

# THE CANYONS AND WATERFALLS TRAIL

*Val di Fanes and Val Travenanzès*



## INTRODUCTION



- ▲ The confluence of the valleys of Fanes, Travenanzes and Ra Vales in the basin of Pian de Loa, from Croda de r'Ancona.
- ◀ Cover photo: the Sbarco de Fanes with Mt. Taé in the background (photograph G. Ghedina).

**T**he route, which is very scenic and spectacular although enclosed among ravines and deep valleys, leads to the confluence of the valleys of *Fanes*, *Travenanzes* and *Ra Vales* to the north of Cortina, linking some

sites of grandiose and imposing landscape and hydrogeology. It vaunts an enchanting succession of pools, cataracts and waterfalls that characterize the full length of the *Rio Fanes*, and the *Cascade Basse* (lower falls)

of *Fanes* and the *Travenanzes* canyon are two of the highest and most abundant mountain streams in all the Dolomites. The route runs through the heart of the *Ampezzo Dolomites* and has sections that vary in terms of technical difficulty and level of fitness required. You can walk it either in sections or as a full itinerary with parts also suitable for families with children. It has several panoramic viewpoints and, in some short most-exposed sections, is equipped with metal cable. You can walk the path either clockwise or anticlockwise but we recommend the latter, which is how we will describe it in this booklet. It is divided into three parts: the *Rio Fanes* ascent, the crossing of the lower *Val Travenanzes*, and the return of *Ru de Ra Vales*. You can return to the *Òuto*

► *View of Rio Fanes from the left-bank trail.*



bridge (*Ponte Ôuto*) and the *Pian de Loa* from each of these areas.

The grandeur of the water and geomorphology are certainly the main reasons for the route's attraction while it also provides good opportunities for observing the special habitats of the ravines and dripping cliffs, as well as torrent banks and avalanche slopes, with the

particular vegetation and wildlife they host.

**Length:**

From the Park's entrance at the *Felizon* bridge, over one km approach to the fork at *Pian de Loa*, then an 8 km loop; from the *Sant'Uberto* parking place, one kilometre downhill to the *Pian de Loa* fork; so 9 to 9.5 km overall. The path can be divided into two separate trips of

▼ *Avalanche forest with downy birch at the foot of the Croda del Valon Bianco.*





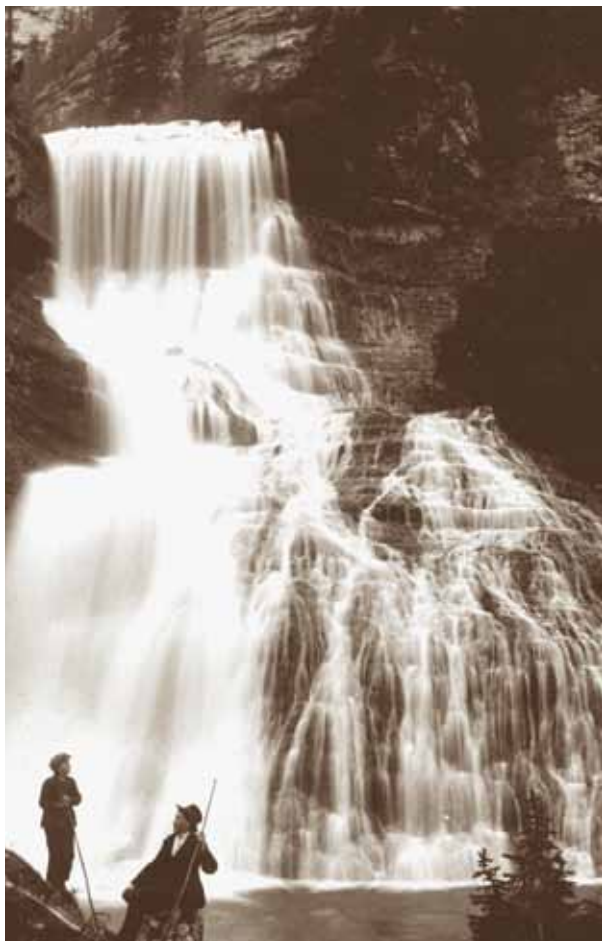
▲ View of the confluence of the Travenances and Fanes valleys with glimpse of the lower falls in the background (photo by M. Da Pozzo)

6.5 - 7 kilometres each. For the full tour, you will need a whole day while if walked individually, the separate trips (returning from *Bus de l'Orso* or the *Ca-doris* bridge) require at least half a day each.

