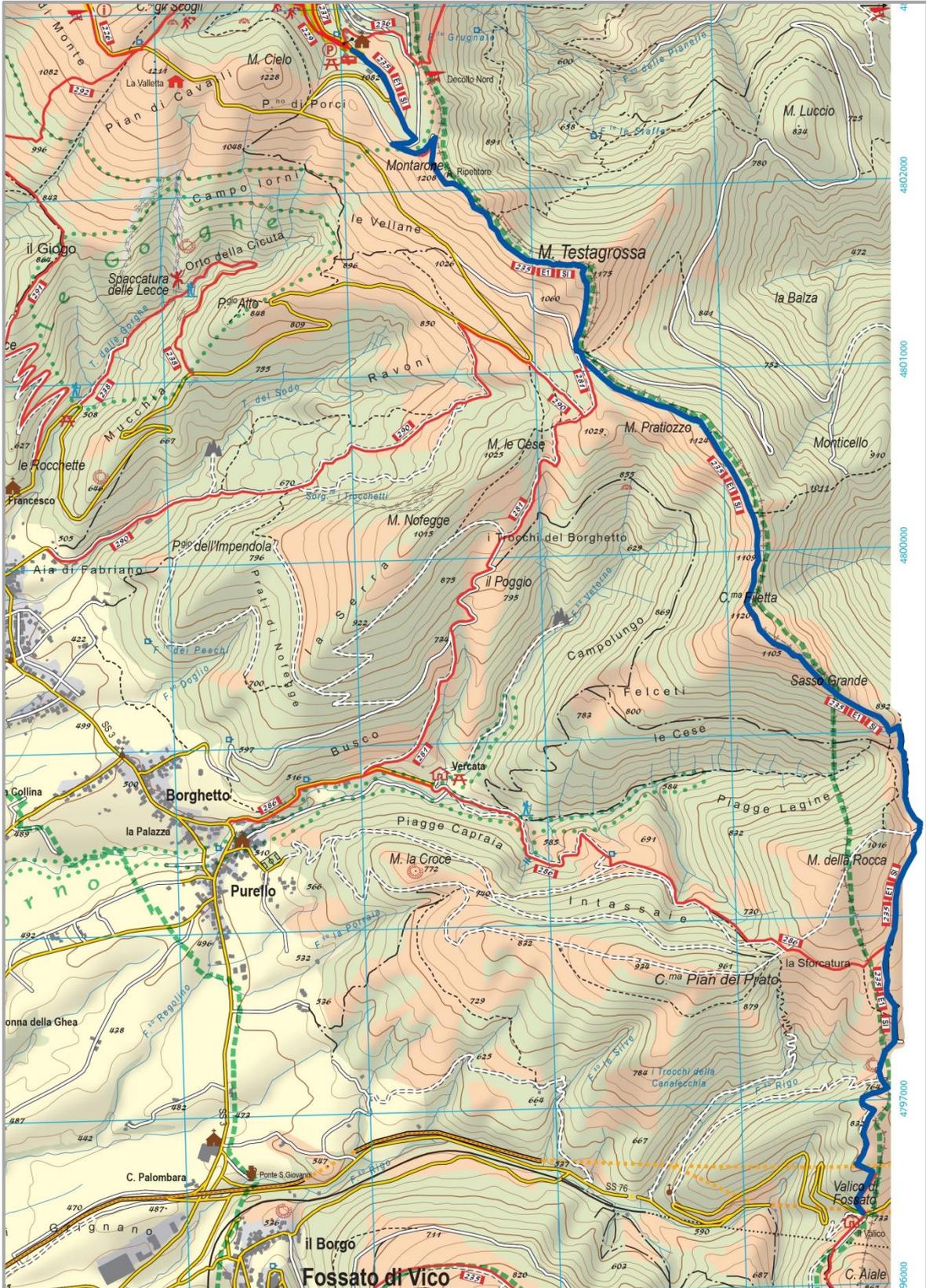


9 FROM THE VALICO DI FOSSATO TO VAL DI RANCO



9. FROM THE VALICO DI FOSSATO TO VAL DI RANCO

“The Ridges”

