

## A DESCRIPTION

The Renaissance Ring – Anello del Rinascimento is an excursion itinerary for getting to know the surroundings of Florence, fascinating for their landscape and nature as well as for the art and history they contain. There has been a strong unbroken tie over the centuries between the city of Florence and the surrounding countryside; the sharing of knowledge and experience has been extremely fruitful and never one way, which is something you can feel to this day by walking through the nature of the countryside and encountering the many examples of its art and history.

The whole Renaissance Ring is 170 kilometres long and is ideal for walking or mountain biking; in drafting it we came across parts of the old Florence road network, now in disuse and disrepair, and we kept away from tarred roads save for a few exceptions. Vertical and horizontal signs accompany tourists and guide them on their way, and since each section of the Ring has a public transport link with Florence it can also be enjoyed as a separate unit. Walking over the hills, in the woods, by the ploughed fields, the visitor crosses areas of great landscape significance. You encounter monasteries, castles, hospices to welcome pilgrims, ancient walled communities, country churches, sections of paved roads that go back to Roman or Medieval times and ideally our eye is always on the old centre of the city of the lily whose focal point is the dome of the cathedral, the masterpiece of Filippo Brunelleschi, which identifies Florence.

This map-guide describes the Renaissance Ring with great clarity. For local walking tours, there are professional environmental guides on hand. In addition to accompanying and providing technical assistance, they can also illustrate the features of the land, its ecology and how it has interacted with human settlements.

For information on the Renaissance Ring and the names of the environmental guides, contact: APT Firenze – via Manzoni 16 – 50121 Florence tel. 05523320 fax 0552346286 [www.firenzeturismo.it](http://www.firenzeturismo.it) e-mail: apt@firenzeturismo.it

### **Calenzano -- Vaglia**

*A very rewarding stage from the point of view of nature and landscape. The route gradually ascends the slopes of Monte Morello, the Mons Maurilius of the Romans, from which there are splendid views both over the city and over the Mugello, as well as of the more distant Appennines.*

*Length of stage: Km 19.7*

*Time required: 6 hrs 40 mins*

*Altitude variance: m 719*

*Difficulties: none*

*Tips and notes: the stage is in full sunshine*

*Access: Train from Florence and Prato. Bus service from Florence, Prato and Barberino di Mugello.*

*MTB facility: medium to easy. On arrival at the Rifugio Gualdo we advise you to continue along the panoramic road as far as the piazzale which leads to the Fonte dei Seppi and from there to Gli Scollini on a forest road which leads us easily to the route for Vaglia, as described for walkers.*

Our main itinerary starts at the castle of Calenzano, from which one descends through the North Gate of the old medieval town, now the new home of the Museum of Toy Soldiers and Historic Figurines. Immediately outside the gate, on the R of the characteristic lane flanked by

stone walls we find a footpath leading down through olive groves to the centre of the locality, the ancient meeting-place of roads once leading towards Pistoia and Bologna. Right at the crossroads we start up the recently restored pedestrian ramp, which after a steep climb including a few steps takes us to the church of San Donato, of which Don Lorenzo Milani was once the parish priest.

Having enjoyed the view of the Val di Marina and the Monti della Calvana, we proceed downhill to Il Colle, where there is a famous medieval inn. After a kilometre or so of asphalt we find the road bounded by low stone walls over which we see the olive groves of the Fattoria di Sommaia, where there is an Agriturismo. Monte Morello looms up ahead of us, while on the hills R rises the tower of Baroncoli, attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio. Shortly after passing the church of San Ruffiniano a Sommaia we leave the asphalt road and soon come in sight of the fine architecture of the Fattoria di Massedonica, it too a producer of “extravergine” olive oil. Just above this mansion, where there is a modern villa at the corner, we leave the main road and take a cart track which bends sharply L until reaching a bar which closes the road to normal traffic. We are on the panoramic firebreak road leading towards the Rifugio Gualdo (under the management of the Gualdo Tourist Group, it is open only for holidays). This road, a veritable terrace overhanging the valley of the Torrente Chiosina, moulded through the centuries by the hand of man, and over the more distant plains below Florence, is south facing and protected from the cold north winds, making it an excellent ride even in winter. Excellent also for the MTB, because it rises constantly all the way to the Fonte del Ciliegio. After taking a breather by the fountain, we find L the path CAI 10, known locally as *rompistinchi* (“smash-shins”), which climbs steeply up the slopes of Monte Morello. The principal route, however, continues on the level along the dirt road until it reaches a curve in the vicinity of the Rifugio Gualdo. Here we meet route CAI 1 coming from Monte Morello, and a short descent R takes us to the nearby Rifugio Gualdo. We pedal slightly uphill for about 600m on the asphalt of the panoramic road, but leave it at the first bend to take a narrow road just below the Fonte del Vecciolino. From this fountain a stony bridle-path starts to climb through the woods, sometimes steeply, until reaching Gli Scollini, a thorough crisscross of pathways. To our R we find route 00 which leads to Ceppeto and before that to the Fonte dei Seppi (a perennial spring at a distance of 800 metres). However our itinerary (CAI 7) continues straight ahead through the wood, rising a few metres before descending sharply along a forest track, which is the ancient mule-track used by the farmers of Paterno and Pescina to go to Sesto Fiorentino on market day. After a few ups and downs we come to the church of Pescina. From here we return to the dirt road that takes us to a fork situated near the Torrente Carzola. Here we go L to follow the dirt road (CAI 6) which swiftly takes us to Paterno. To continue all the way to **Vaglia**, simply follow the asphalt as far as the junction with the traffic-laden SS 65 (“*della Futa*”), and bear L until you reach the town.

