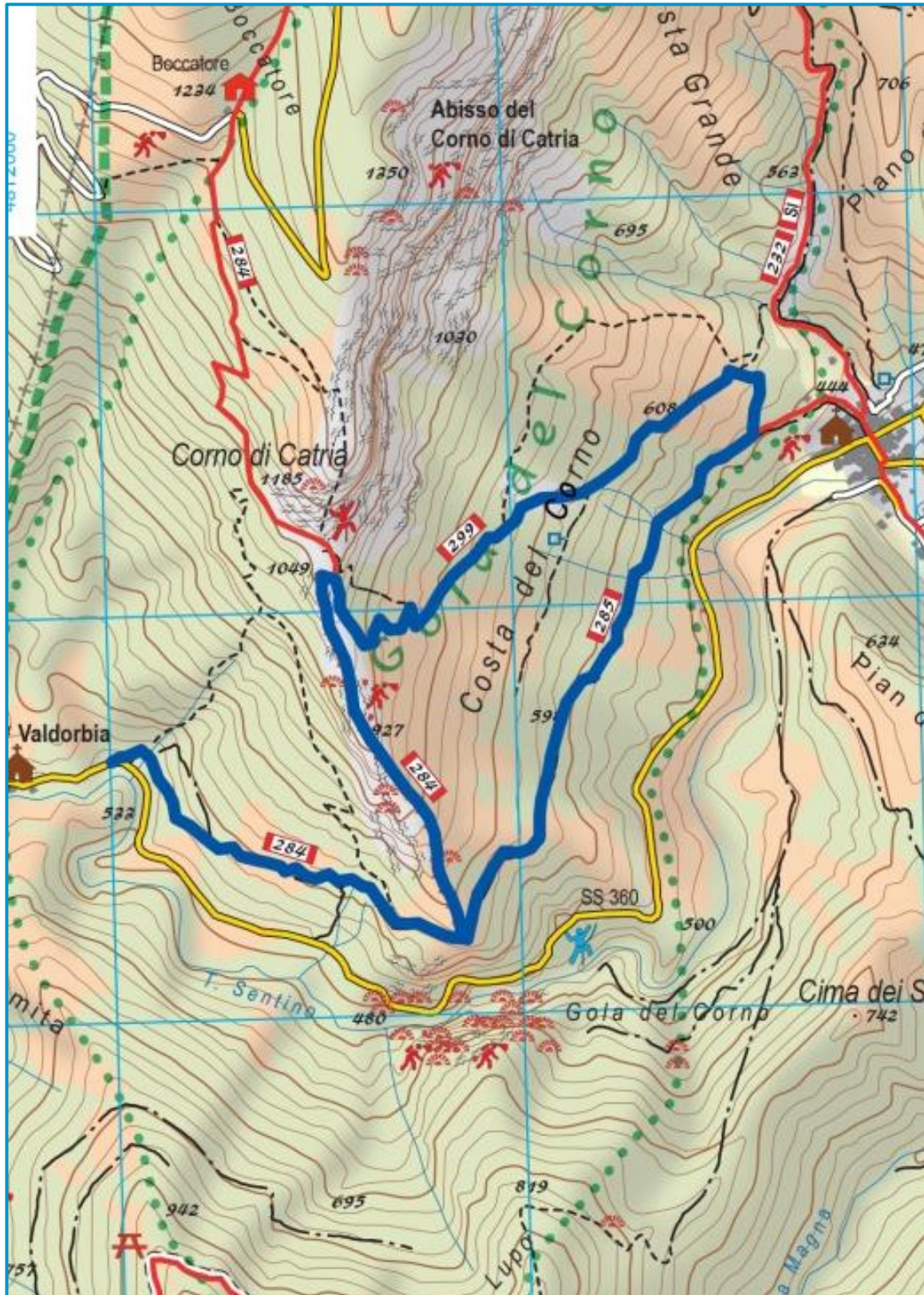


10

CORNO DEL CATRIA



10. CORNO DEL CATRIA

“Geological outcrops and the eagle’s kingdom” ***(TRAILS N. 284 – 285 - 299)***

Lenght: 7.5 km, circular route

Difference in elevation: 500 m

Time: 6 hours

Difficulty: EE

Drinking water available: no

NOTE: The route is decidedly difficult and requires maximum care. It should not be hiked in cold, windy, rainy or foggy conditions.