**Difficulty:**

There are five short sections with safety cables, requiring appropriate *ferrata* (equipped route) equipment,

three at the crossing of the *Cascade Basse* (lower falls), one at the *Sbarco de Fanes* and one at the *Ru de ra Vales* falls. You can however avoid all the ring route to avoid the equipped sections by walking the outward section up to the *Ôuto* bridge, thus avoiding crossing the *Cascade Basse*. You should avoid days that could be stormy as flash floods may occur; also the





winter, when icy sections form at some exposed points. Although the route is broad and firm (generally not slippery), it does have some exposed sections so it is not suitable if you suffer from vertigo.

### Height difference:

600 or 700 metres total uphill, depending on whether you avoid the *ferrata* at the *Cascade Basse*, divid-

ed into at least 4 sections and separated by as many downhills or sloping sections and some undulations. If you split the path into two separate trips, your ascent to the *Val di Fanes* is 300 or 400 metres plus another 300 metres to reach the valleys of *Travenanzes* and *Ra Vales*.



- ▲ Detail of the path in the Rio Fanes uphill section.
- ◀ Tourist trip to the Sbarco de Fanes in the early nineteen hundreds.  
(Fotografia Ghedina - Tipografia Ghedina Archive)

## PATH DESCRIPTION



▲ Passage behind the lower falls (photo by M. Da Pozzo)

### **Parking and access points:**

There are three possible access to the circular route that begins and ends near the second bridge of *Pian de Loa*, on the *Rio Fanes*. The simplest, though not the shortest, is from the entrance and car park to the Nature

Park at *Ponte Felizon*, north of *Fiames*. The start extends for nearly two kilometres along gently rising paved road. It is the only one that also lets you see the *Felizon* gorge close-up. The other carpark, affording two accesses, is instead at km 11.2 of the *Alemagna* road, on



the hairpin bend, known as *Tornichè*. These routes are slightly shorter than the first but have a steep last uphill return. The second descends directly from the junction, westwards through the woods, to reach the *Pian de Loa* at the first bridge over the *Boite* mountain stream. The third, which is more scenic, heads north-west, upstream of the hill and the *Sant'Uberto* car park, to cross the *Boite* at the mouth of the gorge of the *Costa dei Sié* and continue across all of the *Pian de Loa* to reach the start of the loop-trail.



- ▲ The Felizon gorge just before it joins the Boite, at the entrance of the Park.
- ▶ The Boite mountain stream at the mouth of the gorge towards Pian de Loa, below the Costa dei Sié.





### Route:

From the junction at *Pian de Loa*, turn right along the flat at the bottom and passing near two majestic fir trees (the *Ciòces*), ascending the slopes of *Mt. Taburlo* until you reach the edge of the *Rio Fanes* gorge, opposite the confluence with the *Rio Travenanzes*. A little further on is the high lookout point dominating the lower falls. Here begins the descent into the gorge and the most difficult section of the itinerary. If you don't feel up to tackling this, you must return the way you came or descend to the *Pian de Loa* bridge and walk up the broad trail of the *Val di Fanes* on the other side of the stream to the *Òuto* bridge. After the winding descent of the narrow gully, you skirt the base of the highest fall (heavy waterfall mist!), ascending to the right to climb a gully cut into sheer red cliffs (a crux

◀ *The double drop of the lower Fanes falls (Cascade Basse) from the first view-point.*



- ▲ *Laguscîei and Graon de ra Ola*
- *The second bridge at the base of the Rio Fanes cataracts.*

passage equipped with fixed cables). The path turns leftwards and you cross a narrow rocky pass and come to the upper falls, with the enchanting walk that passes behind them. The path becomes a wide but exposed ledge which leads to the broad trail at the junction for the *Fanes* shortcut (Trail No. 10).

You take that shortcut and, after a short sharp climb, you descend right to cross the *Rio Fanes* along a first catwalk. The trail now ascends the left bank up narrow switchbacks passing dripping vegetation-rich walls at the foot of Mt. *Taé*. After passing a small scree slope you cross the mountain stream again over a second bridge at





- ▲ Ledge section behind the waterfall of the Sbarco de Fanes.
- ◀ View from behind the Sbarco de Fanes waterfall.
- ▼ Crossing the Rio Travenanzes on the Acquarone bridge.
- ▲ The rock shelter of the Landro de Travenanzes with Mt. Castello in the background.

the base of a rise where the *Rio Fanes* forms a long and spectacular cataract. From here you can return to Trail No. 10).

