

ANDREA RIZZATO



SECRET DOLOMITES



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

BEC DE ROCES

⑥

A strange little world in the heart of the Dolomites

Starting point: Campolongo Pass between Corvara and Arabba

GPS: 46.519510 11.873769

Time: 3.5 hours

Difficulty: Easy, for all hikers

Elevation gain: 650 metres

Trail markers: Excellent

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 006

Standing before the Sella Group and its cyclopean walls, the Bec de Rocés are strangely shaped limestone pinnacles rising among the mugo pines. In the distance, the sparkling glaciers of the Marmolada and the walls of Pelmo and Civetta are the perfect combination of power and magic. The Bec de Rocés are easily accessible in the Campolongo pass and offer pleasant hikes for those who wish to walk around their base freely and discover picturesque silhouettes. The Bec de Rocés can also be an intermediary stage as part of a longer hike to the Kostner refuge in the Vallon, and the Boè lake, another important sight in the Sella Group. Although they are quite busy in the summer, there are still quieter spots among these large, sunny expanses to enjoy the exceptional views.

The hike starts at the Albergo Boè (hotel), about 200 metres north of the Campolongo pass (1,875 metres, signs and maps). Follow the CAI 638 trail, which is a shortcut to the longer route on a ski slope, until you reach the Crep de Munt (a cable car from Corvara also takes you there). Climb west, along the same trail. Pass the picturesque Boè lake, a glacial pond in a depression between rocky walls, and continue on the rock slabs of the Plan de Sass near a second chairlift. Once you reach a small plateau, you will see the Rifugio Kostner. Sitting at an altitude of 2,500 metres, the refuge enjoys a beautiful panoramic position between the rocky slabs of the Sella, which can be reached quickly (about an hour from the pass). Leave the paths leading up from the refuge to Piz Boè and follow the signs for the Rifugio Bec de Rocés. Go south, and as you descend, take a moment to enjoy the views of the Marmolada, until you reach the Bec de Rocés formations. Take your time to discover this magnificent place at your own pace, passing among towers and rocks, like the Sass Quadro boulder. At the base of the boulder, the remains of an Austrian fortification with a wall and stone steps are still visible. Continue along the path until you reach the lawns near the ski slopes where the large refuge is located. To return to Campolongo pass, simply follow the dirt track which, after a sharp left bend, descends between the meadows.

Rocks and trees at the Bec de Rocés ►





Bec de Rocces with Pelmo and Civetta in the background

THE LAGHETTO DELLE FONTANE ⑨

The magical water mirror that comes back to life every spring

Starting point: Vivaio Piccolet (1,257 metres), on the road from Vallada Agordina leading towards Forcella Lagazzon

GPS: 46.382496 11.918421

Time: 5.5 hours

Difficulty: This hike is accessible to all. It is long and demanding because of the difference in altitude

Elevation gain: 1,000 metres

Trail markers: Good

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 015



The little Laghetto delle Fontane ('Lake of the Fountains') is nestled on the volcanic ridge between the peaks of Auta and Pezza, in the Marmolada group. If you look for it on a topographic map, you won't find it! This beautiful and calm lake is seasonal. Only the few rare hikers who know when to seize the right moment in the springtime will reach it and fall under its spell.

That's why topographers have never noticed it, given the brief instances it graces the peaks of Mount Pezza, a volcanic rock covered with meadows and stretches of rhododendron. As the snow melts at the end of June and an explosion of blooming flowers in a thousand colours grace this corner of Eden in the Dolomites, the deep-blue lake comes to life. If the mythical King Laurin were to see today how so many alpine areas have been damaged, including several very close by, he would certainly take refuge on the quiet banks of the lake. The hike in search of this lake is rich in panoramas, floral beauties and unique landscapes, and is definitely on the list of what to see in the Dolomites. Make sure to visit the area on a clear, sunny summer's day.

