kilometers away and requires a quarter-hour walk. From the **Buccione junction**, we descend to the lake with a series of curves taken at speed.

Once close to the lake, we pedal all on the flat until the start of the **Orta climb** shortly after **Imolo**. This climb does not exceed 5%, and in 1975 was the scene of the arrival of the 16th stage of the

58th Giro d'Italia won by Fausto Bertoglio; the winner in Orta was Fabrizio Fabbri.

Arriving at the roundabout, which was not yet there in those years, two exciting tourist excursions are noted: left to **Sacro Monte**, the center of **Orta** and its **Isle of San Giulio**, whose fame crosses national borders, or right to **Legro**, one of the first "**painted villages**" in Italy.

From the Orta drop-off, we descend back to the lake at **Tortirogno**, a riparian enclave of Miasino, a charming hill town always kissed by the sun.

The last stretch is flat before the arrival in **Gianni Rodari's** birthplace. Still, several points of tourist interest exist between **Pettenasco**, **Punta di Crabbia**, and **Borca**, the first hamlet South of Omegna. Arriving at the roundabout in Borca, with some characters inspired by Rodari's tales accompanied by three bicycles with the national colors, we have reached almost the end of this ring that laps three provinces and still knows how to offer a lot in terms of nature, art, industry, contemplation and fantasy, the same elements that inspired the son of modest bakers in "churning out" tales, fables, nursery rhymes that still delight adults and children in many countries around the world.

All this we discover on a bicycle, the very one that so inspired the famous Cusio writer:

I would like in the moon to
ride a bicycle there to see if,
even up there, those who
go slow are not going fast.

I would like to the moon one
to go there by micromotor to
see if, even up there, those
who are silent do not make
noise.

I would like to the moon one
would go there by
accelerator to see if even
there those who do not eat
on Sunday are hungry on
Monday.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Route with a hundred environmental and cultural attractions, which requires a fair amount of physical-athletic fitness to overcome the continuous ups and downs that characterize it without great difficulty.

POINTS OF ATTENTION

1. On the way out of the village, the most challenging **uphill** section is at **Arola**, where it is close to 16 percent.
2. **Descent from Buccione junction to the lake**: fast but also dangerous, particularly in the first blind turn.

TECHNICAL DATA.

Relevant geographical area:	Cusio/ Lake Orta / Valsesia / Novara Hills
Departure and arrival location:	Omegna
Number of legs:	1
Length:	79.0 km
Height difference:	648 m
Total ascent:	1060 m indicative
Difficulty:	MEDIUM
Average duration:	4 hours 30 minutes
Minimum altitude:	294 m.a.s.l.
Highest altitude reached:	942 m.a.s.l.
Degree of cyclability:	total
Recommended period:	March-October
Presence of dedicated signage:	no
Target audience:	amateur cyclist/cyclo-hiker

SCENIC POINTS

View of Lake Orta and San Giulio Isle from the forecourt of the Church of Madonna dell'Assunta in Arola.

REFRESHMENT POINTS

In the many towns crossed.

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

OMEGNA - Piazza XXV Aprile 17 - 28887 Omegna (VB) - +39 0323 61930/+39 338 8870913

- info@proloco.omegna.vb.it

PETTENASCO - Via Vittorio Veneto c/o Museo dell'Arte della Tornitura del Legno - 28028 Pettenasco (NO) - +39 345 9956357 - proloco.pettenasco@tiscali.it

ORTA SAN GIULIO - Via Panoramica - 28016 Orta San Giulio (NO) - +39 0322 905163 - infoturismo@comune.ortasangulio.no.it

BIKE SERVICE

Sport è bike - Knutti Massimo, **Sale-Repair shop-Rental**, Via Fratelli di Dio 61, 28887

OMEGNA (VB), (+39) 339 5924089, massimoknutti@gmail.com,

<http://knuttibike.com/index.php/en/>

Bike Store Omegna, **Sale-Repair shop**, Via Tito Speri 3, 28887 OMEGNA (VB), (+39) 0323 350295, bikestoreomegna@gmail.com, <https://www.facebook.com/BikeStoreOmegna>

E-Traction, **Rental**, Via Borca 6, 28887 OMEGNA (VB), (+39) 392 4899480,

info@etraction.it, <https://www.etraction.it/>

E-Bike Garage, **Sale-Rental**, Via Sant'Anna 31, 28881 CASALE CORTE CERRO (VB), (+39) 0323 348044, info@e-bikesgarage.com, <https://www.e-bikesgarage.com/>

Ebike Lago d'Orta, **Rental**, Via Domodossola 9, 28016 ORTA SAN GIULIO (NO), (+39) 348 2618416, ebikelagodorta@gmail.com, <https://www.ebikelagodorta.com/>

Atala Store, **Sales-Repair shop**, Viale Kennedy 5, 28021 BORGOMANERO (NO), (+39) 0322 862998, <https://www.atala.it/>

Cicobikes, **Sale-Repair shop**, Via 25 Aprile 29, 28024 GOZZANO (NO), (+39) 0322 956439, info@cicobikes.com, <https://www.cicobikes.com/>

