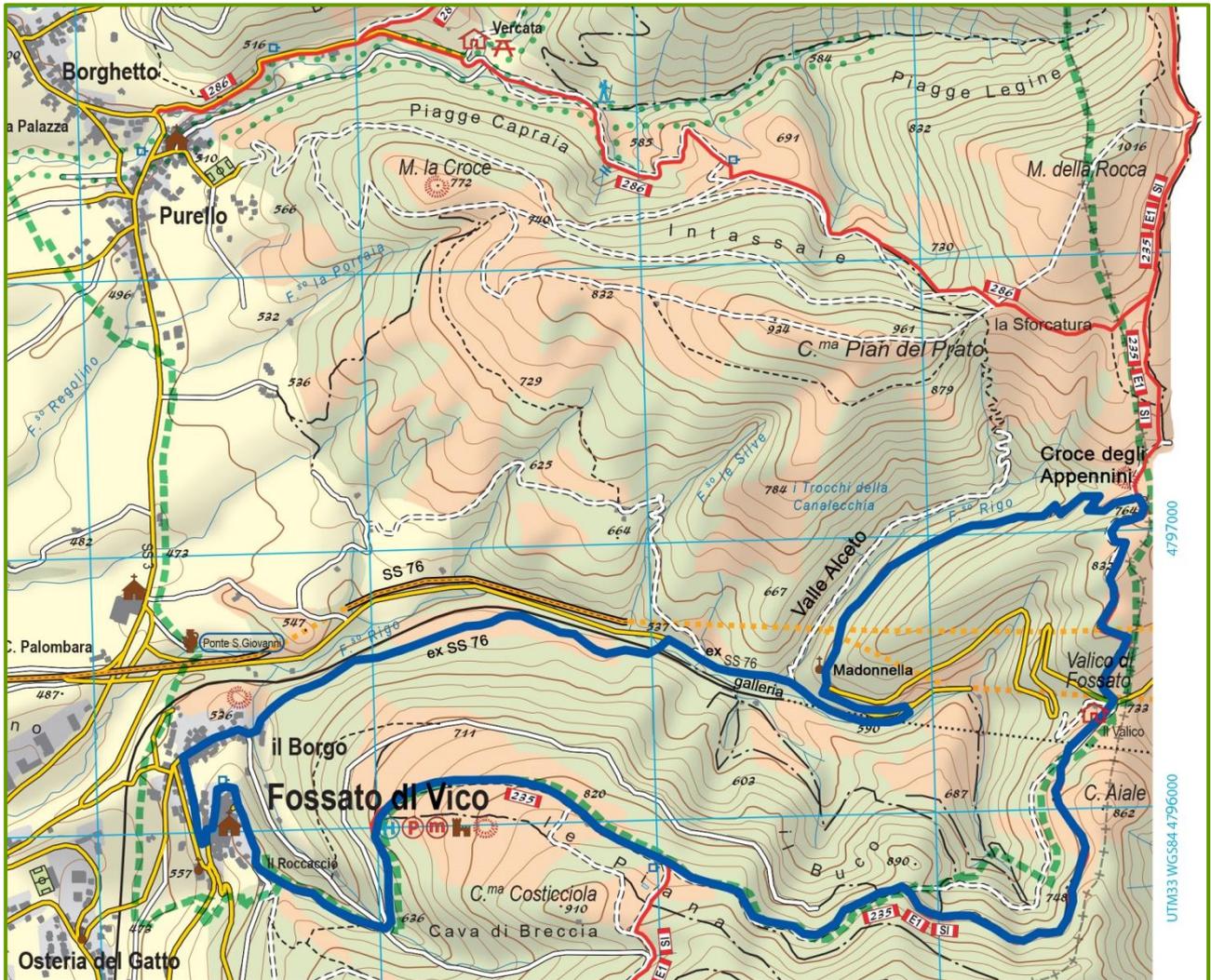


# 7

## DIVERTICULUM AB HELVILLO-ANCONAM



## 7. DIVERTICULUM AB HELVILLO-ANCONAM

### ***“Following the footsteps of the ancient Romans”*** ***(Ex S.S. 76 Val d’Esino – Alceto forest – Trail 235)***

**Length:** 12 km, circular route

**Difference in elevation:** 370 m

**Time:** 3 hours and 30 minutes

**Difficulty:** E

**Drinking water available:** no

Venturing along the route of the “Diverticulum ab Helvillo-Anconam” means not only immersing yourself in nature, but also experiencing the fascination of passing centuries later through the same places that were the scene of who knows what events: in short, following the footsteps of the ancient fathers.

The route identified by the studies of Prof. Luigi Galassi of Fossato di Vico as the “Diverticulum ab Helvillo-Anconam” concerns only the stretch that goes up the Alceto valley from Madonnella to the Cross of the Apennines.



