



Tour of Cistella MTB

 BC (CHALLENGING)

The Cistella MTB Tour is a 38-kilometer loop of extraordinary interest around **Monte Cistella**, the iconic mountain of **Alta Ossola** to which arcane and mysterious legends are linked: the **witches of Cistella** are still etched in the memory of Ossolans. The plateau was regarded with terror as "*the grand ballroom of Messer lo Diavolo*."

It involves three municipalities in Alta Ossola (**Varzo**, **Crodo**, and **Baceno**). The route stretches along an existing network of agro-sylvo-pastoral and consortium trails and tracks.

The loop tour can be approached starting from two locations: **San Domenico** (municipality of Varzo), which can also be reached by public transport, or **Foppiano** (municipality of Crodo), which is not served by public transport but allows you to immediately tackle the most challenging section of the entire tour with fresh forces: the climb to the **Colmine Pass**.

Below is a description of the itinerary **starting from San Domenico**, but if you start from Foppiano, just start the reading from that point.

From San Domenico, take the ski lifts to the 2480 m peak of **Punta del Dosso**. From there, the panoramic view sweeps 360°.

The route starts immediately with a fun descent down the beautiful **Easy Dosso 2500** bike trail (medium difficulty) that takes you to the **Ciamporino Pass**. Take the service trail on the right that descends to the Bondolero chairlift departure station from the pass. From here, the path becomes more technical and, in some places, could be more evident (follow the gpx marking well). In the beginning go straight down, cross a small valley to avoid crossing it further downstream, where it becomes much more recessed and uncomfortable to overcome; after a first stretch through high-altitude grassland sprinkled with stones, cross the marked path that reaches the bottom of the valley. The trail continues, crosses a couple of streams, and a somewhat uneven midslope descends to the huts of **Alpe Bondolero**, built close to large boulders with a protective function against avalanches. An excellent cheese is produced in the alpine pasture in summer (pay attention to grazing cows and anything they leave on the ground!).

From the alp hut, traverse on the level for 250 m to reach a knoll from which a rather rough half-steep trail begins, reaching **Alpe Case di Sotto**. From here, the trail starts to descend more steeply into the larch forest with a section that forces most people to climb down from the saddle (alternatively, from the Case di Sotto huts, one moves further to the left, downhill, from the trail to take a steep meadow that allows one to descend quickly without any obstacles). At the end of

the steep trail, you traverse to the right to reach the Rio di Bondolero (watch out for the ford: in the early season, you risk getting your feet wet). Immediately after this begins a dirt service track that descends the valley with a few hairpin bends to the **Piano di Rio Secco**. From here, the track climbs briefly and then continues halfway downhill to the houses of **Agarù**, where it joins the so-called **Via di Scuetar**, a popular MTB route.

The meaning of the term "Veia di Scuetar" is shrouded in mystery...some translate it as "Squirrel Road," perhaps because of the ease with which this tightrope walker can be spotted in the dense fir forests one passes through. In the local dialect, however, the word "scueta" does not indicate the squirrel, which is instead called "chiuscia." There are at least two stories about the origin of the name. The first suggests with scueta a local family, rather overbearing and ill-regarded in the valley that demanded the payment of duties and excises: the new road, which united Cravegna with the Bondolero Valley, was used to bypass the lands of this family and avoid paying duties. The second story goes back more recently to the period after World War II when the Goglio-Cravegna canal was built (oral testimony of Adelma Trisconi di Cravegna, class of 1938). The construction site had mobile kitchens and canteens that gradually moved along the canal route. Serving the kitchens, a small group of young "scullerymen" shuttled along this route carrying provisions and supplies: the "scullerymen's route" became by dialect term "Veia di Scueta."

Whatever the meaning of this name may be, what is certain is that the Veia di Scueta represents the main impaling route for herds from Cravegna to pastures in the Bondolero Valley.

From **Agarù**, the Veia di Scueta continues on a challenging half-steep trail due to boulders and roots, with almost no gradient (keeping around 1100 m altitude). Occasionally, there are uphill or downhill steps that force you out of the saddle, but it is almost always rideable, although great care is needed because it is exposed.

You cross the consortium track connecting Osso to Quartarone, follow it downhill for a short distance, and immediately afterward, take the path to the right that continues halfway up the channel on level ground until it crosses the **Rio Ghendola** gorge (with a **short portage** of 40 meters uphill to overcome a flight of steps).

From here begins a delightful, streamlined, comprehensive, and flat section, still along the canal, that leads to cross a beautiful **Via Crucis** that connects Cravegna with the Oratorio della Salèra. Here, you leave the Veia di Scueta (which continues towards Cravegna), cross the mule track, and continue on level ground, still following the canal along a sheep track that leads to the so-called **Basin**, a structure equipped with a guard house that collects the canal waters coming from Goglio and from which pipelines run to the Verampio power plant below, where the water is turbed for hydroelectric purposes.