From Vivaio Piccolet, follow the CAI 684 trail that enters the woods to the north (follow the signs for the Baita Pianezza lodge). Climb the slopes of Punta Palazza and cross to the west. At a signposted intersection, turn right on a steep path that climbs steadily through the woods until you reach the wonderful flowery meadow where the Baita Pianezza lodge is located (1,665 metres, 1.5 hours). Here the terrain widens and offers a view of the imposing Pale di San Martino group, which stand out from the landscape. Continue behind the lodge on a narrow path marked in the grass (it is best to follow the signs) which soon widens. After a few bends, you reach the Forcella delle Pianezze. Do not head to the pass: instead, follow the signs and turn right towards the Forcella delle Fontane. Continue east over sloping meadows and pastoral valleys until the majestic and unexpected silvery south face of the Marmolada appears. Continue north, to the right of a stream embedded in the rocky relief at the base of Monte Pezza, to reach the Laghetto delle Fontane and the Forcella of the same name (2,206 metres, 3 hours from the start). For the more experienced hikers, climb over the meadows towards the peaks of Pezza to the east of the lake toward the ridge (there is no identifiable path here) where a panoramic 360-degree view awaits.

◀ The Marmolada and the Laghetto delle Fontane seen from Monte Pezza



The Laghetto delle Fontane near the Cime d'Auta peaks

CASTELLO DI BANCDALE

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A fairy-tale castle in the kingdom of Fanes

Starting point: Sant'Uberto (1,421 metres), on the road between Cortina and Passo Cimabanche (large parking lot). Given the considerable elevation gain of this itinerary, it may be convenient to climb to higher altitudes using the shuttle service to the Malga Ra Stua (information at the visitors' centre of the Regional Natural Park of the Ampezzo Dolomites in Fiammes)

GPS: 46.602410 12.107330

Time: 8 hours

Difficulty: The hike is long and demanding but technically easy. It requires good orientation and competence to advance. It is advised to be accompanied by a guide or an expert

Elevation gain: 1,200 metres

Trail markers: Excellent until Lake Fodara, but absent after. However, the old paths safely lead to the centre of the Vallon Grande. Excellent visibility is required

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 003



The Castello di Bancdalse (Bancdalse Castle) is a small, rocky plateau between the Val di Rudo and the high plateau of Fodara Vedla in the Fanes-Sennes-Prags Nature Park. It descends for 500 metres toward Pederù, while the eastern slope is bristling with broken towers set on the pebbled streams of the Vallon Grande, at the foot of the Crode Camin.

No one passes through these remote lands, as there are no marked trails. Before the creation of the park, only hunters would go up there to find the chamois. The name 'castle' comes from the salt that was spread on the rocks to attract the goat-antelope.

If you want to enjoy the charm of a discovery hike, which is very rare in the Dolomites these days, you can leave the well-trodden paths near the Rifugio Fodara Vedla and walk along the refreshing springs that flow into Lake Fodara all the way to the sparse pine forests and the enchanted meadows at the foot of the Castello di Bancdalse in the Vallon Grande. More experienced hikers can also reach the Cresta Camin, which marks the southern limit of the amphitheatre, to admire the endless panorama overlooking the entire protected area.

When you arrive at the Malga Ra Stua after about an hour's walk along a marked path (to avoid walking on the road) or by shuttle bus, make your way across the splendid meadows surrounded by age-old forests to Campo Croce, where you will find the springs of the Boite and an important crossroads. Turn left and walk up through the sparse Swiss stone pine forests on the slopes of the Lavinores, enjoying the beautiful views on the Croda Rossa, until you reach the grassy plain of the small Fodara lake (1.5 hours from Ra Stua). Without necessarily reaching the nearby Rifugio Fodara Vedla, walk along the pond on your left and join the track that climbs slightly to the south-west on the slopes of the Lavinores, near the stream that feeds it. Cross the entire northern base of the Lavinores group, passing by waterfalls and springs, between rocks and mugo pines, then continue past the opening over the Piccolo Valley and enter the Vallon Grande. The terrain is initially flat and practicable. To your right, you will see the strange towers of the Castello di Bancdalse. On its northern crest, there is a rocky passage that looks as if it is about to collapse. The faintly visible track that leads to this place disappears in the rocky debris but heads towards the broken Cresta Camin, which closes the passage to the south. If you still have the energy and time, make the effort to climb over the steep scree, preferably on the right, to the notch between the rocks called Forcella del Vallon Grande (2,580 metres, 2.5 hours from Lake Fodara). A little to the east of the pass, it is possible to climb to the wild Cresta Camin, where a branch of larch, the only trace of humanity's passage in this solitary expanse, marks the small summit.