*Municipal tower of Fossato di*

The excursion begins from Piazza Umberto I in the historic center of Fossato di Vico, under the Municipal Tower. You go down Via di San Benedetto, passing in front of the church of the same name, and continue to the paved road in Borgo. This hamlet is the place where the ancient center of Helvillum once stood, a post on the Via Flaminia during the Roman Empire, mentioned in



*Scilla bifolia*

the various Roman itineraries by virtue of the road's central location.



*Orchids and gentianella*

## 7. DIVERTICULUM AB HELVILLO-ANCONAM

Continue on the right, along Via Filippo Venturi, and cross the entire village. The route continues on the former Val d'Esino State Road 76, now abandoned and replaced by the new road route that passes lower down. Going through short tunnel, go up the old road on the left that leads to the Valico di Fossato (Fossato pass). After about 500 m, on the left, near the "Madonnella" shrine, take the forest road that rises up the Alceto valley. The trail crosses the mesophilic forest characterized by the presence of hophornbeam and manna ash trees, with maple, hazel and Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*) also found in the tree canopy, while in the undergrowth you can observe dogwood, blackthorn, hawthorn, privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and occasional daphne-laurel (*Daphne laureola*) shrubs. This forest covers the cooler side of the underlying Alceto valley, crossed by the ancient *Diverticulum*, a road deviating from the main route of the Via Flaminia, which headed towards the Adriatic coast. Along with its historical importance, the trail is especially interesting also from the perspective of nature. In spring, the first stretch is bordered by liverwort (*Hepatica nobilis*), alpine squill (*Scilla bifolia*), anemones, primroses, and violets, which form spectacular splashes of color. After about 1.5 km, near the animal drinking troughs, the Alceto forest road ends. At this point the *Diverticulum* continues through secondary meadows and pastures (i.e. created by human activities) towards the Chiaromonte Pass, which goes toward Sassoferrato, but our route heads

southward towards the Fossato Pass, continuing along Trail 235 (which coincides with the *Sentiero Italia*, the Grand Italian Trail, and the Europe Trail).

There is an enchanting view from the small 832-meter peak before the trail descends towards the pass. Here the position overlooking the surrounding area allows you to admire the landscape in a wide panorama, with the view of the Marche side of the Apennines and the towns and villages below in the foothills.

From here you go down across the meadows to the entrance of the pine forest, and after a short stretch, you reach the old Fossato



Cross of the Appennini and Monte della Rocca

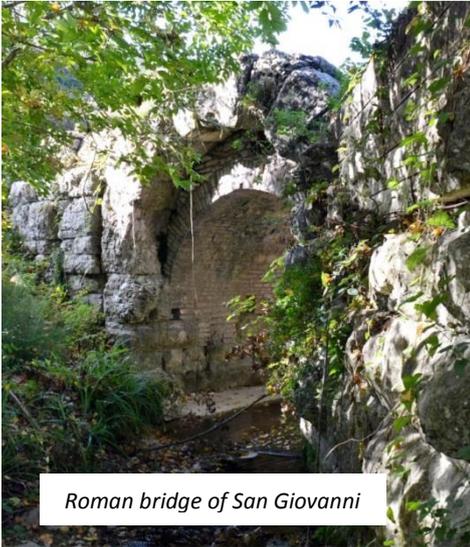
Pass (733 m above sea level). Continue along Trail 235 towards the town of Fossato di Vico, going up the gently rising dirt road at the foot of Colle Aiale, on an arid slope, where you will find holm oak, juniper and hazel. Soon you enter a cool, shady wood of tall beeches (*Fagus sylvatica*), while in the undergrowth you can come across butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*). The route continues to climb up to almost 900 m above sea level, where the coppice gives way to pastures. Arriving at the scenic Le Piana meadows, you can enjoy the view over the Chiascio River valley, which runs between the hills of Gubbio and the Apennine ridge from which Mount Cucco rises. The trail ends with the arrival in the historic center of Fossato di Vico.



Female green woodpecker at the nest

## 7. DIVERTICULUM AB HELVILLO-ANCONAM

### The Via Flaminia and the *Diverticulum*



*Roman bridge of San Giovanni*

Because of its physical conformation, the Fossato Pass has always been one of the easiest passes to cross between the opposite slopes of the central Apennines.

This feature has been taken advantage of since the dawn of the Italic civilizations. The more ancient Umbrian and Picenian peoples already used it for trade and rituals: as proof of this, some archeological discoveries have brought to light a beaten track dating back to the height of the Picentine society (7th-6th century BC). In ancient Roman times, the route was configured as a byroad (*diverticulum*) of the Via Flaminia, which led from Helvillum (present day Borgo) to Ancona.

The Via Flaminia was built by the consul Gaius Flaminius as a military road in 220 BC, and went from Rome to Rimini. It was not the easiest road to build, due to the mountainous terrain crossed by many rivers and streams and subject to landslides, but given the importance of the route, these difficulties were overcome by resorting to structures such as retaining walls, bridges and viaducts. The Romans excelled at these works, many of which still stand along the route of the ancient road, such as the San Giovanni bridge, located near the Fossato di Vico cemetery.