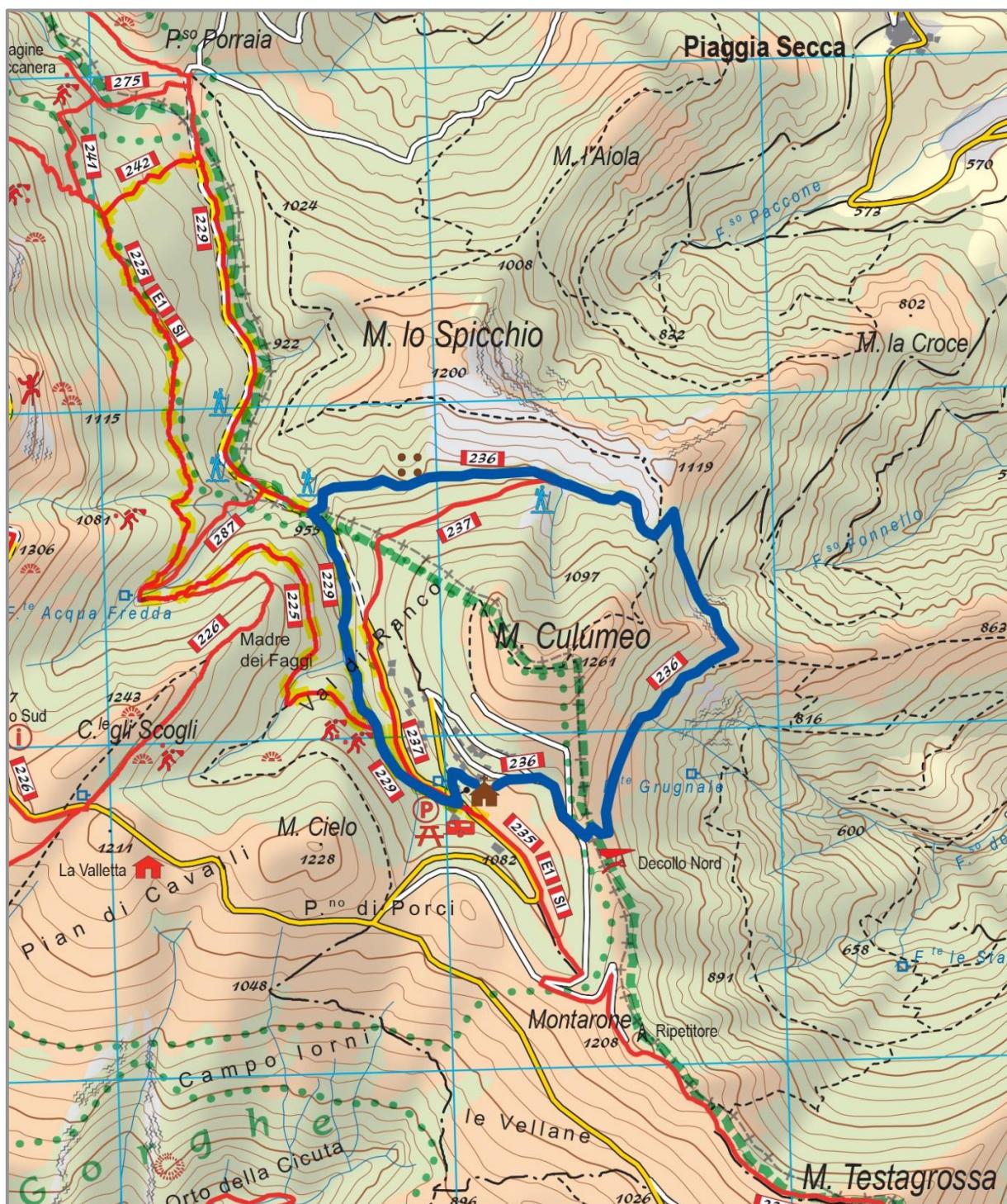


2. A WALK AROUND MOUNT CULUMEO

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"The valley of San Pietro and the far-reaching views of the landscape in the Marche" *(TRAILS N. 229 - 236)*

Length: 5 km, circular walk

Difference in elevation: 250 m

Time: 3 hours 30 minutes

Difficulty: E

Drinking water available: yes (Val di Ranco)

From Sigillo we ascend to Val di Ranco via the paved road that leaves the Flaminia. Park near the "Monte Cucco di Tobia" Hotel Bar Restaurant and take the easy, clearly marked Trail 229. This winds through the cool, peaceful beech grove of Val di Ranco and descends to the Croce dei Fossi (where, according to popular tradition, the witches convene during the night of San Giovanni for the devil to hand over the "Book of Power"). At this point, take Trail 236 on the right, which crosses the pleasant Valle di San Pietro, cut by the gorge of the same name, which you may sometimes have to wade across. You'll find yourself immersed in a natural spectacle: the slowly flowing river is broken by tiny cascades of water falling on to white majolica slabs to form tiny pools which, in some places, make the underlying layer appear to be red jasper. This stream, which rises just a bit further upstream, is the source of the Rio Freddo, which begins with the contact between the majolica limestone (permeable) and the layers of flint (impermeable). Large numbers



