



## Day Hikes Near Genova

One of the many advantages of Genova is its proximity to a number of wonderful (and sometimes even challenging) day hikes in the Ligurian Apennines surrounding the city. One of Italy's most famous and beautiful long-distance hiking trails, the *Alta Via dei Monti Liguri* (<http://www.altaviadeimontiliguri.it/>), passes by Genova a few miles inland. Several sections of this well-marked trail can be easily managed in a few spare hours of walking time.

For all hikes listed below you should purchase a good map of a scale no larger than 1:50.000. The writer of these lines used the following map which conveniently covers all listed walks: Istituto Geografico Centrale (Torino), *Carta dei Sentieri e dei rifugi* No. 16: *Genova Varazze Ovada* (1:50.000).

For public transportation timetables, see <http://www.trenitalia.com/home/it/index.html> for trains and <http://www.provincia.genova.it/ali/> for the indispensable Autolinee Liguri, or ALI for short. If you don't have access to the web, the ALI office on Piazza Vittoria has paper versions of most schedules.

## Walk No. 1

### **Passo dei Giovi – Passo della Bocchetta (Pietralavezzara)**

This walk is perfect for a sunny afternoon, as total walking time is no more than two hours. But the views in all directions are truly rewarding nonetheless. To get to the Passo dei Giovi by public transportation, one needs first to take a train to Pontedecimo (from Porta Principe or Brignole in the direction of Busalla or Arquata Scrivia). Right at the bottom of the street leading down from the train station building is the bus stop for the various bus lines operated by the Autolinee Ligure. The busses for Busalla climb up to the Passo dei Giovi.

Look for the red-and-white markings for the AV (Alta Via) in the center of the village named after the pass (altitude: 472 m) and head west. The trail makes its way uphill, soon leaving behind the last houses. The actual stroll up to the Passo della Bocchetta (772 m) takes a bit more than an hour but is well worth the climb through the forested hillsides. A picnic area with marvellous views towards the south invites sweaty hikers who have reached the destination to sit down and enjoy the sights. To get to the nearest bus stop in order to get back to the Vico della Rosa, you will need to walk down the road crossing the Passo della Bocchetta, heading south and downhill for about three kilometers to Pietralavezzara. The traffic is sparse, so there is no need to worry about dodging many cars – or hitching a lift. If the local trattoria in Pietralavezzara is open, why not take a refreshing break before stepping into the ALI bus, which then winds down into the valley in a series of harrowing curves.

## Walk No. 2

### Passo dei Giovi – Crocetta d'Orero

This walk takes about two to three hours and is, once again, perfect for an afternoon (or morning) excursion. To get to the Passo dei Giovi, follow the steps described in the previous walk. Upon leaving the bus, simply head in the other direction, following the ubiquitous red-and-white AV signs. This walk leads through an alternating landscape of meadows and forests and passes a major pilgrimage site. The Passo dei Giovi (472 m) and Crocetta d'Orero (469m) are located at almost precisely equal altitude, but to get from one to the other you will need to saunter up and down a few hillsides, none of them of any particular difficulty. After the first half hour of a gentle climb, you reach the *Santuario Nostra Signora della Vittoria* (<http://users.libero.it/n.s.d.vittoria/>). The artistic treasures of the pilgrimage site are well worth the effort, but note also the spacious restaurant and bar!

The final descent to Crocetta d'Orero is slightly steeper than the other portions of this gentle stroll. After crossing the local road in Crocetta, go down to the train station stop, where you will be in line for another treat: the ride on the quaint, old-fashioned single-track railway leading from Casella to Genova (one stop beyond Crocetta d'Orero towards the north). Consult <http://www.ferroviagenovacasella.it/> for the schedule and much more. But before stepping into the iron-wrought carriages of the ancient train, stop by the Antica Trattoria "Del Bado" right next to the train stop for a drink. If you happen to get there at dinner time, or on Saturdays and Sundays during the lunch hour, why not indulge in a tasty meal before making the descent into the bustling metropolis. But beware: the Antica Trattoria is closed on Thursdays!

## Walk No. 3

### Crocetta di Orero – Colle di Creto

This walk is just as easy as Walk No. 2. To get to the starting point, take the quaint railway from Genova to Casella, but don't forget to get off at Crocetta di Orero, just a few stops before the final destination of Casella. Retrace your steps to the road above the rail line. Then go east along the well-marked (AV signs abound) trail which goes fairly steeply uphill. Once you have climbed the hill, the trail continues to go up and down across various outcroppings, all of them allowing for excellent views in all directions, weather permitting. At roughly the halfway point of this walk, at a location marked Sella on the map, some guidebooks promise a refreshment stand. When this walker passed by Sella, there was no such outlet to be seen, but then I walked this trail in early November.

