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Best period: May to November

Walking time (including stops and return): 2 hours.

Gradient uphill: 100 m.

Total distance (loop trail): about 2 kilometers.

Dino Campana, Cantù Orfici

since water is here the very queen of landscapes"

encroaches toward the valley in royal bends:

which sweet as the ancient voice of winds

to the broad ruin of its bed

of water that spreads among the cliffs

the very element, the docile melody

painting is not enough, it needs water,

With fresh tremours downstream,

Which the docile river only fills

"To make of the landscape the virgin country

of thousands of people throughout the Romagna.

courses of torrents all over the Apennines, and which nowadays fills the dam and quenching the thirst

along the Bidente valley, occasionally still moving the wheels of watermills which once dotted the

deserted houses. But the protagonist, here more than anywhere else, will be water, which flows

dam and the Park has prompted the realization of tourist services and the conservation of some of the

What is the result? Today we have a valley with important natural features, where tourists linked to the

building of the Dam by that name, a reservoir, which extends for over 3 km inside the National Park.

The event that, however, has most caused the change of appearance between 1976 and 1983 was the

The events which led to the current state of the Bidente Valley of Ridracoli begins many years ago.

Welcome to the valley of Ridracoli

NATURE TRAIL

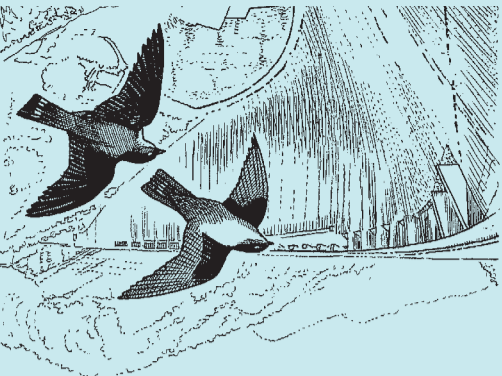
NATURE TRAIL

Ridracoli

A valley, a lake, a centuries-long history

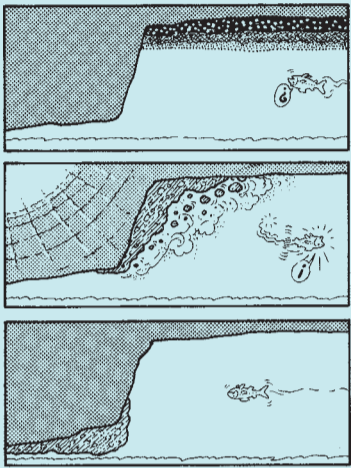


Parco Nazionale
Foreste Casertinesi
Monte Falterona
e Campigna



Let us try to look above us: a splendid cliff. From April to September, more or less, it is possible to see the eurasian crag martin swallow, a bird that builds its nest on vertical rocky cliffs, or, sometimes, as it happens around the Dam of Ridracoli, on concrete constructions. In order to recognize it and distinguish it from other migrating species, we should need to look at some details. Let us begin from the **Common Swift**, which we can easily observe in the centre of our towns, where on Summer evenings it flies in swarms uttering easily recognizable squeals. Swifts are exceptional flyers, clearly larger than other species, and present a fairly uniform dark plumage, and a vigorous peculiar flight. The common swallow, the house martin, and eurasian crag martin are more difficult to recognize! The **Barn swallow**, common in agricultural environments, is easily recognized by the red throat and the shape of the tail, with very pronounced peaks. The **Common House Martin** replaces the swallow often in residential areas and is slightly smaller. It also has a darker back, clear and obvious white spot above the tail, to form shorter and less forked tail. The **eurasian crag martin** finally presents a still less pronounced tail, a less dark color tending to brown and rounded features, with bright spots on the tail, a lighter colour leaning toward the brown and peculiar light patches on the tail.

As is the case for a considerable part of the Apennine chain, also the valley of Ridracoli (Dragon's creek) has its origins in a deep oceanic environment. Not very far from here, beginning from 15 million years ago, sediments that came to make the rocks upon which these trees, houses and the dam stand, began to build up. This part of the Apennines is in fact made of marl and sandstone formation, a repetition of thousands of alternate layers of marls and sandstone, all sediments originated from the erosion of the Apennine chain, which already existed in part, these were carried by underwater "turbid currents" or by underwater currents carrying debris after storms, floods or underwater earthquakes capable of fast carrying sediments towards great depths. We must therefore imagine such sediments while they slow down and come to settle on the sea bottom, originating sandstones, along with more coarse sandy material. The marl layers instead, originated from fine clay materials, from normal sediments occurring between a turbid current and the next. As a consequence of the process of uplift of the Apennines, consolidated sediments were lifted and carried in the present positions: on them we may today observe the processes of distortion to which they have been subjected, and sometimes discover the tracks of organisms that lived in the bottom of the sea at that time.