From the Basin, the road becomes much wider and continues until it crosses the consortium track to Alpe Deccia. Turn right at the intersection and climb along the paved road for a few hairpin bends until you reach the turnoff for **Alpe Voma**.

Take the dirt track to Voma, which ends just before the huts, and then continue level on the path bordered by a stone wall that goes to cross the **Rio Alfenza** (please stay on the path, avoiding entering and trampling the mowing meadows).

Immediately after the ford, a downhill track begins, becoming a steep asphalt track that descends to **Foppiano**.

After passing the **Pizzo del Frate** hotel (the hotel offers a bike charging service and is an excellent refreshment point before tackling the difficult ascent of the Colmine Pass), continue along a wide path for about 200 m and, following the signs, take the path to the left that descends into the woods until it crosses the consortium track to Alpe Cheggio.

It begins to climb along the partly paved track to Cheggio for about 800 m until it crosses a sheep track that climbs steeply to the right to the **Faiö** locality. From here, the most impervious section of the trail begins: the ascent to the Colmine Pass, which is the watershed between the Antigorio and Divedro Valleys.

At the beginning, follow a steep half-hill path that, shortly, with two steep switchbacks, leads to **Cavruga** (this section is hardly rideable also given the rather slippery bottom but overall results in 2-3 minutes of portage). From here, the trail continues at first with low gradients and good bottom, then begins a long series of switchbacks alternating between more accessible and steep sections that are difficult to pedal. However, the trail is wide and allows you to accompany the bike sideways without lifting it by weight.

A last wide hairpin bend allows you to reach the forested ridge and **Colmine Pass**. Don't imagine great vistas, you are immersed in a dense, but picturesque fir forest! After catching your breath, the descent from the pass begins. The first section still requires a lot of concentration and good technique because the trail is steep (be careful). If you decide to get out of the saddle, don't worry: it's only 4-5 minutes!

Finally, you reach a flatter section marked by a small spring. This is the start of a new path, specially built for this purpose, which descends through a beautiful forest of firs and beech trees, with pleasant hairpin bends, until it crosses the Consorzio path that climbs up to Solcio.

Continue along the paved consortium track (however, pay attention to the authorized cars that may pass through) until you reach **Rifugio Pietro Crosta in Solcio** (in addition to being an excellent refreshment point, the refuge offers free bike charging service and provides tools for minor repairs).

From the refuge, continue along a stretch of wide, scenic dirt track halfway up the mountainside, which leads to **Alpe Quaté** and **Moiero**. From here, descend, first on a dirt track, then on a paved track leading to **Dorcia di Dentro**. Paying attention to possible cars you may encounter, continue along a very steep winding section until reaching a detour on a path leading to the **Boschi delle Fate** and finally to **San Domenico**, where this tour ends.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The Cistella Tour is **challenging**, with some very steep climbs, so a good **twin-axle e-bike** is strongly recommended.

Given the significant elevation gain and the overall length of the tour, we recommend using the **ski lifts** from San Domenico that allow you to gain elevation and carry your bikes up to the 2480 m of Punta del Dosso. Colle di Ciamporino can also be reached by lift service trails from San Domenico. Still, we strongly advise against their use because they are uninteresting, steep, often ruined, and force unnecessary and risky battery consumption.

The route should be approached **only clockwise** because the Bondolero Valley section is feasible only downhill.

Information on times and costs of San Domenico ski lifts	 SAN DOMENICO <i>feel the nature</i>	www.sandomenicoski.com Tel. +39 0324 780868 E-mail: info@sandobikepark.com
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POINTS OF ATTENTION

1. Steep and bumpy descent down the valley of Case di Sotto (Bondolero Valley).
2. Ford on Rio Bondolero
3. Some exposed sections along the Veia di Scuetar, between Agarù and the Rio Ghendola.
4. Woad and short portage in the crossing of the Rio Ghendola.
5. Ford on the Rio Alfenza
6. Some steep sections in the ascent to Colmine Pass.
7. Steep descent from Passo della Colmine.

TECHNICAL DATA.