The final descent from Monte Carossino to Creto was a leisurely descent across open meadows, with marvellous views to the higher peaks towards the east. Creto itself has a number of bars and restaurants on offer. For those readers who like to watch movies in fresh mountain air, a special treat awaits you in Creto. The Movie House (Via di Creto 117/1) is perched right on the edge of the precipice leading straight down the

mountainside from Creto into the Val Bisagno. Here you can choose from any number of drinks and a food menu, and you can rest in the outside Hollywood Garden while gazing at the Mediterranean in the far distance below. If the timing is right, especially on weekend evenings, the owners organise real life movie showings in the cosy, small theater inside! Why not call ahead? The phone number is 3473125951. The walk itself should last no longer than two-and-a-half or, at most, three hours.

To get back to the Vico della Rosa, you need to take the blue Ali bus. The last one currently leaves shortly after 7pm. When I took it, the drive from Creto, located just above 600 m altitude, down to the Val Bisagno was a marvelous and even slightly scary ride. It had turned dusk, and the lights beckoned from far below, while the huge bus wound its way down the hairpin curves to Doria. The bus ends in Molassana. Walk down the main road a hundred yards or so, and you will find plenty of buses that will take you back to Genova la Superba

## Walk No. 4

**(Pietralavezzara) Passo della Bocchetta – Pian di Praglia (San Martino di Paravanico)**

This walk is a more challenging hike, and for the core section of it alone, from the Passo della Bochetta to Pian di Praglia, you need to count on four hours walking time. Portions of it are almost alpine in terms of the terrain, although you should be doing well with normal good walking shoes. Wait for a clear day to make this walk, as the views are superb and fog could dampen more than your spirits.

To get to the Passo della Bochetta, you first need to make it to Pietralavezzara, the closest bus stop to the pass. Take the train to Pontedecimo first, then take an ALI bus to Pietralavezzara (see Walk No. 1 for the location of the bus stop), though often you will need to change in Campomorone, as direct buses from Pontedecimo to Pietralavezzara are few and far between. But the transfer in Campomorone usually works out well. If the schedule says that you can make it, you can count on it. At least this was the experience of the author of these lines.

From Pietralavezzara (520m) you will first need to climb the three kilometers stretch of country road. The bird song and the sound of burbling brooks will reward you for it! Right at the pass turn left up a rocky track to the west, now following the usual AV marking. The trail becomes rockier once you have bypassed the tallest of the transmission towers near Monte Lecco. The slight decline and subsequent ascent along the northern edge of Monte Taccone is superb, and it feels as if this stretch of trail should be much higher than the 1000m altitude at which it coasts along. The guidebooks claim views all the way to Milan to the north and Corsica to the south, but this writer suspects that such clear days are few and far between. Still, even on a less spectacular day, the views in all directions are superb. You are literally at the top of the Ligurian world! About twenty minutes or so after bypassing the summit of Monte Taccone on its northern slope, the AV makes a very sharp turn to the left. After having mostly headed in a westerly direction from the Passo della Bocchetta, now the trail leads mostly due south. The usually well-marked trail descends for a while, then rising again, only to lead downhill again, followed by another minor

ascent. For some time, you will have two artificial lakes to look at down below, tucked into a valley to your right. Depending on the season, you may wish that you would be closer to its shores! Eventually, the trail leads out of the forest onto a paved road (altitude: 900m).

Here you will be faced with a hard choice. About half an hour to the west, first following the road uphill but then gently descending once you have reached the pass, the small community of Praglia lies tucked away on a high plateau. Here the major attraction for the weary hiker is the Trattoria La Chelina: <http://www.lachelina.it> . If you wish, you can even stay here overnight. But if you do not want to make this inviting detour to La Chelina at all, turn left where the trail hits the road and head downhill on this very quiet road. As the nearest bus stop is in San Martino di Paravanico (320m), if you do not want to give your hitchhiking luck a try, you will need to gently descend along the road for the final one-and-a-half-to-two-hour stretch of this somewhat strenuous day. But the constant views of the Val Verde and the Val Polcevera, which you will have been enjoying for the better part of the day, will make up for this additional strain. The Santuario Nuestra Signora della Guardia will also have beckoned from a hilltop for quite some time. If you have the same luck as the writer of these lines, then the owner of *La Chelina* will stop to offer you a ride down into the Val Polcevera, and he will regale you with stories of his trekking adventures on various continents of this planet. From San Martino di Paravanico, a bus goes to Pontedecimo. From there take the train back to Porta Principe in Genova.

## Walk No. 5

### (San Martino di Paravanico) Pian di Praglia – Pegli

This walk is another relatively strenuous exercise, and you should wait until you have a reasonably clear day as, once again, parts of the walk are rather more difficult to carry through if fog shrouds vision and trail markings. Just as described in Walk No. 1, you should take the train to Pontedecimo, make your way to the ALI busstop and then take the bus to San Martino di Paravanico. You will probably have to change busses in Campomorone (see Walk No. 2). Stay in the bus until the very end of the line, which is on the far (upper!) end of San Martino. From here you have the same kinds of choices in order to make your way up to Pian di Praglia as I described as options going in the other direction, heading down from Pian di Praglia, in Walk No. 4. You can walk up the quiet road all the way to the pass, or you can try to hitch a ride with a local driver going uphill. The author of these lines was, once again, lucky and obtained a free ride up to the pass after twenty minutes of walking. The walk up the road itself is not overly strenuous, just somewhat longish, considering that another four hours of somewhat difficult terrain is still ahead of you.