### **\*Variant – Monastery of Montesenario**

*Time required:* 1 hr return journey

*N.B. From here to the monastery the route joins up with CAI 00, the Soft and the Bologna-Florence.*

To reach the monastery we continue L along the asphalt road until we are in the vicinity of an old building which was once the monastery’s brick and ceramics factory. Here we turn R onto a minor road. Strictly speaking this deviation does not follow the ancient road, but has been inserted all the same to enable us to visit the **Montesenario Ice-house**. From the ice-house a short, steep track brings us to the piazza from which

the road up to the monastery starts. The old road is closed off with a chain and can only be travelled on foot. To our L is the asphalt road, opened in 1964 to give access to the monastery to motor traffic. Continuing up the old road we come across the tabernacles of the *Via Matris* representing the Seven Sorrows of Mary (the monks of Montesenario belong to the Servite Order, particularly devoted to Our Lady of Sorrows). About halfway up the hill is the little church of San Martino, rebuilt in 1946 on the ruins of an earlier building. Beside it is the monks' cemetery. We are now joined by the main Soft link and route CAI 2, both coming from Polcanto. Shortly afterwards we arrive at the **Monastery of Montesenario**, where the route ends.

After seeing round the monastery we retrace our steps downhill to rejoin the Anello del Rinascimento.

### **Vaglia – Alberaccio – Fiesole**

*In the old days the route to Bivigliano and thence to Montesenario followed a lovely paved road. In this section the Anello del Rinascimento travels this route, rediscovering its silences, its fragrances and the vast panoramas it offers. In the second part the route travels largely along the crests of hills with broad views over the surrounding valleys and extraordinary glimpses of Florence and (ultimately) Fiesole as well.*

*Length:* Km 22.9

*Time required:* 6 hrs 40 mins

*Altitude variance:* m 688

*Difficulties:* the length of the journey

*Tips and notes:* Pay attention to the traffic on the asphalt stretches, and also to exposure to the sun in the summer months.

*Access:* Train from Florence and Borgo San Lorenzo. Bus service from Florence and from the Mugello; Bus service to the Alberaccio and Fiesole.

*MTB facility:* medium to easy. In the vicinity of the Passo della Catena and of Poggio Guadagni the steep and occasionally muddy track makes walking necessary in both directions.

The route starts in **Vaglia** at the corner of Via Bolognese and Via della Stazione. Passing close to the station we take the road R leading to Bivigliano (CAI 20), cross the railway through an underpass and after a short uphill stretch turn R onto a dirt road (Via di Signano). We soon approach a group of buildings where there once stood the little medieval church of Sant' Alessandro a Signano, now vanished. We continue to zigzag upwards until reaching a completely restored farmhouse (Signano I) and beyond it another farmhouse (Signano II). A third building visible higher up, among cypress trees, was used as a lazar-house during outbreaks of cholera during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the second farmhouse the path becomes a country lane running on level ground through meadows in the direction of the woods (we remind you to be careful always to shut the gates behind you!). A little way on CAI 20 turns L up a steep, narrow path, but we keep straight ahead. Further on, in the middle of a cypress wood, we leave the Vaglia side of the hills to enter the valley of Risecconi and Bivigliano.

The route takes a bend to the left and after a brief and gentle downhill stretch arrives at Sommavilla. From this point until Via del Sorbo it coincides once again with CAI 18, which rises from the Strada Statale of the Futa to the top of Montesenario. The path begins to climb gently, passing close by the farm buildings of Sommavilla di

Sopra, then Podere Piamberti, heading towards the edge of the wood. Eventually we reach a dirt road (Via del Sorbo) where we turn L and pass in front of Villa del Sorbo.

After the Villa we follow the track until we reach the asphalt road from Vaglia to Bivigliano. Turning R, we soon get to the camping site at Poggio degli Uccellini, set in a fine sweet-chestnut wood. We continue towards Bivigliano, and after passing Marroneto, and then leaving on our R Via di Corte Nuova, we arrive at Corte Chiarese. At the junction with Via del Massonero we turn L and come to the first houses of the well-known summer resort. Here we leave the asphalt, turning R along a narrow dirt road which soon turns into a grassy path. Finally we arrive in town, emerging first into Via della Fonte and thereafter into the main street of Bivigliano (Via Roma). We follow this as far as the piazza, then take Via della Chiesa R, almost immediately turning L towards the Misericordia of Bivigliano. From here starts the ancient road from Bivigliano to Montesenario. Once past the car park the road becomes grassy and passes through a little wood. Skirting a house, and taking great care not to bear L, we aim straight ahead, first down then slightly upwards. Close by a tabernacle we cross Via dei Condotti and make our way up along the edge of a pinewood (in the rainy season this stretch of path is often muddy). Leaving the brushwood, we emerge into a large meadow along the lower side of which we continue until, with a final climb (this also often rather muddy) we reach the road to Montesenario **\*(see variant for Montesenario)**. We turn R along the asphalt that descends for about 1 km until we see beside the road on our left a cypress tree half hiding a column bearing an inscription dedicated to the Seven Noble Saints of Florence. At this point we turn sharp L, descending through broad meadows offering marvellous views over Fiesole and Florence, until we come to the Via Faentina near the pass of Vetta le Croci, only 300m away. Crossing the road we take a path (often muddy) through pastureland mingled with scrub, and shortly come to the minor pass of the **Alberaccio**, which lies on the asphalt road leading to Molin del Piano.