This is one of the most impressive excursions: a route that is completely exposed and winds over bare rock. It is worn and shaped by millions of years of water erosion and overlooks the ravine below of Gola del Corno. Trail 284 begins on your left, immediately after the hamlet of Valdorbia, on



On the trail

the S.S. 326 leading from Scheggia to Sassoferrato. Before you start, it's worth taking a brief look at the interesting, geological site of Valdorbia. Here, the geological strata appear in all their beauty and reveal the various formations of the Umbria-Marche series (see insert). The landscape is big open book telling the story from 200 million years ago to today from the initial deposits of various carbonate layers on the sea bed, followed by their upthrust. Particularly unusual is the presence of fossils, such as ammonites, bivalves, corals. Valdorbia is also the place where you can visit interesting mines, in disuse for about 50 years, carefully dug by man for kilometers inside the rock to find marl for cement.

After your break, you can park your car right at the beginning of the trail, which starts 200 m further

on, and begin the “climb” towards Corno del Catria. The initial stretch of about 1.2 km rises slightly to a height of 657 m, where it joins Trail 285 coming from Isola Fossara. From here continue to ascend to the left over a very steep rocky crest (a rise of about 500 m in 1.5 km), which brings you to the spectacular, rocky amphitheater known as Corno del Catria. The trail is completely exposed, narrow and inaccessible, with rough, rocky walls with a steep precipice on either side. Walk along the rocky crest which in some places rises almost vertically and requires some scrambling. Take maximum care and hike this route only in ideal weather conditions. Wind, rain and especially fog could make the already difficult to find trail completely invisible. The ascent, therefore, is decidedly difficult and strenuous and requires a good physical fitness. However your efforts will be amply repaid by the stunning, unusual panorama during and at the end of the route. The environment you'll be crossing is typically rupestrian with plants clinging to the rocks or in the recesses between one rock and another. Of major naturalistic importance is



Scotano

10. CORNO DEL CATRIA

Coast of the horn



the presence of the smoke tree (*Cotinus coggygria*) and the boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*), whereas living between the rocks are shrubs of mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), rock rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and the curry

Corno del Catria



plant (*Elycrisum italicum*), together with the broad-leaved bellflower (*Campanula latifolia*) and common thyme (*Timus vulgaris*). Also living on the rocky walls is the Rustyback fern (*Asplenium ceterach*) and numerous saxifrages, whose fleshy leaves are able to eliminate the lime shown by the white edges of their leaves that they absorb from the substratum.

This harsh, rough place with its steep rocky walls plunging deep into the valley below is a suitable habitat for the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), far from the noise and disturbances created by humans. With a bit of luck, you'll be able to observe this majestic bird of prey as it circles in search of prey.

Once you reach a height of 1040 m, walk round the tiny peak on your right, where you'll find your path crosses Trail 299, beneath the Corno and the descent begins towards Isola Fossara to your right. You'll find the initial stretch very steep and fairly difficult, but it gradually flattens out until it meets Trail 285 coming from Isola Fossara and takes you to the right back to your starting point.



Geological Notes

The Umbria-Marche geological series

All the rocks that surface in the Park of Monte Cucco are of marine sedimentary origin. The oldest formation is the limestone, consisting of extremely pure calcium carbonate which has deposited in extremely thick layers massif. As it is so pure, it is easily attacked by water and allows it to penetrate deep down to form spectacular underground systems, such as the well-known Monte Cucco Cave. Next to be deposited was the fairly fractured, pure hornstone, but not to the same extent as the limestone massif. Above these came the completely impermeable and considerably thick, red nodular limestone and jasper sediments. Even higher, we find very pure and well fractured majolica lime, interlaced with layers of extremely hard slate. This was followed by the formation of extremely thin marl and fucoids of considerable importance; as this is completely impermeable, it allows many springs to rise to the surface, such the Scirca spring. Last to be deposited was the entire series of white, pink and grey limestones. This sequence of layers is complete in the area of Valdorbica although in some cases certain strata are missing (Reduced Series): in place of the red nodular limestone, jasper and hornstone we find a layer of marl with considerable quantities of clay and magnesium, known as clay minerals.