The trail heads off from the road just about precisely at the highest spot on the way to Praglia, which is about twenty minutes walking time uphill from the point where the trail hit the road as described in Walk No. 4. The views of the Val Verde and the Valpolcevera are, once again, superb, and the Santuario della Guardia is a constant landmark to your left as well. A gravel road leads without too many altitude changes due south, and soon you will find yourself in a type of moonscape. At one point you should watch out for a sharp 90 degree right turn onto another gravel road. It will slowly wind itself to just a few meters below the 1000m mark. These hilltops are literally the southernmost outcroppings above the seaside immediately to the west of Genova, and eventually the views of the

coastal villages to the west and Genova to the east will be increasingly distracting.

After about an hour's walk from the road leading to Praglia, you will have to pay attention to a fork in the road which was well-nigh invisible when this author walked the trail in early April 2005. Up to now all walks described followed the red-and-white AV signposts that are generally everpresent. At this particular bifurcation, you will leave behind the Alta Via trail, which veers off to the right, i.e. to the west. And from now on until Pegli, you will follow another set of colorful signs, likewise painted in red-and-white, just like the AV, except that these signs will read E1. You already will have seen such postings along the final stretch of Walk No. 1 and for all of Walk No. 4. E 1 refers to the European Long-Distance Path No. 1, which now starts in northern Denmark and leads all the way across Germany, Switzerland and the Po Valley to the Mediterranean at Pegli. It is this final two-to-three hour stretch of the E 1 that we will follow from the difficult-to-spot bifurcation onwards.

The problem with this particular fork is that the AV markings were completely absent precisely at this important intersection. But as we will be now following the E 1 signposts anyhow, it matters relatively little, though one should be aware of the bifurcation to avoid needless backtracking, should one accidentally wander along the wrong trail from this point onwards until one notices the mistake. At any rate, very soon the trail begins its rather steep and long descent from almost 1000m altitude to sea level on the beach at Pegli down below. The good news is that there are no more climbs ahead of you. The bad news is that the trail to Pegli is mostly a very rocky and narrow track which requires near-constant attention to the steps you want to take. Nonetheless, this stretch must count for one of the most stunning trails in the area, for you literally have the Mediterranean at your fingertips. Given a clear day, you can see all the way to the Alpi Apuani to the east and an equal distance towards the west. Guidebooks undoubtedly will tell tales of visions of Corsica!

You need to be careful also to avoid getting sidetracked along one of the many criss-crossing trails you will encounter on your long, steep and rewarding descent. The marking is almost everywhere rather sufficient. Combined with a map, which is naturally a must for all these walks, you will easily wind your way down into the outskirts of Pegli, then passing an array of minor and major villas. The trail officially ends at the bottom of a set of steps two hundred yards from the seaside. Pegli is well-served by trains going to Porta Principe.

# Walk No. 6

## Campi – Righi (Genova)

This walk is the easiest of them all and the one closest to Genova itself. The walk itself takes no more than two hours, and it only entails one train ride in total. For the start of this walk, take the Genova – Casella train (see Walk No. 2) and hop off at Campi. Take the gravel road leading back in the direction the train just came from. After a hundred yards this track will feed into a paved road. Follow this road in the direction you have been walking in. After another hundred yards, the road makes a near 180 degree turn to the left. In about another hundred yards the road, which has been climbing, reaches the pass. Here you need to turn right on a gravel road. On some days, a small restaurant / snack bar is open on your immediate left as you begin to walk on the gravel path.

From now on you will essentially go straight ahead on this gently winding path which, for at least one hour, proceeds at a smooth and level altitude. Views of the Valbisagno and the hillsides and mountains to the east are a constant feature of this path. Eventually you will begin to reach the outskirts of the system of fortifications characteristic of the Righi portion of Genova just above the city center to the north. This path is neither a section of the Alta Via nor the E 1. Instead, at one point, the insurance group Alleanza, which has sponsored local hiking paths, sponsored the installation of some solid markings, including wood-panelled signposts, all of them in the inevitable red-and-white color scheme of long distance paths in southern Europe. The system has not been updated for a long time, or so it seems, and you will not be able completely to rely on them. Nonetheless, some such signposts survive at oftentimes crucial path-crossings, and you should be on the lookout for the Alleanza signs. For, soon after you encounter the first of many long walls belonging to the fortification system mentioned above, the trail veers off the main track and bypasses the fortifications, usually just below the easternmost set of walls, until the Righi funicular. It is probably best to take the funicular into town from here, as the remainder of the trail is completely devoid of signposts, and it mostly leads along fairly well-travelled roads past the Genova – Casella train station and then into the city center where it ends on the Old Port.

**HAPPY TRAILS!**