



Riale - Bedretto (CH)

 BC (MEDIUM)

Beautiful hike straddling the border between Val Formazza and Val Bedretto across the San Giacomo Pass, the ancient "Mountain of Valdolgia," which, because of its easy access, was a crucial direct trade route between Milan, Gotthard, and the Grisons for centuries.

The route begins in **Riale**, in the upper Formazza Valley, at the Centro del Fondo (Aalts Dorf hotel). We cross the Toce River on the small bridge and begin to climb along the beautiful dirt road of the San Giacomo Pass, built in the 1920s to serve the construction of the Toggia and Castel dams: the road is a true masterpiece, with low gradients and hairpin bends with perfect lines. At the end of the hairpin turns and the uphill section, the **Maria Luisa Refuge** is reached, then the **Toggia Lake Dam**. From here, the road continues at a very weak gradient, skirting the entire lake on a midslope. Ignoring the fork for Alpe Regina, where Bettelmatt cheese is produced, we continue until reaching **Passo San Giacomo**, where the dirt road ends. Another hundred meters or so uphill, and we reach the cross from which we can look out over the Bedretto Valley and the Gotthard area.

From the **cross**, the downhill trail begins in Swiss territory. It descends to the beautiful plain of the **Alpe di San Giacomo**, with its characteristic little white church, and then, all on a half-steep trail reaches the arrival of the **Grandinagia** cable car with the completely buried artillery fort of the same name. This is followed by a winding section and a nice diagonal that leads to **Alpe Stabiascio**. Having passed the expanse of alpine rhomice (the "lavazze") typical of the areas where cows are stationed, turn left in the direction of All'Acqua to take the beautiful path through the woods that, in hairpin bends, descends to the bottom of the valley to reach precisely the village of **All'Acqua**. Near the small church, there is a bar-restaurant with available refreshments and a bike charging station along the cantonal road.

From here, we descend along the cantonal road for about 2 km toward Ronco-Airolo. When you reach the fork for **Ronco**, continue on the cantonal road for a few more tens of meters until you cross the Ticino River on the bridge, and immediately on the right, a mountain pasture track turns off and climbs in hairpin bends to **Alpe di Valleggia**. At the Alpe, we turn left along a trail following the signs for Stabiascio. After about a kilometer, the track gives way to a nice half-hill path that reaches **Alpe Stabiascio** again. From here, you retrace the outward route to **Passo San Giacomo** and descend to **Riale** along the track.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The route from Riale to the San Giacomo Pass is a wide dirt road with a somewhat uneven surface that will test arms and wrists on the descent. The road is closed to ordinary traffic, but ENEL vehicles, mountaineers, and hut managers can access it.

The downhill trail in Swiss territory is not for the exclusive use of bicycles, so speed should be moderated at all times, especially when approaching curves or any blind spots.

POINTS OF ATTENTION

1. The route passes through Italy and Switzerland, some mountain pastures where many cows are grazing in summer. When you encounter them, always reduce your speed or, better yet, get off the saddle and proceed bike by hand so as not to scare them away. Always pay close attention to electrified fences as well: the gates should permanently be closed!
2. Be careful when driving along the approximately 2 km section of the cantonal road in the Bedretto Valley, which can also be very busy in summer

TECHNICAL DATA.

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Relevant geographical area: | Verbano Cusio Ossola / Ossola / Formazza Valley Canton Ticino / Bedretto Valley |
| Place of departure: | Riale (1730 m) |
| Place of arrival: | Riale (1730 m) |
| Number of legs: | 1 |
| Length: | 40 km |
| Total ascent: | 1300 m indicative |
| Total descent: | 1300 m indicative |
| Difficulty: | BC (MEDIUM) |
| Average duration: | 4 hours 00 minutes |
| Minimum altitude: | 1460 masl (Bridge over the Ticino in Ronco di ValBedretto) |
| Maximum altitude reached: | 2315 m asl (St. James Pass) |
| Degree of cyclability: | Total |
| Recommended period: | July - mid-October |
| Presence of dedicated signage: | Yes (partial, up to San Giacomo Pass) |
| Target audience: | MTB lover |

SCENIC POINTS

The last road hairpin bends with beautiful views of Lake Morasco and the village of Riale, Toggia Dam with Lake, Cross just after San Giacomo Pass with views of the mountains of the Bedretto Valley and the Gotthard Massif

REFRESHMENT POINTS

Riale, Rifugio Maria Luisa, bicigrill Passo San Giacomo (under construction), All' Acqua, Ronco

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

FORMAZZA - Frazione Ponte - 28863 Formazza (VB), Tel. +39 0324 63059, prolocoformazza@libero.it

BIKE SERVICE

Riale Fund Center, **Rental-Assistance**, Riale locality - 28863 FORMAZZA (VB), Tel. +39 329 125 7417, barpgianluca@gmail.com