From the pass of the **Alberaccio**, crossing the road for Molin del Piano we embark on a dirt road (CAI 2) which at first runs parallel to the main road but then, after skirting a few little villas, becomes a mule-track rising gently to a hilltop, only to re-descend to the Passo della Catena. At this point, to our L, after crossing the road at the Pass, we begin to climb steeply R in a wood of conifers. Through alternating wood and meadowland, with a number of not very demanding ups and downs, we come to a saddle, which affords a passage between the valley of the Mugnone and that of Molin del Piano (near Casa Pretena). Now a fresh climb, with one very short difficult bit, enables us to reach Poggio Guadagni and a little later on the grasslands of Poggio Pratone from which vast panoramas greet the eye. Passing a stone monument erected to the memory of Bruno Cicognani, we continue along a broad track, through spacious meadows, past the building which houses radio antennae and repeaters (still on CAI 2) until we come to a junction a little way below. Here we find (L) the route of CAI 3 making for Complobbi across the plateau of San Clemente, and straight ahead the continuation of CAI 2. This we follow downhill on an easy dirt road, in the direction of Monte Fanna. Our route passes from meadowland to mixed woodland, until reaching the increasingly dense clumps of cypresses surrounding Casa Monte Fanna, which comes into view just beyond a chain across the way near an asphalt secondary road. Reaching this, only a few hundred metres R take us to Villa Gargiolti, beyond which a woodland path L enables us to make a high circle round Monte Muscoli and follow a well-kept cart track to the junction where, near a gateway and a tabernacle, we leave route CAI 2. We are now in Via Riotorto, a narrow asphalt road that leads down

through mixed woodland and cypresses to the Strada Provinciale of Vincigliata. Keeping R once more a short walk brings us to Baccano and the junction with the Strada dei Bosconi coming from Fiesole. At this point we have to pay close attention: taking the asphalt road L and immediately L again we find a secondary road (Via di Baccano) sloping gently downwards. After a bare hundred metres we turn sharp R to follow a shady path running parallel to and below the main road. This path rejoins the asphalt near recycling area. We are now nearing the town of **Fiesole**, towards which we direct our steps. Passing Casa Peramonda (L) we come to the junction on the road of that name, with signs to a camping site and to the Parco di Monte Ceceri. A short uphill stretch brings us to the camping site and the buildings of Borgunto. In the little piazza of Prato dei Pini is one of the entrances to the Parco di Monte Ceceri, while Via Corsica slopes down gently R, leading to Via Pelagaccio and Via degli Scalpellini, enabling us to reach Via di Montececeri, which must be numbered among the most panoramic viewpoints in all the environs of Florence. The road leads L to the park of that name, while in the opposite direction, walking through the lovely streets of the little town, we reach its heart at Piazza Mino.

### **Vaglia – Alberaccio – Santa Brigida**

*The route follows quiet, shady pathways as far as Bivigliano (and as an optional to the Monastery of Montesenario, see the described variant), continuing to the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso, and ultimately descending along a beautiful paved road to Santa Brigida. In addition to its religious associations, this itinerary is also of interest to nature lovers because it passes through the ANPIL of Poggio Ripaghera, famed for the plant life unique to the area.*

*Length of route:* 17.5 km

*Time required:* 3 hours

*Altitude variance:* m 483

*Difficulties:* none

*Tips and notes:* as this stage is a short one we advise the detour to Montesenario.

*Access:* Regular bus services to Alberaccio and Santa Brigida.

*MTB facility:* medium to easy. In a few muddy and steep stretches you will need to steady yourself with your feet.

### **N.B. For a description of the Vaglia-Alberaccio route see the itinerary Vaglia -- Alberaccio – Fiesole**

From the **Alberaccio**, a pass on the Strada Provinciale leading to Santa Brigida and Molin del Piano, we take a side road past a few little villas and running parallel to the main road for about 200 metres. Rejoining the Provinciale, we cross it (with a wary eye to the traffic) and embark on a dirt road that climbs up L. We follow it until reaching a large tourist map displaying the whole Commune of Pontassieve. Beyond it we come to a first fork. We take the track R, bypass a bar across the road and descend along a dirt road (CAI 8-A) until coming to another fork just before a farmhouse. We curve round to the left, on flat ground, and pass Casa Malaspina. Here the road narrows and continues on the flat until Casa Castelluccio, after which we start downhill towards the road which from the Fattoria di Masseto climbs all the way to the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso. On reaching the road we start upwards, turning sharp L, and after a short and easy ascent we arrive at the Sanctuary itself, an ancient place of worship and the goal of

processions and pilgrims from all over the country around Florence. Having admired the fine views to be had from here, we circle beneath the buildings and begin our descent along route 8-C, through a delectable wood of Turkey oaks and chestnuts, until we come to a fork marked with a stele. We go L down seven steps and continue along the historic paved road which leads to a pair of fine stone pillars. Just beyond these two pillars we notice a stretch of roadway with larger paving stones. This is said to be the last remnant of the original ancient Roman road. We traverse the rustic hamlet of Le Lucole before climbing slightly and finally turning R and reaching the asphalt road at Lucole, where we note a fine tower-house dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Turning L, along a short stretch of tarmac, we reach the village of **Santa Brigida**. This takes its name from a saint who, tradition has it, led the life of a hermit in a nearby cave. Close by the cave was built an oratory which later became the church which stands to this day.

### **Santa Brigida – Pontassieve**

*An itinerary of interest chiefly for the countryside it passes through, almost always in descent, in the lovely landscape that slopes towards the Val di Sieve, dotted with stupendous farms and hamlets and... rediscovered windmills.*

*Length:* Km 13.2

*Time required:* 4 hrs

*Altitude variance:* m 303

*Difficulties:* none

*Tips and notes:* long stretches of little-used asphalt road can still be dangerous.

*Access:* Bus service to Santa Brigida, bus and train to Pontassieve.

*MTB facility:* medium to easy, with a short uphill stretch of steep, rough mule-track. after Fornello. Be careful not to gather too much speed downhill!