After the cataract you walk close to the bank through both dense forest and other tracts covered with blueberries. You pass another beautiful waterfall and reach the base of the

last and most spectacular falls: the *Sbarco de Fanes*. A short equipped path (which you can avoid by taking the path on the left) takes you along a surprise ledge that leads you behind the falls themselves to then ascend upstream of the waterfall. The first part of the route ends here and you descend



to the *Òuto* bridge down the steeper shortcut No. 10 or along the main path. If you want to continue into the *Val Travenanzes*, after descending the track for about a kilometre, you must take the path to the right (pay attention to the signpost) to walk through the *Progoito* forest (with many trenches dating from WWI) before descending to cross the *Rio Tavenanzes* gorge over the *Acquarone* bridge (ponte). After a short ascent of the right bank you will reach footpath No. 401 of the *Val Travenanzes*. We recommended a detour walk upstream for a few hundred metres to see the base of the *Landro*, where you will come to an interesting natural rock shelter. After retracing your steps, you will cross the *Cadoris* forest to reach the ford that crosses the *Ru de ra Ola*. The second part of the route ends here and, if you like, you can take the easy way to the *Òuto* bridge by descending

to the *Cadoris* bridge and continuing past the *Cason* (big house) *dei Laguscièi*. If you don't take that descent and keep on trail No. 408 towards *Posporcora* pass, you will continue along a flattish trench-way to approach the ravine of *Ru de Ra Vales*. After a short uphill section among blueberry bushes, you come to the gorge through a gap and pass a boulder zone and







- ▲ *Evorsion pools in the Ra de Ru Vales.*
- *Ra de Ru Vales with its string of plunge pools and waterfalls above the highest waterfall.*

ascend the valley to the base of a beautiful waterfall.

A winding path up a steep gully to the right lets you to reach the gorge's upper edge and Trail No. 408, which you should follow to the left. Just before coming to the bridge over the *Ru de Ra Vales*, a short diversion to the left takes you to admire a spectacular sequence of evorsion plunge-pools on the stream. Upstream of the bridge, if the stream is low and there is no threat of a storm, you can walk up the bottom of the gorge for about a hundred metres, making some ford crossings. The ascent ends at

a high waterfall, which you cannot pass. You leave the gorge to the left up a steep equipped trail or by turning back down to the bridge.

From the turning near the bridge, the loop closes by descending right along the path of *Ria Longa*, along the western slopes of *Col Rosà*. The trail leads back to the broad path of the *Val di Fanes*, a kilometre downstream and to the *Pian de Loa* bridge over the *Rio Fanes*. You are now on the home run, to the car park at either the *Felizon* bridge (following the *Boîte*) or steeply up left to *Torniché*.













▲ The valleys between Col Rosà, the Tofana group, the Valon Bianco and Mt. Taé converge on the Pian de Loa.

Five of the main Ampezzan valleys flow from different directions into the *Pian de Loa* basin. They are respectively, clockwise: *Ra Vales*, *Val Travenanzes*, *Val di Fanes*, *Valle del Boite* and the *Val Felizon*. Their catchment areas cover the whole zone to the north of Cortina and most

of the area of the Nature Park. They also take in the catchment basins of the eastern side of the *Tofana* group (*Ra Vales*) and the south-west slopes of Mt. *Cristallo* (*Val Padeon*, lateral to the *Val Felizon*). The huge water flows converging at the *Pian de Loa* confluence from these differ-

ent basins mean that strong forces of erosion have worked here over the millennia. In ancient times, when these valley floors were carved by glaciers and not flowing water, the area of *Pian de Loa* was subject to intense pressure from the weight of immense converging ice masses, to the extent that it was greatly deepened in the period after their withdrawal.

After the ice masses melted, five U-shaped valleys emerged on the surface, arranged in a 180 degree arc. Their waters flowed into an ice-overdeepened basin into which waterfalls gushed from great heights. Meanwhile the streams eroded the valley bottom, gradually digging their courses and eliminating the original height difference towards the *Pian de Loa* depression.