Before the mountains and the lake, was the sea

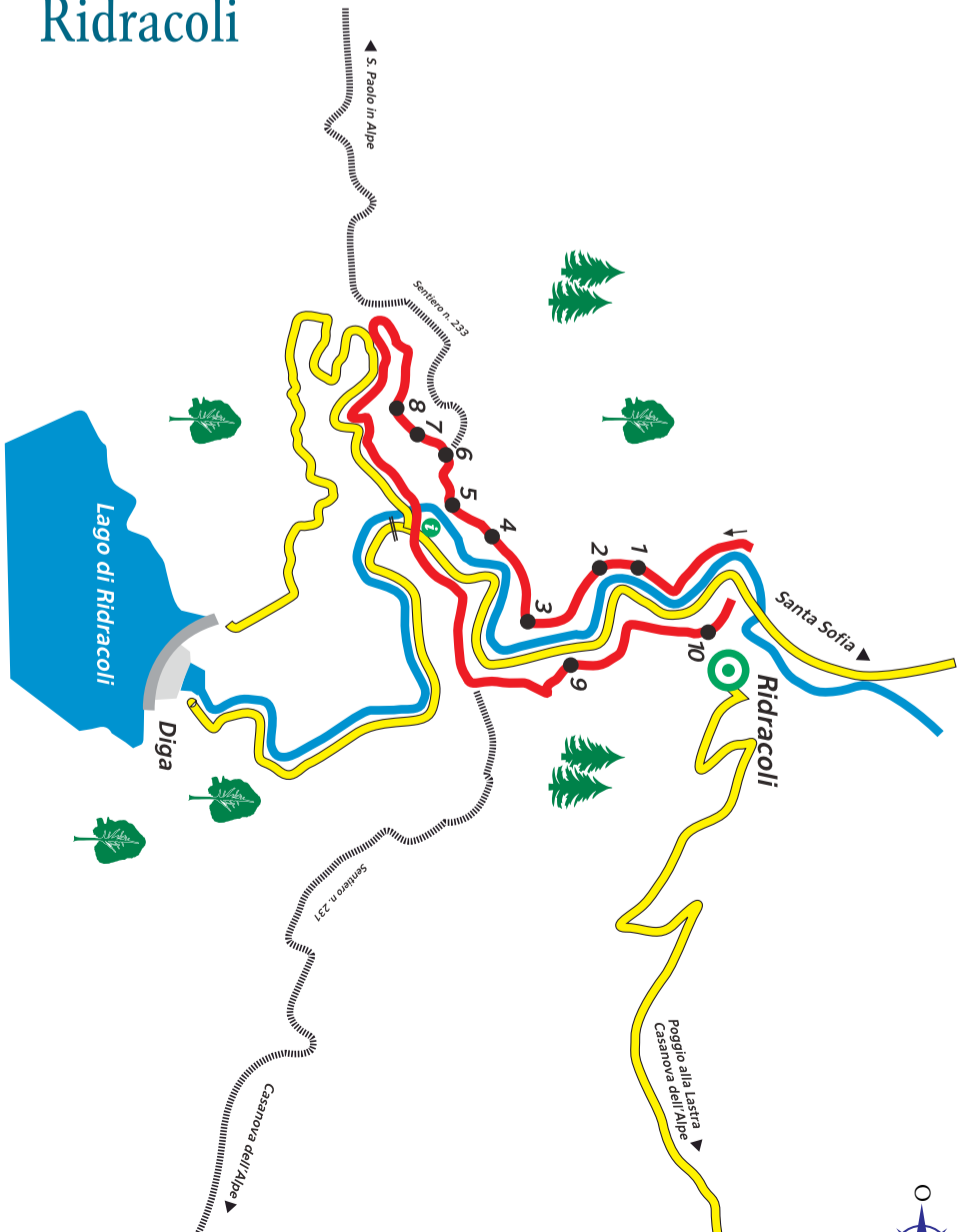
HALTING POINT 1

HALTING POINT 2

The crag martin, acrobatics on the rocks

Ridracoli

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Getting there: from the Romagna side reach Santa Sofia and follow the SS310 highway of Bidente. From the Tuscany side reach the SS71 highway and at Stia continue to Passo della Calla.