From **Santa Brigida** we faithfully follow the narrow but panoramic asphalted Via Doccia, which once through the village becomes Via di Parga and leads to a junction at La Villa. We follow Via di Parga L as far as the village of Fornello and its church. While still in Fornello we leave the main road, turning sharp L along Via Fornello which climbs steeply to become a dirt road (route GEO-A) and passes a group of little villas. Subsequently we follow a woodland road that continues to climb, eventually turning into a rocky mule-track until it crosses a dirt road. Here we leave the signs of GEO-A and take the dirt road R, but only for a few hundred metres. We soon reach the asphalt road marked CAI 7 which climbs towards Galiga. Once again we go R, cross the zone of Le Colline, and descend to the Santa Brigida – Pontassieve road. At a first junction with the road leading to Doccia we keep straight ahead until we reach a second junction. This time we turn sharp L and enter a beautiful olive grove with fine views. Shortly thereafter we arrive at Monterifrassine where we discover a handsome 18<sup>th</sup> century windmill, recently restored.

After admiring the view over the town of Rufina, in Val di Sieve, famous for its Chianti wine, we come to a crossroads with asphalt roads leading to Rufina (L) and Pontassieve (R). We go straight ahead towards Montefiesole. At the next junction we leave the asphalt to continue L along the dirt road (CAI 7) which rises to Montefiesole and its beautiful Pieve (panoramic views). From here we return to the lane leading to the junction below, after which we continue through a lovely cypress wood until we reach a crossroads where stands an ancient tabernacle. From here we must take care as we climb up a steep, straight mule-track through the wood to then circle the top of Poggio Bardellone.

The views towards the Sieve are at this point really lovely, with the village of Nippozzano immersed in the precious vineyards of the house of Antinori. A long descent through the wood brings us to a dirt road which joins Via del Capitano and then, crossing Via G. Matteotti, descends to the centre of **Pontassieve** and the nearby railway station.

### **Pontassieve – Montecucco – San Donato**

*This route takes us along narrow, ancient roads with fine views over the Arno Valley. As in other itineraries, the beauty of nature is mingled to a remarkable degree with historical and artistic interest.*

*Length:* Km 13

*Time required:* 4 hrs 20 mins

*Altitude variance:* m 598

*Difficulties:* none

*Access:* Train to Pontassieve; Bus service to Rosano, Pontassieve and San Donato.

*MTB facility:* medium to easy. From the Vicoritto crossroads, instead of going up to the Convento dell'Incontro, it is advisable to continue along the ancient paved road that leads directly to the pass of Terzano and then, continuing along Via Bencistà e Gorioli, at the first crossroads you come to turn L uphill on the asphalt road that leads to Montecucco. Thereafter continue along the Anello del Rinascimento to San Donato.

Having traversed the centre of **Pontassieve** to the bridge over the Arno which takes us to Rosano, where we pay a visit to the convent of that name (in September the nuns there provide wonderful peaches, while the Gregorian chant sung during Mass on Sundays is nothing short of divine), the route faithfully follows CAI 1 in the direction of the hills. The asphalt lane, once past a group of houses, becomes a dirt road and climbs more steeply as far as the lovely church of San Pugnano, dating back to the early Middle Ages and recently restored. Back on the asphalt, a hundred metres from the church we come to a crossroads. Beside the tabernacle erected here we take the asphalt road R which climbs immediately L towards a cluster of houses not far off in the wood. After two hundred metres in that direction, and before the houses, we take the mule track L over a steep rise to arrive in the vicinity of a villa, whose fence we circle bearing L. Leaving the fence behind we follow a shady path leading to a crest near Poggio Masso Tondo. After a short level stretch of dirt road along the crest we get to Le Pozzacce. Another easy climb on a stony path and we reach an ancient boundary stone where our route joins with itinerary CAI 00. We bear L to circle Poggio Alberaccio and emerge onto the road to the stupendous villa of Poggio Luco. After barely three hundred metres of asphalt, at a cross placed at a crossroads beyond the Villa, we take the asphalt road L which rises to the Convento dell'Incontro. Coming to a bend, we note the white road to Vicoritto branching off L, whereas we continue R on the asphalt, which we leave after a hundred metres to take a path up towards the Convento dell'Incontro (CAI 00). The route circles the boundary wall of the monastery, offering breathtaking views over the hills and over Florence itself. At the television masts we turn R downhill, on a path that becomes increasingly steep and stony and, after crossing itinerary CAI 4B, leads to the pass of Terzano, an ancient link between the Valdarno and the Florentine plains. Arrived at the pass we must be careful to take the path to Poggio Crociferro, which is straight ahead of us beside the gate of a villa, and bears the indication AR – 00. The climb up the crest ends at Poggio Crociferro, one of the most panoramic spots in the whole trek. Shortly thereafter we reach the saddle of **Montecucco**, with a cluster of little villas, where the *Anello del Rinascimento* crosses the route from Rignano

sull'Arno to Bagno a Ripoli. From the crossroads at Montecucco we take a short stretch of tarmac towards the entrance to a villa. Before reaching this we take a narrow pathway R in descent around the fence of the property. The path then regains the crest and soon becomes a track that follows the watershed, heading south. There are broad views towards the basin of the Valdarno. After climbing a little further, we start descending steeply R, circling the boundary fence of the Torre a Cona estate and its Park, ending up at Fornace on the main road (PR Aretina). On this road (paying great care to the traffic!) after less than one kilometre we arrive at the pass and village of **San Donato in Collina**, where we can find a few such services as a bar, grocer's shop, newsvendor etc.