Mount Culumeo from Val di Ranco

of leeches and caddis flies live in the clear water, a sign of uncontaminated purity. The narrow, wild valley gradually widens to give way to beech-covered slopes and tangled undergrowth. Its name comes from a hermitage (San Pietro Orticheto), of which no trace remains. However, it bears witness not only to the widespread monarchism throughout the area, but also to the importance of the mule tracks in days gone by, when most resources came from the mountains. Shepherds, woodcutters, huntsmen, merchants, soldiers and the religious people who travelled through this impervious environment were able to find hospitality at the hermitage. A large clearing opens at the top of the valley with meadows that offer a display of typical spring and summer flowers, with many rare, endemic species, such as the viola of Eugenia (*Viola eugeniae*), narcissus (*Narcissus poeticus*), oxlip (*Primula elatior*) and various species of orchids. In this clearing surrounded by mountain peaks you can easily catch sight of birds of prey, such as the buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and the

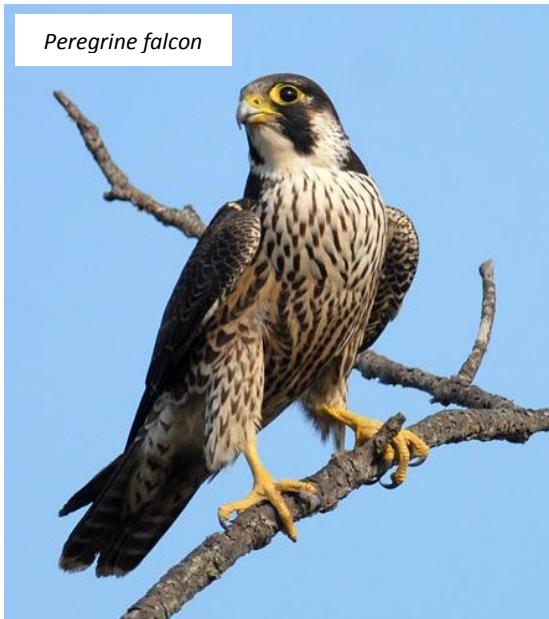


Valley of San Pietro Orticheto

2. A WALK AROUND MOUNT CULUMEO

peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), that regularly soar high above the open spaces during the daytime, whereas numerous butterflies flutter undisturbed from flower to flower. The exceptional numbers in this area are a clear sign of a clean, uncontaminated environment.

Peregrine falcon



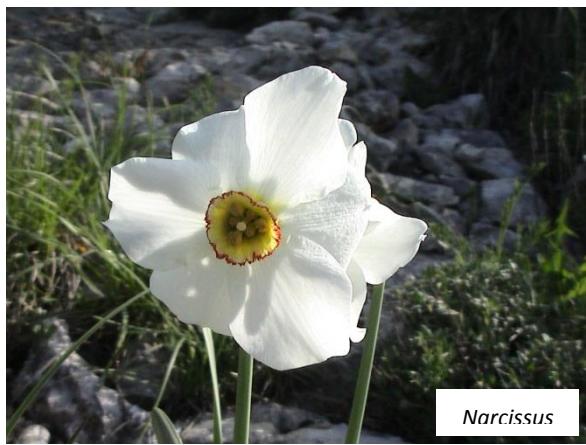
From here, continue towards what is known as "Passo Cattivo" (Evil Pass), an eloquent name referring to all the hardships met here by those who, in times gone by, were forced to cross the Apennines via this wild, impervious spot. In fact, the path is the ancient road connecting not only Umbria and the Marche, but also the villages at the bottom of the valley and the mountain. Around you are grassy slopes scattered with patches of tiny trees, all dominated by the majestic majolica walls of Mount Culumeo. The trail begins to descend quite steeply to an elevation of 1004 m, where it leaves the main trail (which continues downhill and appears on the maps of Fabriano as no. 136), and bears right. From here, ascend past exposed stretches, partially blocked by little shrubs and with rough scree underfoot, as result of the crumbling rock face above. All around, the view is of a steep, grassy slope, which becomes a proper rock face of clear majolica layers just

Viola of Eugenia



Waterfalls at the cross of the

above the path. The path crosses rocky ridges cutting into the steep, eastern slope of Mt. Culumeo, whereas the hillside becomes increasingly rough and craggy: sheer rock faces, corroded and eroded by the weather, descend a little way away from the trail in a scenario of rare beauty, with a vast panorama opening up before your eyes. Facing you, a ring of mountains surrounds the wide valleys of Sassoferato and Fabriano and the tiny hamlets of Bastia, Viacce and Rucce. The path rises slightly and you enter little woods of beech, maple, whitebeam and black hornbeam, whereas the surrounding meadows



Narcissus

are covered in a spectacular display of spring flowers. The continuous turf hides the track, which sometimes disappears altogether, as do the waymarkers, thus it's a good idea to carry a map or use the help of a guide. You can make a detour through the mountain meadows to the northern launching point for hang gliders, for then resume Trail 236, which leads back to starting point of the route.