HALTING POINT 3

The signs of popular religiosity

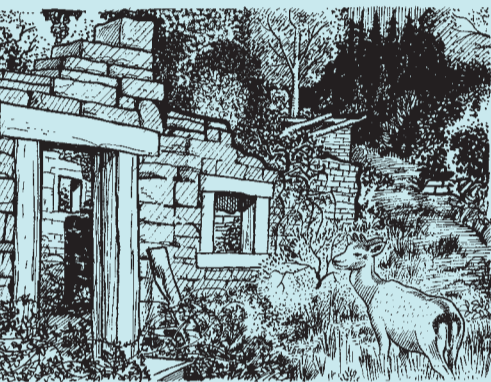
Walking through our mountains is not unusual to see the signs of religiosity of those who once lived in these places, signs of time and spirituality in these valleys. On mule trails there are small stone buildings, like kiosks, here called "**Maestà**" (majesty). Placed as they were along thoroughfares, they had the function of blessed signs, of religious witnesses, of graces received, and they also pointed the way. These "majesties" granted a moment of pause and recollection to the fatigued traveler. Some has paintings or small statues of the Madonna, while others are simply made of piled up stones to form a small pillar, but equally telling of the simple and sincere devotion pervading the life of the people of these mountains, sometimes telling of a narrow escape for which someone thanked the Divine Providence. Among these suffices to mention one, that of Felcitino in the neighboring valley of Pietrapazza, also called "Majesty of cholera", because it was built by those who were fortunate enough to escape a terrible epidemic that hit these areas in 1855. The Majesty of the Galvane is found along the mule trail that connected Ridracoli to San Paolo in Alpe. Particularly imposing and elegant, with a four slopes roof, it is documented as early as the late eighteenth century and was one of the stations for the "Rogations", processions that were carried out in the spring to invoke the protection of the harvest of that season, by the Parish church of S. Martino of Ridracoli.



HALTING POINT 4

Stone houses

With few exceptions, in our mountains scattered settlement was prevalent: the parish church with the parsonage in fact represented the "gathering centre" of a number of houses, located within a few miles, where the farmers lived. Ridracoli was no exception: the parish church was located close to the school and the cemetery, just upstream of the bridge, beyond which there was a tavern. Scattered throughout the territory, there were individual rural settlements, the houses clinging to the sides of the valley, from which the peasants drew, with an immense effort, the little that was necessary to their livelihood. The houses were built of stone, the material of which there was an unlimited availability but at the cost of a great effort, placed, where possible, with the best possible exposure. Around the house a few fruit trees, a small vegetable garden used for home consumption, the pastures for the few animals reared and around the forest: a source of food and firewood. The pace of life was inexorably marked by the seasons, more intense agricultural activities in the spring and summer, lesser in winter: the season devoted to chores around the house, to the production of wooden utensils (sometimes sold in markets villagers) to the production and maintenance of farming equipment. Food needs were largely met from self-production, purchases were limited almost exclusively to salt and oil, used sparingly, purchased at the weekly market in San Piero in Bagno or Santa Sofia.

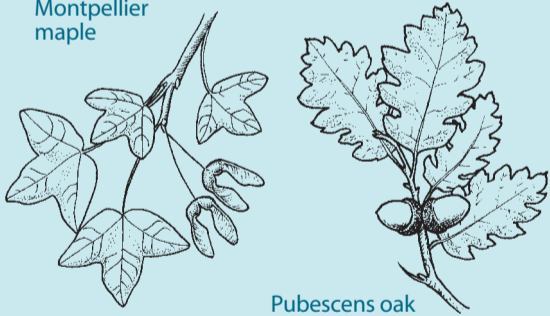


HALTING POINT 7

Montpellier maple and pubescens oak: pioneers on the rocks

The distribution of the trees is influenced by many factors, among which are the fundamental structure of the soil and climatic conditions. In this station you can see two interesting species typical of warm and dry, the Maple trefoil and oaks: learn to spot them! The **Montpellier maple *Acer monspessulanum*** grows at the edge of the woods in hot and sunny places, at lower altitudes. The species is easily recognizable from the leaf that, unlike that of other maples, has only three small lobes with rounded apex. The **pubescens oak *Quercus pubescens*** is instead an oak of particular hardiness and adaptability, an ability that has made the oak widespread in Italy. The distinction with the sessile oak, with which it can be mistaken, is linked to the hairiness of the leaves and the presence, in winter, of dry leaves still attached to the branches. Often the sunniest areas are also the most arid and sometimes more rocky. This means that the species that we find in these places are also called "pioneer" plants. This term is to indicate the capacity of such plants to adapt and grow on poor soils, to withstand difficult conditions of life. The term pioneer also indicates a temporal concept: it is applied to plants that typically colonize sterile land before others, but then they open the way to the species that occupy these places after them.