### **Rignano sull'Arno-Montecucco-Bagno a Ripoli**

*On this route we are taking a metaphorical walk through history, along with those shepherds and wayfarers who crossed the bridge at Rignano to gain the Pian di Ripoli or even the Maremma. They used to follow the remains of the ancient Via Cassia Adrianea, which led from the bridge through the pass at Montecucco to the medieval Spedale del Bigallo. Long stretches of historic paved road accompany the excursionist.*

*Length:* Km 13.5

*Time required:* 4 hrs

*Altitude variance:* m 437

*Difficulties:* none

*Access:* To Rignano Train and Bus service; Bus service to Bagno a Ripoli.

*MTB facility:* medium-easy. Only a few steep inclines may require walking.

From the railway station of Rignano we head for the Pieve di San Leolino, which dates from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century and seems to have existed before the town. After visiting it we continue towards the cemetery, leaving the asphalt for a dirt road that rises a short distance to the junction near Casa Rignano, a farmhouse which has grown up around a medieval tower-house. We turn L to climb still further into a wood, but soon arrive at the fields and olive groves surrounding the scattered farmhouses of the Fattoria di Pagnana. From here we come to the road from Bombone down to Rignano. We cross this, and after a bare 100 metres L we begin to climb R, through the pretty little village of Bombone, until we reach the old road running parallel to the more modern one we have just left. From the little main piazza, with its tiny church, we bear R as far as another junction (Il Crocicchio) with the Strada Provinciale mentioned above. This we cross and, straight ahead, we embark on a track (Via Vicinale delle Fontanelle) which dips down slightly to a drainage ditch and rises again towards Casa delle Fontanelle (drinking water point R). Skirting the house L we continue uphill as far as a field of young olive trees. This we cross, following the line of the electricity pylons, until the beginning of a firebreak cut under the line itself. After some 200 metres uphill we turn R along the old paved road (just visible) that plunges into the woods. We soon rejoin the firebreak only to leave it for the last time to re-enter the wood R along an uphill mule-track (also paved) until reaching a narrow asphalt road. Here we turn sharp L to climb to the nearby dirt road at the place called Il Quercione (the clearing is indeed remarkable for a great oak tree). At the crossroads we turn R and follow the dirt road (which later becomes asphalted) that leads to Villa di Moriano. Ignoring the asphalt road descending R (towards Mitigliano) and marked CAI 3, we forge straight ahead for a hundred metres till we reach a chain slung between two cement posts which mark (R) a dirt road lined with most beautiful cypresses, which leads to Casignano (AR –CAI 3). After barely 200 metres, at the first junction, we turn R onto a mule-track which rises slightly through the



wood, revealing stretches of the ancient paving. Ignoring a second junction with a mule-track ascending R, we continue downwards through the wood for a short while before turning sharp L, and continuing until once more reaching the dirt road marked CAI 3. This we follow R and soon arrive at the ruins of the Monasteraccio (Casignano), a medieval monastery which the monks abandoned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to move to the Bigallo, and now in part restructured as a private house. Here we leave the dirt road and route CAI 3, which would take us to the pass of Terzano, and instead turn L along a narrow track which after crossing a dirt road leading to a nearby private house rises once more through an oak wood. Narrow at first but then increasingly wider, this ancient road – which is said to be Roman, or at least medieval – reveals stretches of very fine paving (partially covered with moss or loose soil) which we hope will some day be recovered for all to see. We soon arrive at the modern villas of **Montecucco**, an important meeting of the ways on the *Anello del Rinascimento* (AR).

*N.B. From this point, according to which excursion is planned, we can reach San Donato or Bagno a Ripoli or Rosano/Pontassieve and then (after finding out about routes and times) return by train or bus to our starting-point at Rignano sull'Arno or else to Florence. We advise a short deviation (R from the pass) to the top of a knoll from which there is an exceptional 360° view over Florence and the Valdarno).*

From the saddle of **Montecucco**, a really focal point in this part of the *Anello di Rinascimento*, we head down an asphalt road through the woods. At the first junction R we notice a broad dirt road which comes from the pass of Terzano. We however continue down the asphalt road, which widens out but is still shaded by trees. The descent ends at a crossroads near a restaurant. We go past this to the nearby Case Bencistà and the subsequent junction (CAI 6 ascends L to Monte Pilli), and continue (on the flat at first) along one of the best-preserved stretches of the ancient road that formerly connected the Valdarno to Pian di Ripoli at the very gates of Florence. We do not know if this road is Roman or medieval, but certainly it served to shorten the route from the Valdarno to Florence. It is a stirring thing for us excursionists to tread in the footsteps of travellers of the remote past. At a certain point the paving stops suddenly, evidently because the terrain has shifted (note how the paving heads off into space!). We continue along the flank of the hill with notable glimpses of the city below. We come now to the cypresses of Villa Ada and the olive groves that tell us we are near the Spedale del Bigallo, a historic building of the first importance, recuperated by the recent restoration to its original form and now used as a hostel. From here the course of SP “Vecchia Aretina” descends between stone walls and among olives to the Arco del Camicia, the entrance gate (for the AR) to the commune of **Bagno a Ripoli**.

### **San Donato in Collina – Impruneta**

*A long excursion with acceptable gradients. From the woods of Fonte Santa we move to the vineyards and olive groves that herald the gentle landscapes of Chianti to end up at Impruneta, the “capital” of terracotta ware.*

*Length:* Km 18

*Time required:* 5 hrs 50 mins

*Altitude variance:* 542m

*Difficulties:* none

*Access:* Bus services from Florence and Impruneta, which intersect the route at several intermediate localities.

*MTB facility:* medium to easy. From Petigliolo we advise taking the asphalt road L to reach Impruneta via Santa Cristina, so as to avoid several steep, narrow paths.

From **San Donato** we take the Via Maremmana that rises to Fonte Santa, following the ancient transhumance routes along which shepherds and their flocks moved to and fro from Val di Sieve and the Upper Casentino according to the season. The short climb ends at the park of Fonte Santa, where there are a number of botanical rarities typical of Mediterranean vegetation, due to the sea breezes which reach thus far inland.