(TRAIL N. 235 wich coincides with the Sentiero Italia – Grand Italian Trail)

Lenght: 9 km one way

Difference in elevation: 7000 m

Time: 5 hours on way

Difficulty: E

Drinking water available: no

Take your car from the hamlet of Borgo di Fossato di Vico and follow the old road leading to the Valico di Fossato. When you get there, leave your car and begin to walk the trail, which will take you across the peaks of Sasso Grande, Cima Filetta, Mount Patriozzo, Mount Testagrossa and Montarone to the Val di Ranco in the Municipality of Sigillo. Take Trail 235 (which follows the Grand Italian Trail) and ascend through the forest of Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*), the result of man's reforestation after the Second World War. After a short, demanding stretch, the trail opens out on to extensive, green meadows. Continue as far as a small peak (832 m), from which you can gaze over a stunning, impressive view: wide open

spaces blend on the horizon with gentle peaks overlooked by other wilder mountain tops. To the west stretches the vast, peaceful Chiascio valley, bordered by its low, undulating hills and scattered with the villages of Purello, Sigillo, Scirca and Costacciaro. To the east lies the Giano valley with the Apennines of the Marche in the background, dominated by Mount San Vicino.

We leave Colle Aiale, Cima Mutali and Mount Maggio behind us, to be faced with Mount Cucco towering above overlapping peaks.

The view opening before you is just a hint of the vast, enchanting horizons to come, which give the hiker a sense of complete freedom and an intense feeling of the infinite. From here, you

Panorama from the ridges



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begin to descend amidst meadows dotted with small trees and wooded areas that have clawed back the deforested pastures. Interestingly, some historians believe this was the place on the border between Umbria and the Marche where the Abbey of Santa Maria d'Appenino originally stood, evidence of the widespread, fervid vocation for monasticism throughout the Park. The trail continues gently up and down into the Marche and carries on through meadows and pastures packed with the most extraordinary flowers. It passes close to La Sforcatura, where Trail 286 comes from. It then goes eastwards around the peak of Monte della Rocca, until it reaches the Chiaromonte Pass (892 m), a place of strategic, historic importance, as this was the place where the Umbrians and Picenians met and where the ancient Diverticulum ab Helvillo-Anconam branched off. Now, you'll really begin to climb along a steep ridge as far as Sasso Grande (1030 m), to poor, arid pastures suitable for the amethyst sea holly (*Eryngium amethystinum*), the carline thistle (*Carlina acaulis*) and blue bonnet (*Globularia meridionalis*) to take root. The western slope of Monte della Rocca is interesting for the presence of one of the last patches of holm oak woods. From here onwards, the trail runs along the boundary between Umbria and the Marche in a north-north-easterly direction, along the mountain and valley ridges of this part of the



Umbria-Marche Apennines, to give you more splendid views on both sides.

It continues to rise from Sasso Grande towards Cima Filetta (1120 m), and then slowly descends slightly into the lovely valley between the latter and Mount Patriozzo (1124 m). To the west below lies Sigillo and the peaks of Mount Le Cese (with a centuries-old beech and hornbeam wood)



Continue as far as Mount Testagrossa (1175 m) and cross the road that links Sigillo to Bastia (a hamlet of Fabriano), where there is a dip in the ridge, before going on to Montarone (1208 m). You have almost reached your destination: descend through meadows and wooded stretches to the well-known tourist spot of Val di Ranco, where you'll find refreshments in any of the numerous bars and restaurants.

The entire trail is a natural garden, especially in spring and summer, when the intensely colored flowers are in bloom, including some rare, legendary species, such as the extremely beautiful orchids (*Dactyloriza sambucina*, *Orchis mascula*, *Orchis simia* and others). All around are ancient beech groves which, as they reach lower levels, gradually degrade into mixed woods of hop hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*) and turkey oak on the cooler slopes, and downy oaks (*Quercus pubescens*) in the warmer parts. Many spaces have been replanted with Austrian pine, to allow the wood to be recolonized in areas once exploited for pasture and agriculture.