Montpellier maple



Pubescens oak

HALTING POINT 8

Towards the lonely valley of San Paolo

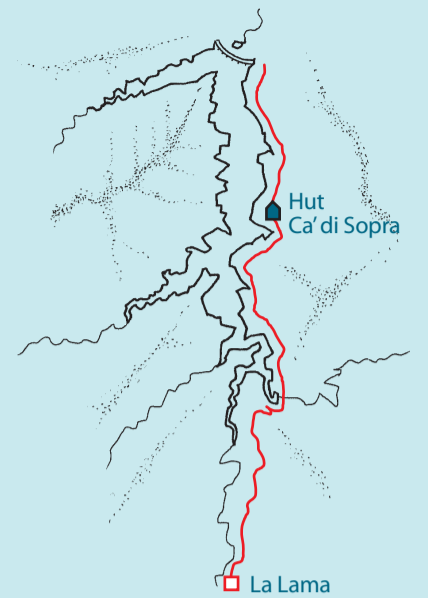
San Paolo in Alpe is one of the landmarks of the Park, a mix of history and nature, vantage point on the profile of the ridge or "giogana" from Passo della Calla it stretches toward the sinuous Mandrioli Pass, and the Natural Reserve of Sasso Fratino, but also offers an opportunity for sighting ungulates grazing on the meadows. St. Paolo is a real balcony which offers the eyes a 360° panorama, an "amazing view" wrote Sir Richard Colt Hoare, the eighteenth-century English traveler, describing the view from Poggio Scali, just opposite St. Paolo. The mark of man is still evident: the ruins of an old church, a well and the remains of what, a little over fifty years ago, it was an old inn. Of the parish church of St. Augustine, which until the sixteenth century was also a hermitage, only the walls remain and, miraculously intact, the beautiful bell tower. The plateau of St. Paul was used, in the last war, as a field of launch for the allies who parachuted weapons and food to support the resistance, very active in these mountains. Precisely because of this, however, the German troops intervened attacking partisans and setting fire to the houses and the church. Now the peace of the place softens the memories of these tragic events, nature gets the better on human affairs and gives us a worthy picture of this marvelous landscape: a green plateau inserted within the frame of the Apennine mountains that surround it.



HALTING POINT 5

The valley of the lake

A curious the fate that of the river Bidente, throughout its descent to the sea it changes name several times at first it is Ronco in Meldola and downstream joins with the Montone to form the Fiumi Uniti (United Rivers). Not only that, the Bidente, upstream of Santa Sofia, has three main branches and retains its name combined with the centers of reference of the various valleys: Bidente of Pietrapazza, of Ridracoli and of Corniolo-Campigna. In the Valley of Ridracoli, the area in which the eponymous Bidente meets the Rio Celluzze has been identified as the ideal place to build a dam; built in the 70s and 80s, it is an important and monumental engineering feat, conceived and designed to supply water to the Romagna. The complex of the dam is now also a major tourist attraction. Along one of the arms of the reservoir is the shelter of Ca'di Sopra, a renovated farmhouse turned into a reception centre. It is also possible to visit Hydro, the Water Ecomuseum, located near the old village of Ridracoli, and also the dam, with the possibility of hiking along the many paths available, or boating in the reservoir, or to combine your trip boat to a fascinating excursion to the Lama: a beautiful plateau nestled between the mountains, once the beating heart of the forest, now a place of charm in the heart of the Casentino Forests.