Relevant geographical area:	Ossola / Divedro Valley, Devero Valley, Antigorio Valley
Place of departure:	Punta del Dosso 2480 m (reached by chairlift)
Place of arrival:	San Domenico 1410 m
Number of legs:	1
Length	38 km
Height difference	1392 m
Total ascent:	1350 m by chairlift between San Domenico and Punta del Dosso; 1700 m chairlift only between San Domenico and Alpe Ciamporino; 2400 m without chairlift
Total descent:	2400 m using the chairlift (recommended) between San Domenico and Punta del Dosso; 2200 m if using the chairlift only between San Domenico Alpe Ciamporino or if not using it at all
Difficulty:	OC (CHALLENGING)
Average duration:	5 to 7 hours
Minimum elevation:	1084 m.a.s.l. (along the Veia di Scuetar)
Highest altitude reached:	2480 m.a.s.l. (Punta del Dosso, chairlift arrival)
Degree of cycling:	good
Recommended period:	July-September. Typically, the chairlift operates daily only in August and summer, while in July and September, only on weekends.
Presence of dedicated signage:	The route is marked with red arrows bearing code 50, which identifies the Cistella MTB Tour. Some signs indicate the presence of difficult or dangerous sections (steep stretches, hazardous descents, curves, intersections with tracks travelled by cars, and pastures with grazing animals).
Target audience:	experienced mtb lover

VANTAGE POINTS

Punta del Dosso, Alpe Rono

EATERIES

San Domenico, Alpe Ciamporino, Punta del Dosso, Foppiano, Alpe Solcio

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

CRODO - Location Bagni, 20 - 28862 Crodo (VB), Tel. +39 0324 600005,
altaossola@gmail.com

BIKE SERVICE

San Domenico Ski, **Rental**, locality San Domenico - 28868 VARZO (VB), Tel. +39 0324 780868, www.sandomenicoski.com

Hotel Pizzo del Frate, **Rental**, Viceno locality - 28862 CRODO, Tel. +39 0324 61233,
info@pizzodelfrate.it, www.pizzodelfrate.it

CHARGING STATIONS

San Domenico Ski, locality San Domenico - 28868 VARZO (VB), Tel. +39 0324 780868,
www.sandomenicoski.com

Rifugio Pietro Crosta, locality Alpe Solcio - 28868 VARZO (VB) Tel. +39 0324 634183 tel. mob.
+39 340 825923434, www.rifugiocrosta.it

San Domenico Ski, locality Alpe Ciamporino - 28868 VARZO (VB), Tel. +39 0324 780868,
www.sandomenicoski.com

Hotel Pizzo del Frate, Viceno locality - 28862 CRODO, Tel. +39 0324 61233,
info@pizzodelfrate.it, www.pizzodelfrate.it

PLACES OF INTEREST

Along the route

Punta del Dosso: vantage point; Alpe Bondolero: alpine meadows and area of production of excellent alpine cheese; Veia di Scuetar: dense fir forests; Voma: old village with beautiful stone architecture; Foppiano: vantage point; Colmine Pass: dense fir forests; Alpe Solcio: vantage point; Coatè and Moriero: vantage points

Nearby

VARZO

The Multimedia Archaeomuseum of the Veglia Devero Park, a 14th-century medieval tower, a Roman bridge (rebuilt in 1300) over the Diveria, several Oratories dating from the 16th-17th centuries, Archaeological Museum, Ski lifts (chairlifts) San Domenico Sky.

CRODO

Viceno Mountain House Museum, "Ubaldo Baroli" Earth Science Museum, and "Devil's Wall" are megalithic structures from the protohistoric period.

BACENO

Goglio Cable Car Museum, Chaplain's House "Don Amedeo Ruscetta," Church of San Gaudenzio, Old Press, Alpine Pasture Museum, Urieggio Gorge and Giants' Cauldrons.

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, sudden movement, or loud noise. Allow them enough space and time to adjust to your presence.

5. Give right of way properly

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 appearance of the first mountain bikes, the NORBA (National Off-Road Bicycle Association) has drafted 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 NORBA 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.

NORBA Code.

1. Always give the right of way to hikers on foot.
2. Slow down and use caution when approaching and overtaking hikers on foot or other cycle walkers. Always signal your arrival well in advance; avoid cackling or shouting. Apologize and greet politely.
3. Keep mountain bike speed under control at all times 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 route, 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 collect your own and, when possible, also those abandoned by other "distracted" hikers.
7. Always respect private and public property, leaving gates, moving barriers, or bars as they are found. In all cases, 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 advisable to be self-sufficient. The destination to be reached and the speed at which one moves should be proportionate to the psychophysical fitness and ability of the driver, the equipment, the environment, the terrain, and, above all, the weather conditions.
9. Never undertake a cycle excursion alone, except in cases of force majeure. Stay away from isolated areas far from major roads, and always leave clear directions regarding the route and estimated return time.
10. Minimize impact with nature: steal only images and memories and leave, at most, the barely perceptible imprint of the wheels of your vehicle.