Passing the small Refuge and the Fountain itself, we continue first on level ground and then in slight descent until we spot the Sasso Scritto (so called because it seems to have borne an Etruscan inscription), then on to Casa Il Mandorlo, which was probably a staging-post for shepherds. The route runs along a ridge, over the saddle of Monte Masso (formerly the site of an Oratory), and descends towards La Collina, a cluster of houses on the SP to San Polo in Chianti. Already in view ahead of us is Il Palagio and the hill of Santo Stefano a Tizzano, which we soon reach. Accompanied by ancient, shady cypresses we come to the open spaces surrounding the Villa of Castel Ruggero, the name of which is a reminder of its medieval origin. Just beyond it we descend steeply to the Molino di Petigliolo, where we cross the Torrente Ema and climb (equally steeply) towards the SR Chiantigiana, passing on our way a number of very fine rural buildings.

Turning R, we follow the Chiantigiana for about a kilometre until the junction with the Via della Montagnola, which we embark on L, heading for the Podere Porciana amidst its lovely copse of cypress trees. Once past a bar across the road, we traverse an olive grove affording fine views to arrive at the above farm. Here we must turn sharp L to descend to the Torrente Grassina, following the electricity lines. Crossing the stream we walk for a few metres L, but very shortly have to make a steep climb (with a trace of a path) as far as a hunter's cabin and thereafter to the first house, Casa Monteferrato.

From here a track among the olives crosses an area known as the Terre Bianche, where there is more than one Agriturismo. A little above Inalbi, where the dirt road turns to asphalt, we turn R to re-enter the woods and descend for less than 100 metres. A slight rise through the pinewood takes us to the rear of the Sassi Neri football ground and the SP leading to the outskirts of **Impruneta**.

Turning R along the road, shaded by an avenue of lime-trees, we arrive in the beautiful piazza in which stands the Basilica.

### **Impruneta – La Certosa**

*An easy downhill walk with very worthwhile views over Florence itself and of the grand architectural complex of the Certosa (Carthusian monastery).*

*Length:* Km 7,3

*Time required:* 2hrs 10 mins

*Altitude variance:* m 78

*Difficulties* none

*Access:* Bus service to Impruneta, Bottai and La Certosa

*MTB facility:* medium to easy

From Piazza Buondelmonti, in which stands the Basilica of Impruneta, we traverse the historic centre by way of Via Paolieri and Via Roma until we arrive at Villa Carrega and find spread before us vast panoramic views of Poggio Firenze, the Monti del Chianti, the Appennine chain and the Pratomagno. Beyond the villa we come to Viale Aldo Moro in the little town of Desco.

We bear R on the road to Florence via Pozzolatico. After about a kilometre we turn L uphill (note an unusual corner house) along Via di San Miniato a Quintole, a road which starts out asphalted and rising steeply but then becomes a dirt road leading shortly to the church of the same name, very ancient and picturesque and with its old cemetery which is worth a visit. Note also the fountain in front of the church.

The route continues among olives, with alternating stretches of dirt road and asphalt, leading to I Baruffi, where there is a fork surrounded by little modern villas. We bear R down Via le Rose towards the village of that name, after which we arrive at the beautiful Villa Antinori.

At the corner of the Villa we are careful to turn R, to pass through the ancient entrance with its rows of cypresses and embark on a white road which, once past Villa Brancolano, gives us fine views particularly over the Certosa. Still among the olive groves is a last farmhouse, just before which we turn sharp L and steeply downhill, along a lane which brings us to the car park at Bottai on the Via Cassia. (Be warned! On the stretch between the last farmhouse and the car park we find a notice reading “cancello chiuso – strada privata”. Do not be taken in: it is a “strada vicinale” and not private at all!).

The road just mentioned appears to end at a permanently locked gate. A hundred metres before this, turn L, surmounting a low wall, and you will arrive right at the car park (ATAF bus 37 for Galluzzo).

To reach the Certosa, on the Via Cassia we go R towards Firenze. After barely 100 metres we turn L into Via di Colleramole, and then R on Via Buca di Certosa. Among the houses at the foot of the Certosa starts (L) the old stone-stepped ramp leading to the ancient entrance to the monastery.

### **La Certosa – Firenze**

*A lovely walk along roads typical of the hills around Florence. Reaching Piazzale Michelangelo we find ourselves on a prodigious balcony overhanging the City of the Flower.*

*Length of rout: Km 6,3*

*Time required: 1 hr 50 mins*

*Altitude variance: m 114*

*Difficulties: none*

*Access: Bus service to Galluzzo and Florence*

*MTB facility: easy*

From the Certosa to Galluzzo we simply go down to the car park and after a short walk along Via Senese we are in Galluzzo.

From Piazza Acciaioli we turn R along Via Silvani. Reaching a crossroads we continue straight ahead until finding to our L a steep alleyway (Via Suor Maria Celeste) which leads to Villa Le Piazzole. At the junction opposite the Villa we continue R along Via San Matteo in Arcetri.

Still climbing, we arrive at Pian dei Giullari, and pass right in front of Villa “Il Gioiello”, where Galileo Galilei died in 1642. Skirting the wall surrounding the Observatory of Arcetri we come to the junction of Volsamminiato. We turn R along Via Torre del Gallo and soon reach Piazzale degli Unganelli. Thanks to the narrow, winding Via del Giramonte, which we enter R, we arrive at the walls enclosing the basilica of San Miniato a Monte. Circling these we descend towards the beautiful cemetery of that name, reaching Via Monte alle Croci and, after a short stretch of gravelled road, emerge onto Piazzale Michelangelo.