Hotel Rotenthal, **Rental**, Ponte hamlet, 81 - 28863 FORMAZZA (VB), Tel. +39 0324 63048 Mob. +39 338 9851736, rotenthal@rotenthal.it, www.rotenthal.it

La Baita Restaurant, **Rental**, Ponte hamlet - 28863 FORMAZZA (VB), Tel. +39 0324 63048, bruna.papa65@gmail.com

Andre Rent, **Rental-Assistance**, Via Maglioggio, 4/A - 28862 CRODO (VB), Tel. +39 347 570 1297, ebike@andrerent.it

CHARGING STATIONS

Recharging possibilities in Riale (Fondo center-Aalts Dorf), Maria Luisa Refuge, San Giacomo Pass Bicigrill (under construction), All'Acqua (behind the church)

PLACES OF INTEREST

Along the route

The San Giacomo Pass

In 1405, a small hospice dedicated to St. Nicholas, patron saint of merchants, and St. Catherine was erected near the pass. The first "customs" agreement was made between Bedretto and Formazza as early as 1451, regulating the tolls and stages of the someggiatori, who transported goods with mules across this pass. A chapel dedicated to St. James was erected in the early 1600s. Since then, the pass lost its ancient name of Montagna di Valdolgia to take on that of P.so San Giacomo.

In more recent times, from the late 1800s to the 1970s, the pass was constantly garrisoned militarily on both sides. The military fortifications on the Swiss side have recently been enhanced as part of the Interreg ForTi-Line Cadorna project. On the Italian side, the remains of the former barracks of the Guardia di Finanza are being restored as part of the Interreg Lakes & Mountains Bike project to create a refuge/bicigrill on the pass to support cycle hikers: from a physical place of border garrison and closure to a place of welcome, a symbol of a mountain without borders.

Ancient processions of the Alps

On June 25 each year, the formazzini would walk up the valley to Riale, climb up to the St. James Pass, descend to Airolo, and then face the final climb to the Gotthard hospice to invoke the Saint's grace. Forty kilometers on foot to be done in good or bad weather, singing and reciting litanies in the day. At the head of the procession was the parish priest who frowned upon these outings, so much so that in 1610, he appealed to the Bishop of Novara to commute this procession to a shorter one. In the letter, he denounced the promiscuity between men and women who, having arrived at the hospice, indulged in drinking and eating, and the next day, everyone was about their own business, so much so that only a scanty handful returned home with banners. The Bishop granted the request by commuting it to the pilgrimage to Altilone, enjoining a fresco painting in the alpine Oratory. This painting by an unknown hand, kept inside the small Oratory, is today the only evidence of what Gotthard looked like in the 17th century. However, the guidelines were not entirely followed

because sixty years later, they still begged the Bishop to let the formazzini go to the Gotthard, guaranteeing this time, they would organize the procession with the "men divided by the women."

Alpine lakes and dams

On both the Swiss and Italian sides, the western Lepontine Alps are rich in natural waters that offer themselves to the hiker in waterfalls and hundreds of small alpine lakes. The presence of glaciers and the steepness of the slopes favored the development of hydroelectric power generation in the first half of the 20th century. Exploiting "white coal" profoundly changed the natural landscape by constructing dams, roads, power plants, and penstocks that created an "alpine industrialized landscape" that still arouses amazement at the boldness of the works.

We owe, in particular, to Eng. Ettore Conti, his company "Imprese Elettriche Conti" (which later merged into the Edison Company), started in 1909 with a plan to exploit the high Ossola valleys with the first Foppiano power plant. Then, the Devero Valley and Formazza Valley work.

White gold: the Bettelmatt

Bettelmatt is the name of an alpine pasture at the foot of the Gries Pass. Since the 13th century, the time of Walser colonization, an excellent cheese was produced here and used as a bargaining chip for payment of rents or alpine pasture concessions or taxes. The name Bettelmatt seems to derive from the German battle meaning quest and matt meaning pasture, thus: "quest pasture."

Now the brand name Bettelmatt® denotes cheese made from whole milk produced exclusively in the summer in seven mountain pastures in the Antigorio Formazza Valley (Morasco/Bettelmatt, Kastel, Val Toggia, Vannino) and the Devero Valley (Sangiatto, Forno, and Poiala): flavors and aromas born from the high mountain grasses on which the grazing cows feed transformed by a dairy art that has been handed down from generation to generation

At the Water: the Robiei-Stabiascio tragedy.

In front of the small church in the village of All'Acqua, in the Bedretto Valley, a plaque commemorates the Robiei-Stabiascio tragedy. On the night of February 15-16, 1966, while work was underway in the adduction tunnel of the Robiei-Stabiascio-Gries hydroelectric plant, fifteen Italian workers and two firefighters from Locarno were killed by toxic gases stagnating in the tunnel. It is the most severe work accident ever in Italian-speaking Switzerland, one of many that have entered the history of Italian emigration.

