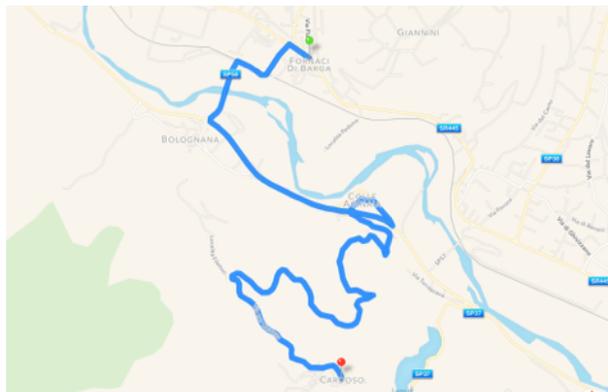


Cardoso walks

Monte Gragno / Penna

The big tree-topped mountain seen from the kitchen window is known as Monte Gragno. It is, however, Monte Penna - but generations of locals have confused it with (and hence called it) Monte Gragno and so the name has stuck.



This walk has been done directly from Filecchio (via Ponte all'Ania) but is much easier if you start at the small hamlet of Cardoso (10 mins by car).

CARDOSO is situated almost opposite Filecchio, on the other side of the Serchio Valley. It is a pretty village with small, winding streets, covered alleys, and a small palace at the top of the village which was once the summer residence of a noble family from Lucca. It has a fine old church, Chiesa Di San Genesio. At night in summer, the lights of the village and those outlining the church can be seen clearly from Barga and from Filecchio.

In contrast to Sommocolonia above Barga, CARDOSO appears to be thriving. It has two cafe/bars and many of the fine, old houses have been renovated, some as holiday homes.

CARDOSO is about 6km from Filecchio by road. Drive into Fornacci di Barga and then take the road for Lucca. Almost as soon as you cross the bridge there will be a road on the right signposted for Cardoso. Take this road and drive the 2-3 km up to the village. As you enter Cardoso there is a free carpark on the left where there are usually places to park. Cardoso is well worth a visit just to wander its narrow streets and enjoy the views across the valley and over to Monte Giovo.



CARDOSO is the starting point for two fine walks. The paths are way-marked as routes 111 and 136. Both leave CARDOSO in a combined, single route before diverging after about 45 minutes with route 136 going right and 111 left. There are options to make this a circular 4 hour expedition via San Luigi, or a shorter there and back route down either the 136 or 111. Route 136 takes in the view from the Croce, a viewpoint situated three quarters up Monte Penna, the flat topped mountain directly opposite Casa Togneri. The path

continues across the face of the mountain to the hamlet of San Luigi which can also be reached by road from Fabbriche di Vallico via Vallico Sotto and Sopra. San Luigi is a good picnic spot and is very close to the summit of Monte Gragno. Route 136 from San Luigi continues up to Mt. Palodina m.1171, about a fifty minute walk, and which provides a superb viewpoint for the Serchio valley and surrounding mountains. The top of Mt. Palodina is also a good picnic spot. A description of these routes from San Luigi is contained in the "Discover Garfagnana" guide in the house.

The alternative Route 111 terminates in San Luigi, but does so by winding around the mountainside before joining the tarmac road to Vallico Sopra.

If wanting to walk up Mt Palodina it would be advisable to drive to San Luigi and park there. A visit to the Croce can also be made by descending on route 136 from San Luigi.

Walking from Cardoso

From the car-park, cross the small square and opposite the bar take the route signposted Chiesa di San Genesio. The narrow, stone-paved road has a railing on the right. Keep following this railing. The red and white way-marks and the route signposts are obvious at the start of the road. Keep to the right all the way up through the village. The road becomes the Via Dante Alighieri, an appropriate name for a route that will later pass the Devil's tree!

Follow the red and white way marks which will take you through a passageway under a house. Exiting the passageway and going through a garden, keep to the right of an old stone building. Our route then follows a path to the right that is well signposted. The path can be slightly overgrown, but is always distinct and well marked. There are a few tracks that branch off the main path at the beginning of this walk, so be alert and look for the red and white signs.

After about twenty minutes of steady ascent you will reach the blackened, gnarled remains of a huge chestnut tree. It is signposted Castagno del Diavolo (Chestnut of the devil) and is estimated at 400 years old.

The path continues steeply upwards for another thirty minutes to reach a Y junction named Piazzola at m.720.



Defying the Laws of Physics!

Here the routes divide, with 136 going right to the Croce (15 mins), where there are picnic tables and panoramic views down to Filecchio and then on to San Luigi (75 mins) through a forest which blurs the laws of physics!

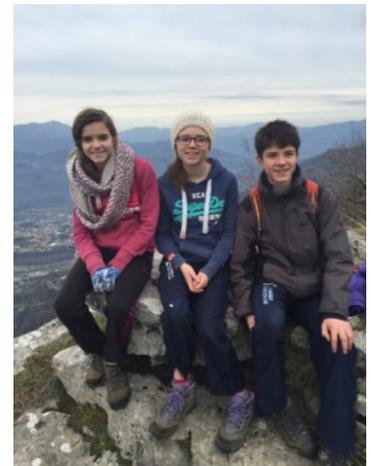
The other route 111 is even more scenic, going under the sheer cliffs of Monte Penna and offering successive views into and across three valleys. Following 111 from Piazzola, the path is cut into the mountain side with steep drops down. It is well constructed and wide enough to walk along in comfort and safety.

At the start of the path, a poem is attached to the cliff extolling the beauty of the unfolding scenery.

After five minutes the path reaches "La Buca di Castelvenere". A sign describes the importance of the extensive cave system that enters the mountain from here and features the early pictographs that have been discovered in the cave. It is possible to scramble up to the cave entrance.

After another five minutes, a picnic area with a dilapidated table is reached and the spectacular face of the mountain looms overhead. The cries of nesting hawks can often be heard here. The path now becomes much flatter and wider, being constructed to carry a small tractor used for timber extraction. Until two years ago it was common to encounter two, semi-wild mules grazing the mountainside. They were used to haul out wood and they clattered down on to the path to greet walkers. After about 40 minutes of easy trekking and wonderful views of the cliffs and the valleys, the route abruptly joins the tarmac road up to San Luigi which is about two hours further by foot.

Retracing the path back to CARDOSO takes about an hour and a half.



View from the Cross on route 136