The Sasso delle Nove in the Cunturines from the meadows of Vallon Grande

THE TRENCHES OF THE ALPE MATTINA PASS

④

The military outpost facing some of the most emblematic scenery of the Dolomites

Starting point: Rifugio Auronzo, accessible from Misurina on the Tre Cime toll road

GPS: 46.612262 12.295837

Time: 5 hours

Difficulty: Easy, for all hikers

Elevation gain: 200 metres

Trail markers: Excellent. The trenches can be visited freely

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 010

Is it still possible to find peaceful havens to admire the many wonders of the most emblematic and frequented place of the Dolomites, facing the gigantic, sail-like mountains of the Tre Cime di Lavaredo? Can we still escape the crowds of tourists that flock to the terrace of the Locatelli refuge and find a quiet corner, respectful of the tragic events that took place up there during the First World War? The answer is undoubtedly yes, because the best viewpoints, slightly off the beaten track, were vital throughout the war, precisely because of their strategic positions at high altitude.

On the slopes just west of the imposing Torre di Toblin there are still paths, trenches and other artefacts that are easily accessible and

shine a light on the tragedy of countrymen killing each other in such a beautiful, harmonious natural setting.

From the car park near the Rifugio Auronzo, follow the road that leads to the Rifugio Lavaredo. At the height of summer, it is best to set off early in the morning as this stretch is overrun by tourists. Walk under the famous walls of the three peaks of the Lavaredo, the Ovest ('west peak'), the Grande ('big peak') and the Piccola ('little peak'), culminating in the Spigolo Giallo, a blade that stretches from the scree of the ground toward the sky. From the Rifugio Lavaredo, which was a key Italian stronghold during the war, climb up to the Forcella Lavaredo, where the three peaks can be seen from their best-known angle. From the pass, continue along the road until you reach the Rifugio Locatelli, whose owner was the guide Sepp Innerkofler before the war. This legendary figure, a connoisseur of the surrounding mountains, joined the Austrian Standschützen (militia) and was killed by an Italian sniper on Mount Paterno, just opposite his refuge. The guns fell silent that day, and operations ceased, as a sign of remembrance, but also to recover the remains and bury them. From the refuge, follow the signs to the Rifugio Tre Scarperi and climb very slightly to go around the Sasso di Sesto to the west, reaching the Alpe Mattina pass in a spectacular setting. From this point, abandon the marked trails and wander freely across the relief of the Val Rinbon below with its many war relics, including a large, well-preserved trench. The last outpost overlooks the Tre Cime, and the view from this privileged vantage point is breathtaking. It was on this ridge, on the morning of 24 May 1915 at 8.45am, that the First World War began.





