



Antrona Lakes: Cheggio, Antrona and Campliccioli ● OC CHALLENGING

From the former steel capital of the Lower Ossola (Villadossola) to the lakes of Antrona, Campliccioli, and Alpe dei Cavalli (Cheggio), among the most beautiful pre-Alpine artificial lakes at the foot of the Andolla and Weissmies.

Villadossola, Ossola's second-largest city in terms of population, is now searching for a new identity.

There, where people from all parts of Italy once found employment (these were the days of the economic boom), in factories built with thousands and thousands of cubic meters of concrete and iron (and mountains of manufacturing waste), efforts are now being made to reclaim, dismantle and create new living conditions.

This is not an easy process because it is not just a matter of rebuilding but also rethinking other forms of employment and economy that would guarantee residents' income and prosperity. Just as, for better or worse, the iron and steel industry that developed here, thanks to the exploitation of iron ore from the nearby **Valle Antrona**, guaranteed it.

The historic Ceretti plant, then Sisma, then Leali, came to have as many as 1,600 employees. But that is now a thing of the past.

However, the link between Villadossola and the **Torrente Ovesca** valley remains intact and may offer new resources.

One of these could be tourism, with a well-equipped valley fund that can provide the essentials for the development of renovated and brought-back-to-life mountain villages, making the most of people's demand for nature and a healthy environment in large metropolises.

Dreams, pious illusions!!!? Who knows...

And who knows, maybe the bicycle can help drive this new development process and make most people aware of these wonderful mountain places.

We've taken it a bit broadly this time, but it's to better understand the context in which the area's bicycle tourism promotion moves.

We start near the **Romanesque church of San Bartolomeo** (10th century), in the supermarket area where you can get supplies.

Along **Via Idilio Zonca**, you reach the bottleneck (right next to the **bridge over the Ovesca**) that leads out of town and soon forces you to put your hand to your nimblest ratios.

A series of curves with gradients approaching double digits, followed by a long straight, leads to the hamlet of **Noga**. Its **17th-century church**, dedicated to the **Beata Vergine del Rosario**, overlooks the town below.

Upon reaching **Cresti**, a hamlet of Montescheno, the climb becomes less challenging.

Administratively, it changes and enters the territory of the new municipality of **Borgomezzavalle**, which was created a few years ago by the merger of **Viganella** and **Seppiana**.

Small village, but with great minds. Two examples are the famous **Viganella mirror** that brings the sun back into the square on cold winter days and houses for sale for one euro.

You can also see how beautiful these small villages are by pedalling, just raising your head, although it is advisable to stop and admire them in peace and safety.

A long flat section and transit over the bridge at **Rivera** lead to the right bank of the stream. After a few hundred meters, you start climbing again, passing through **Prato**, **Terzo Fuori**, **San Pietro**, **Madonna**, and **Locasca**.

After a long straight stretch between well-kept meadows and a few scattered houses, we come to a hump that anticipates one of Ossola's many monumental **hydroelectric power plants**, that of **Rovesca**, dedicated to G.B. Pirelli and built in the 1920s.

A couple of hairpin bends and many uphill curves, followed by yet another bridge back to the left bank of the Ovesca, lead to **Antronapiana**, the capital of the Municipality of **Antrona Schieranco**.

Here, one usually chooses either the west side and the lakes of Antrona (Alpe Russi) and Campliccioli or the east side and Alpe dei Cavalli past Cheggio. Since you are here to learn more about these places, opt for both, starting with the first two lakes to the west, which appear more affordable on paper.

Right at the beginning of the village, cross the bridge on the left to soon plunge into a beautiful forest of larch and birch trees, where you will find the lonely and quiet "**Le Betulle**" **campsite** you meet on the first part of the climb. After about ten not-too-demanding hairpin bends, you reach **Alpe Russi** with the Albergo Ristorante Lago Pineta for refreshments before climbing to the day's second and more challenging lake.

The first **lake**, **the Antrona**, is a basin dominated by steep cliffs that help give it that dark blue colour that immediately leaps to the eye.

Leaving the lake on the right, cross **Alpe Baite** and begin to climb, facing the first series of hairpin bends (12 in all) that gain more than two hundred meters in elevation gain.

A kilometre or so of false flatness leads to the base of the second and final set of switchbacks that, in another kilometre, gain the last 70 m of elevation.

This brings you to the vicinity of the **Campliccioli dam** with a breathtaking view of the valley that repays all the hard work done.

Once you return to Alpe Russi, proceed on the opposite side where you went up. The communal road back to Antronapiana is wider, longer, and has breathtaking gradients, so exercise maximum caution!

At the end of the descent, passing through **Cimalleggra** at Antronapiana, turn left for Cheggio along **SP 141**.

At this point, there are still 6 km of challenging ascent, so it is recommended that you stop at the **stone fountain** at the base of the **mega map** illustrating the area.

The exit from the village is marked by a series of signs indicating where you are headed, which are impossible to miss.

After the last houses, the road winds through vegetable gardens and meadows, with hairpin bends that soon allow a beautiful view of the village below.