### **La Certosa – Pian dei Cerri – Lastra a Signa – Signa**

*A long stage, but not demanding. From the bottom of the valley at Bottai we climb again into a hilly landscape dotted with villas and farmhouses. The route plunges into the pinewoods characteristic of the Florentine hill country bordering on Chianti and winds through the woods of Roveta, interspersed with the olive groves in the parts towards Signa and the Arno.*

***N.B. At Pian dei Cerri one can break off the excursion and catch a bus back to town.***

*Length: Km 22.9*

*Time required: 6 hrs 50 mins*

*Altitude variance: 126m*

*Difficulties: only the length*

*Access: Bus to Galluzzo, along SP Volterrana and to Pian dei Cerri*

*MTB facility: medium to easy, with some short stretches of steep, rough mule track.*

Following our interesting visit to the **Certosa del Galluzzo** we take Via Buca della Certosa to regain our route leading up into the hills. Crossing the bridge over the River Greve and negotiating the underpass beneath Motorway A1, the road leading to San Cristofano a Viciano passes close by a camping site and continues uphill, through the woods.

Shortly thereafter broad views open before us and, passing through olive groves and arriving at a fork near Colleramole and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Villa dei Collazzi, we descend to the Via Volterrana, which follows to this day a route of Etruscan origin. We too follow it L for a bare 600m in the direction of Chiesanuova, to leave it when we come to a dirt road (barred) which descends R to the Fosso Vingone (CAI 00). Just above us is the dam on the same stream.

Crossing along the embankment and reaching a meeting of paths, we bear R along a track with some remaining paving which runs along the hillside (views over Florence and the plain), between woods above us and olive groves below, until we come to another fork in the vicinity of Casignano. We turn L to go up to the Grotta di San Zenobi, the cave where Zenobi, bishop of Florence, retired to live a hermit's life.

The road continues uphill to the pass of La Catena, where the old roads met to cross over into the Val di Pesa. Once at the pass, nearby on our R is the entrance to the public park of Poggio Valicaia, which includes all this high ground.

From the parking lot, along the mud track of Via dei Valloni, we continue through the woods first to Casa Spazzavento and further on the Casa Poggio al Pino, which stands on Via dell'Arrigo and leads to the villa of that name. Near Poggio al Pino there is an Agriturismo. A few hundred metres further on and we are at **Pian dei Cerri**, an ancient pass where there are now a few houses and a restaurant.

From **Pian dei Cerri** we follow the Strada Provinciale for barely 200 metres before leaving it L for a white road descending among woods and olives to Casa Selvoli. Passing close by the building we keep a look-out for the route markers and find L a shady lane that crosses the Borro Vallemorta and then remains on high ground as far as Casa Roncigliano, only a short distance from the recently restored Albergo Roveta. Near Roncigliano take note of a number of chestnut trees, unusual in this otherwise Mediterranean vegetation.

After the hotel we turn L along the unpaved Via della Roveta which ends at a fence. We avoid this hazard by following the lane that rises R, towards a house which in turn we

bypass on the L by means of a path which swiftly enables us to regain the white road beyond the locked gates.

We are now on the road that led to the Fonte Roveta mineral water plant, famous in the 1950s but now abandoned. Coming to a bend we bear L and descend the old road, still partly paved. We thus come to a crossroads where to our L is the Fonte Roveta, while straight ahead a bosky path leads down to join the local dirt road of Roveta. After 200-300 metres along this we come to a junction, at which we bear R through dense woods and pretty much on the level. A few fields and olive groves tell us we are near a house, and also to the bridge over the main Firenze-Pisa-Livorno highway. Once past the bridge we take Via di Naiale, at first on a dirt road and then, having traversed the little settlement, along a track that crosses a gully and takes us to the farm of La Torre, which we recognize from a distance by the tower soaring above the olive trees. At the farm we find a narrow panoramic asphalt road leading R, and after one kilometre, through a grove of superbly maintained olive trees, we reach the tower-house Il Mulettino, of medieval origin. Branching off at the gateway of Il Mulettino (note the tabernacle) is the dirt road of Poggio Vittorio, which passes that house and plunges into the woods, becoming an increasingly steep track. Once clear of the bushes we walk among orchards and cultivated fields that tell us we are nearing the town of **Lastra a Signa**. Following Via Castruccio Castracane and Via Matteotti we come to the Portone di Baccio, one of the gates of the 15<sup>th</sup> century castle of Lastra a Signa, of which Brunelleschi was one of the architects. We enter the historic centre (in which the Spedale di Sant'Antonio is one of the sights worth viewing), pass through the principal piazza and leave through the castle walls at Porta Pisana, right opposite Via di Sotto which leads to Ponte a Signa. At this spot there used to be a bridge of great importance, because from the Middle Ages right up to modern times it was one of the only ways of crossing the Arno between Florence and Pisa (the other being the one on the Via Francigena near Fucecchio). On the site of the ancient bridge, destroyed during the Second World War, there is now a footbridge which enables us to reach **Signa**.

### **Signa – Campi Bisenzio – Calenzano**

*The last lap of the Anello del Rinascimento is set in the Florentine plains, laboriously reclaimed from the marshes by means of drainage. From the Renai to Campi Bisenzio, in a man-made landscape, traces of the past are still legible, giving this area a fascination of its own that can only be rediscovered on the banks of the River Bisenzio.*

*Length:* Km 16.8

*Time required:* 4 hrs 30 mins

*Altitude variance:* m 126

*Difficulties:* none

*Tips and notes:* a sun-drenched route.

*Access:* Bus service and train to Signa; Bus to San Piero a Ponti, Campi Bisenzio, Capalle; Bus and train to Calenzano.

*MTB facility:* easy, though with a few stretches of narrow embankment (take care!).