Bike Ride Borgomanero, **Sale-Repair shop-Rental**, Viale Vittorio Veneto 15, 28021 BORGOMANERO (NO), (+39) 338 6306308, info@bike-ride.it, <https://bike-ride.it>

CHARGING STATIONS

Etraction, Via Borca, 6 - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Bar Ristorante Salera, Piazza Salera, 16 - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Canottieri, Lungolago Buozzi, 37 - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Sport è Knutti, Via Fratelli Di Dio, 61 - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Public baths, gardens Lungolago A. Gramsci - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Oasi della vita, Via Fucine, 7 - Bagnella - 28887 OMEGNA (VB)

Piazza del Municipio - 28891 NONIO (VB)

Circolo Operaio, Piazza Guglielmo Marconi - 28891 CESARA (VB)

Piazza Tripoli - 28899 AROLA (VB)

Camping Cusio, Via San Giovanni Bosco, 5 - 28016 ORTA SAN GIULIO (NO)

PLACES OF INTEREST

OMEGNA

Birthplace of Gianni Rodari, Fantasy Park, Nursery Rhymes on the Streets, Forum Arts and Industry Museum Foundation, St. Ambrose Collegiate Church, De Angeli-Frua Area, Vatican District, Porta Romana, Old Bridge, Giardini della Torta in Cielo and Rock Engravings (Monte Zuoli), the Morta di Agrano, Crusinallo Castle, Agrano Agricultural Nature Center Alpe Selviana.

NONIO

Brolo "the cats' village" (paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs inspired by the four-legged pet, Laghetti di Nonio), Vicolo Tavola Portal, San Rocco Oratory.

CESARA

Parish Church of San Clemente 16th century, San Lorenzo Chapel 11th century, Chinese-style pagoda nestled in the forest.

AROLA

Parish church of San Bartolomeo 17th century, Old wine press, Church of Madonna dell'Assunta.

CIVIASCO

San Gottardo Parish Church 17th cent., San Carlo Oratory 17th cent., Church of St. Mary of the Seven Sorrows 16th cent., Civic Museum "E. Durio," Old Town with sundials, trompe-l'oeil decorations on the oldest buildings, wash houses, and decorated or painted fountains.

VARALLO SESIA

Sacro Monte UNESCO heritage site 15th century, Palazzo dei Musei home of the very rich Pinacoteca, Collegiate Church of S. Gaudenzio 12th century, Church of S. Maria delle Grazie national monument 15th century, Villa Durio, Villa Barbara, Villa Virginia, Civic Theater, Civic Library "Farinone Centa, Museo Calderini, Palazzo Scarognini d'Adda, Palazzo Racchetti 15th century.

QUARONA

Church of San Giovanni al Monte 5th century, Parish church of Sant'Antonio Abate 17th century, Beata Panacea al Monte Sanctuary 15th century, Villa Rolandi.

BORGOSESIA

Sant'Anna Sanctuary, Romanesque Bridge of Agnona, "Carlo Conti" Museum of Archaeology and Paleontology, Church of S.S. Peter and Paul, Ospedale degli Infermi, Monte Fenera Natural Park, "Mercù Scùrol" carnival event held on Ash Wednesday, Montrigone Torchio, Trione Tower.

GRIGNASCO

Church of San Graziano 18th century, Church of St. Mary in Bovagliano, Monastery of the Daughters of Charity, San Rocco Oratory 16th century, Loggia houses: "Casa Canonica" and "Il Roncaccio," Durio Palace, Fenera Nature Park.

PRATO SESIA

San Bernardo Parish Church 14th century, Tower and ruins of the medieval castle of Sopramonte, Civic Library "Rinolfi Camana," Giant Bench No. 127.

BOCA

Montalbano Castle, San Gaudenzio Church at the cemetery 16th century, Shrine of the Most Holy Crucifix, Cobianchi House, Rezzi House, Bishop's House, CDO wine since 1969.

MAGGIORA

Maggiora Park (autocross and motocross), Holy Spirit Parish Church, Conti Castle Cellars.

BORGOMANERO

" Come eravamo " museum, San Leonardo Church 12th century, San Bartolomeo Collegiate Church 13th century, Oratory of Santa Caterina 12th century, Holy Trinity Oratory 16th century, San Nicola di Baraggiola Church 10th century, Palazzo d'Este, Medieval bridge known as the Torrione, Vergano Castle, Grape Festival in September.

GARGALLO

Parish Church of St. Peter 18th century, San Michele Oratory 18th century, Shoemaker's Museum, Fornace Museum.

BRIGA NOVARESE

San Colombano Church 12th cent.

GOZZANO

San Giuliano Basilica, Bishop's Palace, Colle della Guardia.

ORTA SAN GIULIO

Painted village (Legro hamlet), Sacro Monte, dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi and UNESCO heritage site, Isle with the Roman basilica and Benedictine abbey, Motta Square and "Broletto," Buccione Tower.

MIASINO

Villa Nigra, Palazzo Sperati, churches of San Gottardo (Pisogno hamlet) 16th century, San Pietro (Carcegna hamlet) 17th century, San Rocco 16th century.

PETTENASCO

Museum of the Art of Woodturning, Medieval House, Parish Church of Saints Audenzio and Caterina 17th century.