

Walk to Sommocolonia

Height: 700m

History

Sommocolonia is a small, Tuscan hill village high up on a ridge above Barga. It is a delightful place, offering wonderful views down over Barga and the Garfagnana valley and across to the Apuanes on one side and the Appenines on the other. From May to September the swifts and swallows swoop around the church tower and over the valley. The village is depopulated. There are many empty houses used as holiday homes. The resident population numbers about seventy, down from five hundred, fifty years ago. There is no shop or bar.

The village played a brief but interesting part in the Second World War in late December 1944 involving The Buffalo Soldiers, local Partisans, and the German Army. For details, see Moscardini's autobiographical account of his childhood in Sommocolonia, written in English, entitled *La Vacanza*. There is a copy in Casa Togneri. The memorial in Sommocolonia also gives details of exceptional bravery of Lieutenant Fox which went unrecognised for many years.



From Barga

Take the Renaio road, Viale Cesare Bionde, opposite the Alpino Ristorante in the centre of Barga new town. The big cedar tree is the marker to look for here.

This tree-lined road has grand houses on each side. Follow it uphill for about a Kilometre until it comes to an end in a cluster of newish houses. Do not follow the main road around to the right signed Tiglio/Renaio. At the end of the road there is a way-marked path B2 on the

right using the familiar red and white marking.

Follow this historic, grassy track as it sweeps around the contours of the hill high above the busy road from Barga to Catagnana far below. There are lovely views from this path.

After about 30 minutes from the start of the walk, the path descends steeply to join the main road to Sommocolonia which was opened about sixty years ago replacing the Mule track that is our route.



Turn left down the road for about 150 metres to reach Ponte di Catagnana. Cross the bridge on the main road, then after about 50 metres turn right on the way-marked road up to Catagnana.

Go up this steep road. After about 600 metres the road curves left to Catagnana. Ignore this road unless you want to drive up to park at Catagnana which gives an option of shortening the walk to Sommocolonia.

Go straight on up the tarred road, marked B2, and soon it will develop into the stone paved muletrack which goes all the way to Sommocolonia. This was the only link the village had with Barga and the wider world and it features often in Moscardini's account of life there.

Keep on the stone paved muletrack, ignoring any gravel roads leading off to properties. The delightful views of Barga below are a feature of the walk, as is the welcome shade.

On a sharp corner, over half way up to Sommocolonia , there is a signpost B2 to Albiano which gives a pleasant way back to Barga. (It is currently blocked by fallen trees but will be cleared by Summer 2015).

You will now be either encouraged or discouraged by seeing Sommocolonia high above you. However, it is only about twenty minutes to the top!

You soon reach the lovely wayside chapel of St Rocco which is typical of those found on muletracks in Tuscany. You will find examples on the road to Tiglio from Filecchio and from Tiglio to Barga, and going up to Campocatino, to name but a few.

At the top of the muletrack is the sign Via92a Divisione Buffalo. The track was renamed in the 1990s in honour of the Buffalo soldiers who fought in Sommocolonia in December 1944.

Turn sharp left at this sign, and head for the church tower and Piazzola to enjoy the stunning views. This is a good place for a picnic as there are benches and a table.



The narrow streets of Sommocolonia are worth exploring. Visit the ruined Tower that was Lieutenant Fox's lookout post. Information boards give details of his actions.

Keep going along Via Al Belzo to reach Piazza San Rocco and another church. Cross diagonally and follow the road to the memorial hill at the edge of town where the Partisans and Buffalo Soldiers are commemorated. The route is now waymarked 22 with the usual red and white signs.

Onwards and Upwards

If you want to continue walking above Sommocolonia, turn left into Piazza Martiri della Resistenza and take the only road , diagonally opposite, way-marked 22. It is tarred at the start and goes gently at first up the ridge above Sommocolonia . There are lots of red and white markers on this track. After ten minutes a Pump House is reached with a big sign 22 on the side. The road becomes a dirt track and becomes much steeper. Keep going up the ridge following markers. Do not deviate along side tracks. The road becomes rocky where timber lorries have destroyed the old muletrack .

After a few kilometres a three -way junction is reached. Keep straight on up a narrow stony track. It is way-marked. From here it is half an hour to Lama and three and a half hours to St Bartholomo. Before Lama is reached, the path swings across the top of the valley from where Sommocolonia can be seen far below.

A grove of pine trees is crossed at the top of the path and on the other side is a small sign post reading 1070 Lama. Barga 3hours. Sommocolonia 1.20 hours. Saltello 3 hours. Dogana 1 hour.

Take the right hand track and continue up the hill through the woods to sweep around the top at height 1260 metres and follow the route along the ridge. There are lovely views of Monte Giovo and Monte Omo across the valley.

This point is 14 kilometres from Barga. We have turned back here on each occasion we have walked this route, but it would be possible to continue on for another two hours to reach Monte Nuda and Monte Romecchio, then join the 00 route and make a grand circuit down via Renaio to Barga. This could be a two day walk with a night spent in the Refuge on the other side of Monte Giovo by the lake.

A car drop off at Sommocolonia gives a head start, and a car pick up at Renaio would perhaps allow this lovely, high level route to be done in a long day.