Dawn over the Cristallo, the Tofane and the Croda Rossa d'Ampezzo, as seen from the Alpe Mattina pass

ANDER DELLE MATE

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The enigmatic karstic eye of the Cansiglio forest

Starting point: Pian Canaia, accessible by car from Tambre d'Alpago passing through Sant'Anna e Vivaio

GPS: 46.115201 12.434857

Time: 5 hours

Difficulty: Easy, but a sense of direction is required in the woods (follow the signs carefully)

Elevation gain: 300 metres

Trail markers: Good

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 012



Just below the popular Forcella Palantina, so well hidden that it is almost invisible, is a large cave with a rugged floor called Ander delle Mate. The origin of this name is rather vague, but it seems to refer to women (*mater* means 'mother' in Latin) or a place used by witches. It is one of the most mysterious places in the Cansiglio forest. Said to be charged with sacred energy, it was appreciated by the ancient inhabitants of the plains at the edge of the woods and on the bare grassy slopes as a place to perform magic rites. With its door open to the sky, like the eye of a giant, it is believed the karstic cave was formed after the limestone floor of the mountain collapsed. The entrance is hidden by the grass of the surrounding meadows, then the walls sink down, letting the light in from above. The water that filters through there reappears downstream in the Friulian plain, after a long journey deep in the heart of the karstic layers, which are still the object of speleological explorations. Reaching this lair on an autumn day, with clouds possibly gathering around the mountain peaks, is undoubtedly the best way to appreciate the scenery. This hike feels like a long walk in the heart of an enchanted forest, strewn with secluded, isolated navigation locks that breathe fresh air and where deer bellow at dusk.

From Pian Canaia, continue on the road to Campon until you see the forest path to the left and the CAI 983 markers. You'll arrive in one of the most precious and evocative areas of the Cansiglio, which alternates between flat surfaces and grandiose, dense forests. After a flat area with some clearings, the forest road becomes a path and begins to climb to another basin populated by fir trees, due to the particularly cold microclimate resulting from the effects of thermal inversion. Pass through a final gap that leads out of the vegetation. The trees give way to a tormented karstic landscape of meadows, sinkholes and wandering rocks. In the distance you'll notice the Dolomites stretching out, while to the south, the profile of the Adriatic coast and the bell towers of Venice are clearly visible. At a crossroads, leave the signs pointing to Piancavallo and the Rifugio Arneri and turn left toward the Forcella Palantina and the cave. Keep a close eye out for the entrance, which blends in with the landscape. The descent to the bottom of the cave must be made with care, especially if the rocks are wet.

◀ In the Ander delle Mate



Autumn in the Cansiglio forest



From the entrance of the cave in winter

CIMA DI VAN DEL PEZ

⑥

Following a chamois trail

Starting point: Col di Prà (843 metres), in the San Lucano valley, accessible by car from Taibon Agordino along the asphalt road. Park near the last few houses in the village

GPS: 46.296679 11.926785

Time: 7.5 hours

Difficulty: This hike does not present any difficulties but is recommended for qualified and resistant hikers as it requires good orientation and excellent visibility. Good stability is essential on the very steep meadows

Elevation gain: 1,400 metres

Trail markers: Sufficient until Forcella di Gardes (even if the high grass around the pass makes it hard to see the path), but then absent, except for a few stone cairns, until the summit

Cartography: Tabacco 1:25.000, sheet 022

The summit of the Van del Pez, or Quarta Pala di San Lucano, dominates the San Lucano valley with its 1,400-metre-high rock face. Together with those of the Torre, the Spiz di Lagunaz and the Terza Pala di San Lucano, Van del Pez overlooks the Boral di Lagunaz. In the local dialect, 'boraz' refers to a narrow, steep and frightening place, which lends itself well to the environment here, where the classic, postcard-worthy scenery of the Dolomites is set aside to give way to much more powerful and impressive landscapes.

Just like on the western dihedral of the Spiz di Lagunaz or on the pillars of the Quarta Pala, difficult tracks which have since become legendary were carved in these walls, amid the complete and deliberately sought silence of the mountains. The ascent to the summit is possible thanks to a surprising line of meadows on the Van del Pez (a suspended basin marked by the surrounding walls and punctuated by red spruces, or 'pez' as they are called in Belluno), bordering the precipices of the Boral di Lagunaz.