Twenty-five years after the tragedy, writer-journalist Erminio Ferrari reconstructs the events in his book "Cielo di stelle" (Edizioni Casagrande, Bellinzona), reporting the testimony of Angelo Da Dalto, the only survivor of the tragedy. That testimony is followed by many others: Ferrari meets the miners active at the time on the construction site, the employees of Ofima (Officine Idroelettriche della Maggia), who commissioned the work, the firefighters who intervened on site, and then the widows, the orphans. Sky of Stars collects those voices and memories - the misery, the toil, the love, and solidarity - and gives them back to us as a passionate and delicate literary narrative to understand what remains today of that individual and collective drama.

In the vicinity

Toce Waterfall

Immediately before Riale, the Toce Waterfall represents one of the leading natural attractions of the Verbano Cusio Ossola province: with its 143 m drop, it is the highest in Europe; it is fed by the Toce River, which is formed in the Riale plain by the confluence of the Hosand, Gries, and Rhoni streams.

The history of the Toce Waterfall and its famous Albergo is to be linked to the history of romantic and pioneering mountaineering exploration started by De Saussure in 1777 and continued by the Reverend Coolidge, the Swiss scholar Gottlieb Studer, Arthur Cust, the father of ski mountaineering, and the Milanese Riccardo Gerla referred to as "the apostle of the Ossola" together with the faithful Antronapiana guide Lorenzo Marani.

The Toce Falls was visited and loved by many distinguished visitors such as Richard Wagner, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Queen Margherita, King Victor Emmanuel III, Giosuè Carducci, and



Abbot Antonio Stoppani who left enthusiastic descriptions of what was already being called the most beautiful waterfall in the Alps.

The Toce Falls is visible in its majesty only for specific periods during the summer because the waters are used for power generation.

Standards of behavior

1. Stay on the trails

Respect the trail and any prohibitions on access. Respect private property.

2. Leave no trace

Respect the land. Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable than dry trails. Stay on existing trails, and do not create new ones. Don't take shortcuts by cutting corners. Take any litter with you.

3. Drive carefully

A moment's distraction can endanger both yourself and others. Abide by speed limits and ride so that you can always control your bicycle. Always wear a helmet.

4. Don't scare the animals

Animals are easily startled by an abrupt approach, a sudden movement, or a loud noise. Allow them enough space and time to adjust to your presence.

5. Give right of way

These trails are not only for bicycle use but also shared by hikers on foot. So, especially downhill, speed should be moderated: around a bend, someone may be coming up. Let other trail users know you will overtake them through a friendly greeting or a bell. Bicyclists must give way to all non-motorized trail users. Bicyclists proceeding downhill should give the right of way to those going uphill. Make any overtaking as safe and polite as possible.



**REMINDER:
BIKERS MUST ALWAYS GIVE WAY TO OTHER USERS**

RULES OF CONDUCT FOR BIKERS

Since the first mountain bikes appeared, the N.O.R.B.A. (National Off-Road Bicycle Association) drew up a code of conduct intended to regulate off-road activity with full respect for nature and other frequenters of the mountains and trails.

Many clubs, organizations, associations, and schools throughout Italy have adopted the N.O.R.B.A. Code. It consists of a series of general tips that, if followed carefully, can help make this sporting and hiking practice so much in vogue today more enjoyable for everyone.

N.O.R.B.A. Code

1. Always give priority to hikers on foot.
2. Slow down and use caution when approaching and overtaking hikers on foot or other cycle walkers, always making sure to signal your arrival well in advance; avoid cackling or shouting instead, apologize, and greet politely.
3. Always keep the speed of the mountain bike under control and approach turns with extreme caution, anticipating sudden obstacles. The pace should be commensurate with the type of terrain, the type of trail, and each person's experience.
4. Always stay within the marked path, thus minimizing environmental impact (permanent damage to surrounding vegetation and subsequent soil erosion).
5. Do not disturb or frighten domestic or wild animals; give them time to move away and off the path.
6. Do not, for any reason, leave garbage as a result of your passage; you should pick up your own and, when possible, also those abandoned by other "distracted" hikers.
7. Always respect private and public property, leaving gates, mobile barriers, or bars as they are found. In any case, go directly to the landowners to ask for permission to pass. "No trespassing" often means "Please ask permission if you want to pass."
8. During cycle hiking, it is always appropriate to be self-sufficient. The goal to be reached and the speed at which one moves should be proportionate to the psychophysical preparedness

, the driver's skill, equipment, environment, terrain, and, most importantly, weather conditions.

9. Never undertake a cycle tour alone, except in cases of force majeure. Stay away from isolated areas distant from major roads, and always leave clear directions regarding the route to be taken and the estimated return time.

10. Minimizing the impact with nature: stealing only images and memories and leaving, at most, the barely perceptible imprint of the wheels of one's vehicle.