From the footbridge over the Arno we take Via Roma through the railway underpass and enter (L) on a pedestrian way (steps) climbing to **Signa Castello**, the historic centre of the town.

From Piazza Cavour, dominated by the Pieve of San Giovanni, containing some notable frescoes of the Beata Giovanna, we descend to the Town Hall and thereafter to the main road. This we cross to take Via dei Renai and once across the recently built ring-road we go over the bridge across the Bisenzio near the entrance to the **Renai**,

lately converted into a nature reserve. We can catch a glimpse of its ponds, and for those with enough time we advise a visit. Here we take the right bank (orographic L) as far as **San Mauro a Signa**, and in particular the bridge at Il Valico. Crossing the bridge we shift to the other bank (orographic R). Moving upstream on the river Bisenzio, an affluent of the Arno, we arrive at a second bridge but stay on the same side of the embankment. A kilometre further on we are at **San Piero a Ponti**. Here we cross Via Pistoiese (third bridge) and almost immediately find a footbridge where once the main road entered the village. We continue along the same bank as far as **San Martino**, where we cross yet a fourth bridge from which we enjoy a good view. On for another kilometre and we come to a modern steel footbridge by which we cross to the other bank (orographic L) and soon come to a cement ramp by which we get down to the centre of **Campi Bisenzio**, an ancient town but now industrialized. Once in Campi, we take Via Garibaldi which leads to Piazza Ballerini and Piazza Fra' Ristoro. From here Via Santo Stefano leads L to the nearby bridge over the River Bisenzio, directly below the Rocca with its crenellated walls and tower. From the bridge itself some steps enable us to reach the left bank of the river (orographic R) to follow the path along the embankment, which in this reach of the river makes sweeping bends. It is a sight for sore eyes, with intent fishermen and flights of waterfowl such as blue herons and little egrets.

Reaching the point where the Torrente Marina joins the main stream, we find the bridge of **Capalle**, near which there is a tabernacle. We descend R to the centre of the village, and are at once struck by its ancient medieval appearance. Once past the premises of the "Misericordia" we enter the nucleus of the "Terra murata" (walled village) by way of Via Gora and arrive at the church of Saints Quirico and Giuditta. Beyond the church we leave through the gateway of the village to turn R onto Via dello Scalo, near the public gardens and a recently restored Villa. At the first curve and bridge we reach the right bank (orographic L) of the Torrente Marinella, and soon come to an underpass close by a new cinema complex. Having taken a second underpass beneath the road to the shopping centre known as *I Gigli*, we arrive at the public park of the same name. Here, following part of the *Percorso Vita*, with green areas and benches for old people (N.B. this stretch has also been cleared of obstacles such as walls etc.), after another bridge we come once more to the R bank of the Marinella and follow it as far as the Florence-Prato railway line. At the embankment we turn R and then immediately L into the underpass which leads to an ancient Hospital, now a private home. A hundred metres further and we are on the Via Pratese between Calenzano and La Querce (Prato), not far from the railway station of **Calenzano**. Following Via Pratese we come to traffic lights at a first crossroads known as the "Nome di Gesù". Following the signs for Travalle, we turn L and quickly reach the Ponte del Mulino on the **Torrente Marina**. This we cross, and taking Via del Castello L we climb to the nearby Rocca, which (like many other castles) was devastated by Castruccio Castracani, but to which a partial restoration has now given a new life as the municipal cultural and recreational centre.

### **Signa – Florence**

*An itinerary entirely on level ground, which partly in the Parco dei Renai, with its flashes of water, moves upstream along the Arno to end at the Parco delle Cascine at the gates of the city. Along the river we have a chance to observe a large colony of egrets (Egretta garzetta), many blue herons and a great many seagulls.*

*Length: Km 12.6*

*Time required: 3 hrs 10 mins*

*Altitude variance: m 10*

*Difficulties:* none

*Tips and notes:* a very sunny route in summer

*Access:* Bus service and train to Signa and Florence.

*MTB facility:* easy, with possibly muddy stretches in wet weather.

From the centre of **Signa** (see itinerary Signa – Calenzano), after crossing the bridge over the River Bisenzio, we make for the entrance to the Parco dei Renai. Directly opposite the park entrance the route for Campi Bisenzio and Calenzano continues L, while a broad dirt road R leads towards the railway, traversing the area remarkable for its little lakes, which are in fact gravel-pits resulting from excavations carried out after the Second World War to obtain aggregate for building. Once past the underpass through the railway embankment we turn L. Immediately after a derelict farmhouse our route, constantly on level ground, approaches the Arno, and from this point on, until reaching the Parco delle Cascine, runs between the river and the railway. In the vicinity of a building once a line-inspector's house we may choose to make a short deviation L, crossing the railway to reach the fine Pieve of San Donnino and the nearby Parco Chico Mendes, recently established directly opposite the old refuse incinerator, now disused. Returning to the cycle path we continue towards the Cascine, first passing under the A1 motorway and then noting R the confluence of the River Greve with the Arno. In this area we can nearly always observe a colony of egrets (white water fowl) and often we notice a great gathering of fish at the meeting of the two rivers. The modern bridge of the Ponte dell'Indiano tells us that we are nearing the Cascine. The path now turns to an asphalt lane, passes some huge pylons and comes to a little bridge over the Mugnone which leads to a piazza where we find the little temple dedicated to the Indian prince who, in accordance with the customs of his country, had his ashes scattered at the confluence of the Mugnone and the Arno. Keeping a course parallel to the avenue between the Arno and the Park (either along the embankment or on the gravel path) we soon arrive at the **Piazzale delle Cascine** (there is a footbridge R leading to the Isolotto). Pursuing our route straight ahead along the embankment we reach Piazza Vittorio Veneto, near the busy Ponte alla Vittoria, where we are already in the heart of Florence.