This is a typical trail for chamois, which go there in number to graze, and so reveal the natural weaknesses of the mountain. The summit also offers an unparalleled view, in all its breadth and strength, of the northern front of the Agner. If you were to drop an object there, it would land directly in the woods at the bottom of the valley!

From the car park near the last houses of Col di Prà, follow the signposted path until Pont. The path is a shortcut to the much longer forest road to Gares. Turn right for Casera Malgonera up a steep dirt track through the woods. Leave the path when a sign points to the right for the Forcella di Gardes. Continue through a sloping forest, still on a clearly visible track, until you reach the meadows of the upper Gardes valley. After passing a spring, you will come to the



now abandoned Casera Gardes and then to the water intake of an aqueduct at 1,925 metres of altitude. Continue to follow the markers, which can be hidden in summer by the tall grass of the flowering meadows, and climb to the Forcella di Gardes (1,998 metres). From the pass, between the Pale di San Lucano and the Cima Pape, turn south. At the beginning, no paths or cairns are visible, as the abundant vegetation covers everything, but near the first rocky strips, a discreet track quickly leads to the only place where it is possible to climb the upper slopes of the mountain. After crossing a short, rocky step with the help of good support points, you will arrive at the slopes that descend from the top of the Cime del Van del Pez. Although not very visible, you can see a crossroads with a small stone cairn: on the right, you can reach the summit directly by following the cairns. It is better to continue toward Monte San Lucano, gradually ascending on a faint track until you reach a spectacular depression in the ridge where the Torre and the Spiz di Lagunaz appear. The Boral di Lagunaz can be seen right in front of you. Leave the track, which soon leads to the Arco del Bersanel, and climb freely up the grassy ridge on the right that overlooks the impressive Boral chasm and the Agner walls that rise up in front. Continue to the first rocks that make up the Cime del Van del Pez and follow them on the eastern side along an impressive semicircle, making the most of the faint chamois tracks. This section is a must; there is no other way than to cross the entire Van del Pez amphitheatre and then climb the only grassy slope that leads up. When you reach the mugo pines that cover the summit cap and look like a spot in the landscape, you will find a providential track that cuts through the branches and leads, without any possibility of error, to the triangulation station on the summit (2,266 metres, 4 hours from Col di Prà). It is also possible to push on to the very top of the ridge, above the houses of Col di Prà, paying careful attention to the precipice on the right.

The Miola via ferrata, an enigmatic ghost trail

Until the end of the 1980s, it was possible to cross from Forcella di Gardes to Forcella Besausega by means of a via ferrata that climbed the walls of Monte San Lucano from the Arco del Bersanel. The route was dedicated to the shepherd Gianni Miola, who tragically fell into the precipice near the Forcella di Gardes while trying to pick edelweiss. Unfortunately, the via ferrata denatured places that were wild, opening the way to tourism that featured artificial routes, including on the Pale di San Lucano. It is said that all the metal equipment disappeared overnight and that no one has come up with a new initiative since. It seems that, for once, and contrary to the trend of the time, the desire to preserve the legendary natural environment of this unique atoll-like platform prevailed.

ANDREA RIZZATO



SECRET

DOLOMITES

From ephemeral lakes in mountain meadows to rocky labyrinths hidden behind rock walls, ancient mining villages and abandoned hamlets, the prison of the Turks in the Dolomites, a proglacial lake, a rock that defies the laws of gravity, petrified bishops, dwarfs, gnomes and an elephant, caves, ravines and mysterious portals, breathtaking views of the highest rock walls of the range, a forgotten and enchanting forest, lost bivouacs on high, secluded plateaus, solitary hermitages, stone books in an open-air library, the trails of Mesolithic hunters, a glacier between blood-red rock walls and another with a bewitching turquoise gaze, via ferratas to travel along in solitude, unknown and unnamed summits on topographic maps, fabled spirits of the air ...

Secret Dolomites is a guidebook for travellers escaping the crowded paths to discover the range's countless unknown and often spectacular sites.

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