Then there is little to distract, the ascent becomes more challenging, and the surrounding landscape changes, becoming more rural and alpine. Old barns and farmsteads replace houses, and a fountain spouting near a large boulder replaces the more sophisticated one in town.

People once lived here, raising a few heads of cattle and cultivating what little the mountains allowed. Now, the bravest have restored these buildings and use them on weekends and during summer vacations as huts where they can find peace, rest, and recreation.

This first section runs on the proper orographic slope of the Torrente Loranco tributary of the Ovesca River.

When you reach yet another stream crossing, you come out of the closed valley and have an abrupt change of scenery. You have a comprehensive view of the entire Loranco Valley (the northern part of the Antrona Valley is called) and a decidedly more alpine environment.

After a few hairpin bends, you reach the vicinity of **Alpe di Campo**, with several renovated huts and broad mowing meadows, where excellent hay is still made thanks to the commitment and sweat of the few remaining farmers.

The exit from the Alpe is along a couple of open and scenic switchbacks, followed by a really challenging section, where the gradient exceeds double digits. This section leads into a pine forest, where you certainly do not spare your legs, but at least on certain summer days, you have the refreshment of shade.

About ten hairpin bends separate from Alpe Cheggio and its small San Bernardo oratory right in front of the Ristorante Alpino.

Before indulging in a plate of pasta and a refreshing beer, it is advisable to immediately tackle the last two hundred meters to the **Alpe dei Cavalli lake** dam. The first part is asphalt, and the second part is dirt. Be careful not to puncture it right here!

The reservoir mirrors an alpine crown dominated by **Pizzo Andolla** and the **Weissmies**, mountaineering destinations coveted by hikers.

Suitably refreshed at the Alpino, all that remains is to take the way back, with a few brief stops at those scenic spots where memorable photos can be taken.

For the record, the climb in the Antrona Valley is one of those preferred by **Elisa Longo Borghini**, the multiple champion, of whom the entire Verbano Cusio Ossola area is proud.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Lined up one after the other, with over 2,000 meters of ascent, the three destination lakes of the day make this a challenging route.

A 50/32 is recommended to be on the safe side.

POINTS OF ATTENTION

1. The most challenging sections are found in the first switchbacks to Campliccioli Lake and from Alpe Campo to the exit of the pine forest before Cheggio.
2. The descent from Campliccioli Lake has many blind curves and a very narrow roadway; use extreme caution. Ditto on the final part from Cheggio on Antronapiana.

TECHNICAL DATA.

Relevant geographical area:	Ossola / Alta Valle Antrona
Place of departure:	Villadossola
Place of arrival:	Lago dei Cavalli (Cheggio)
Number of legs:	1
Length:	37.3 km
Height difference:	1236 m
Total ascent:	2060 m indicative
Total descent:	850 m indicative
Difficulty:	OC (CHALLENGING)
Average duration:	5 hours 30 minutes
Minimum elevation:	260 m.a.s.l.
Highest altitude reached:	1495 m.a.s.l.
Degree of cyclability:	total
Recommended period:	May-September
Presence of dedicated signage:	no
Target audience:	amateur cyclist/cyclo-hiker

VANTAGE POINTS

Diga del Lago dei Cavalli

EATERIES

Hotel Restaurant Lago Pineta (Alpe Russi), food store and bar in Antronapiana, Alpine Refuge CAI Città di Novara, Alpino Restaurant in Cheggio.

BIKE SERVICE

Il Ciclope SAS di De Pani Cesare e C., **Sale-Shop-Hire**, Via Sempione, 41 - 28844 VILLADOSSOLA (VB), Tel. +39 0324 53845, info@ciclopecicli.it, www.facebook.com/ciclopeciclivilladossola

PLACES OF INTEREST

Along the route

Romanesque Church of San Bartolomeo in Villadossola, 17th-century Church of the Noga, Villette piazza del Sole riflesso, Antrona, Campliccioli, and Cavalli lakes.

Nearby

VILLADOSSOLA

Historical Hall of Resistance, Museum of Peasant Civilization locality Sogno, Romanesque church of San Bartolomeo 10th century, Gaggiolo hydroelectric power plant of 1889 on the Ovesca Stream, Boschetto hydroelectric power plant of 1922, Villa-Ovesca hydroelectric power plant of the early 20th century with nature trail, Torchio d'Armenosc 18th century at Noga, Church of Santa Maria Assunta 9th century locality Piaggio, Oratory of San Maurizio 11th century locality Piaggio, Parish Church Beata Vergine del Rosario 16th century locality Noga.

MONTESCHENO

Grape press and mill locality of Barboniga, SS John the Baptist and Charles 17th century church, Oratory of Madonna della Grazie in Vallemiola 16th century.

BORGOMEZZAVALLE

Solar mirror of Viganella, 12th -century crucifix in Le Selve locality, 11th -century parish church of Sant'Ambrogio in Seppiana locality, houses with arcade from 1600.

ANTRONA SCHIERANCO

Lakes of Antrona, Campliccioli, Cingino, Camposecco, Lareccio, dei Cavalli, the church of the Beata Vergine del Carmine 16th century locality Madonna, the oratory of the Beata Vergine della Neve 16th century locality Antronapiana, the parish church of San Lorenzo 12th century locality Antronapiana.