HALTING POINT 6

A forest of trees, learn to recognize them

The Casentino National Park is a park of forests! At first glance it may seem a monotonous and repetitive environment, but a trained eye will seize immediately the great diversity of species that make up these forests. If in the higher valleys fir and beech trees have been preserved, descending to lower altitudes other species make up the forests. Along this path we could easily observe **Hop Hornbeam *Ostrya carpinifolia*** and **Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus***, very similar but with a different ecology: the first a pioneer species common on poor dry soils, the second requires fresh and deep moist soils. The distinction is clear by looking at the bark, smooth in the first case, ribbed and grooved in the second. It is said that to recognize the hornbeam you must embrace it! Other species we shall encounter are the **flowering ash *Fraxinus ornus*** or **Flowering Ash tree** by beautiful white flowering, common of sunny slopes, and the **Hedge Maple *Acer campestre***, rustic tree typical of hilly areas and lower mountains. The **Turkey oak *Quercus cerris***, finally, the oak is more common in the Apennine mountain environments, recognizable by the "hood" of the acorn covered with very coarse hair. The strong presence of the species in these areas explains the meaning of place-names such as "Cerreta", "Cerreto" or "Cerretina", so common in the Apennines.

Hop hornbeam

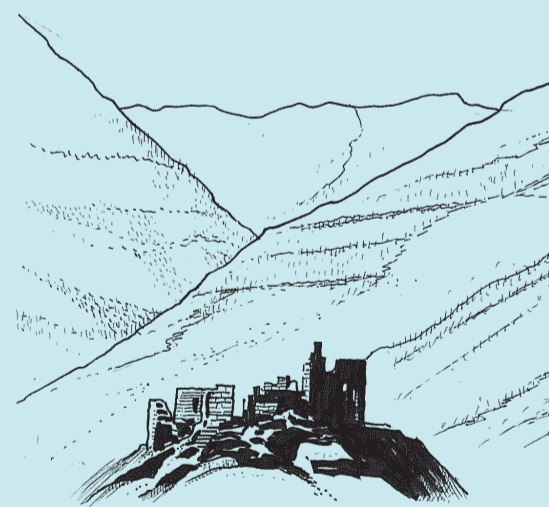


Hornbeam

HALTING POINT 9

An ancient castle

Popular tradition derives its name from an ancient pagan temple, situated by the river, where a Sibyl uttered her oracles: *Rivus oracolorum*, "creek of the Oracles". The first written record of Ridracoli dates from the thirteenth century, when it was a possession of the Guidi, Earls of Modigliana. In *Descriptio Romandiola* of Cardinal Anglico 1371 is registered as a *castrum*, (fortified village) with six *focularia* (households). In the fifteenth century Ridracoli belonged to the Captaincy of Bagno, but depending spiritually from the ancient Diocese of Sant'Ellero in Galeata. The castle of Ridracoli in 1371 belonged to the Lords of Valbona, later went to the Guidi of Battifolle and in 1440 joined the Republic of Florence. It is curious that the torrent of Ridracoli and trout that were caught in it are mentioned several times in historical records: in 1363 Azzo di Franceschino of Valbona, grants to the Prior of Camaldoli the opportunity to fish for trout in the creek. About a century later, in 1475, the Captain of Bagno, Gaspare della Volta wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici, informing him that he had captured a group of poachers in the creek of Ridracoli. The Captain turns to Lorenzo telling him that "...you told me you wanted to come over this Summer for solace a for fishing"... Evidently the Florentine ladies liked to relax by fishing in the cool waters of the Bidente of Ridracoli.



HALTING POINT 10

The village of Ridracoli

Ridracoli is the farthest locality of the municipality of Bagno di Romagna. As was common in this part of the Apennines, houses were mostly scattered around the most important town or village, in this case it was Ponte a Ridracoli, where were the parish church, the school, the cemetery, and a beautiful nineteenth-century bridge, the mill and the "Inn of Terror". All around, within a few miles, so many houses that referred to the town, dotted the ridges above Casanova Alpe on one hand, St. Paolo, and on the other The Forest of Lama below the main ridge of the Apennines. In the area of Ridracoli there were, until the school year 1960-61, two multi-classes schools, one at Seghettina, the other at the Palazzo Giovannetti. In the fall of 1961, the new school of Ridracoli, built next to the church, was inaugurated, but it did not work for long, because of depopulation. The village of Ridracoli in 1921 counted 290 inhabitants, 250 in 1951, after the war, and then became fewer and fewer; a period in which the painful period of the exodus was consumed, the depopulation of the Apennines took place to the advantage of the valleys or of the cities of the plain, in search of a more comfortable life. Then the inhabitants of Ridracoli, like those of Casanova dell'Alpe Pietrapazza, of Strabatenza, San Paolo in Alpe and all other localities of the Apennines, picked up their few, poor chattels, taking them often on foot, towards the dream for a better life, leaving behind the memories and the places of a lifetime.