The ravines that all the mountain streams have carved in various ways into the Dolomite



▲ The ravine of the lower Val Travenanzes from Croda Rossa ('red crag') mountain.

rock of the valley floor (*Dolomia Principale*) with typical V-sections, bear witness to their erosive force and common destiny in post-glacial times. The waterfalls still found along the *Rio Fanes* and *Ru de Ra Vales* however indicate that the gradient-eroding action is not yet fully completed.



- ▲ *The U-shaped profile of the lower Val Travenanzes.*
- ▼ *The Rio Fanes flows in gorge environments in a wooded valley.*

On the edges of the path ascending the *Rio Fanes* you can spot particular boulders the rounded shape and geologic nature of which testify to their

glacial past. They are indeed moraine boulders that have been gradually taken downstream by the glaciers and received prolonged erosion on the way from rolling and friction. They are often composed not of Dolomite but Red Ammonite limestones, as they hail from distant Jurassic outcrops of the *Cunturines* heights and *Limo* pass, found at the head of the valley. Although mostly covered by forest vegetation, large traces are therefore evident of the lateral moraine the *Fanes* glacier once amassed along its flanks.

Along some very narrow parts of the *Rio Fanes*, downstream of the *Sbarco* and, more clearly, along the gorge of *Ru de Ra Vales* just before the bridge of Trail No. 408, you can see some spectacular “evorsion wells”. This particular erosion feature is found in rivers where the water flows turbulently over a rocky bottom.







- ▲ *The marshy area of the source springs of the Rio Fanes with mounts Taé and Cristallo in the background.*
- ▲ *Small eversion holes in the limestone over which the upper Rio Fanes flows.*

They are hemispherical basins that trap pebbles, which then erode the basin walls and themselves in the constant spinning of the current.

The confluence area of the rivers of the *Fanes*, *Travenanzes* and *Ra Vales* valleys is set slightly back from the *Pian de Loa*, at the convergence of a complex fault system which has not only carved the valley floors vertically (thus tracing preferential erosion routes of the respective gorges) but has also literally fractured the northern flank of the *Tofana* (*Ra Ola*) and the opposing



mounts *Taé* and *Taburlo* along deep gullies. In some places the friction surfaces of the fractures are found on the surface and are smooth and polished. This is called slickenside (or mirror fault).

► *The Travenanzes canyon between the Ôuto and Cadoris bridges with Mt. Croda Rossa in the background.*

▼ *Slickenside on Dolomia Principale rock.*





## WILDLIFE AND VEGETATION



▲ *The lake of Piantone de Fanes on the border between Cortina and Marebbe with Mt. Cristallo in the background.*

**G**orge-type natural habitats are what best characterize these deep valleys. They feature damp or dripping rocky cliffs and slopes that enjoy little or no sun. Along the equipped

walking route of the *Cascade Basse* and also the first leg of the trail above, you will pass walls rich in rock plants, among which the abundant blooms in late July of the magnificent rock buttercup

(*Physoplexis comosa*), and carnivorous plants such as butterworts (*Pinguicula*), including the violet-flowered *Pinguicula leptoceras*, which grows on rocks typically subject to continuous dripping.

The rocky niches on the shadiest walls are the habitat of one of the most majestic but



▲ Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*).  
(Photo by V. Verzi)

its ideal ecological niche in these valleys. The eagle owl is particularly vulnerable for its

broad wingspan (up to 2 metres) which makes it vulnerable to striking cables or ropes in its territory. Three pairs with related nesting areas are known in the Ampezzo area. On the walls of these ravines, and preferably beneath the overhangs but



▲ Tufted horned rampion (*Physoplexis comosa*).

endangered birds of prey: the eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*), a very rare nocturnal bird, protected internationally, which finds

exposed on the sunnier and warmer walls, one can easily spot a small red and dark-grey bird with a flitting flight and



a long, narrow beak. It is the *Tichodroma muraria* or wallcreeper, which is not a true woodpecker but a passerine insect-eater specialized in feeding on spiders, opiliones (harvestmen) and molluscs found in rock nooks and crannies. The wallcreeper typifies one of the most unique and specific food chains of the rocky Dolomites cliffs. In sections where the gorges



▲ Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*).  
(Photo by V. Verzi)

broaden and the slope lessens, large deposits of gravel build up, especially in the large al-

▼ The Boite alluvial plain below the confluence of the Felizon stream.





luvial outwash of *Pian de Loa*. The debris floods are another rich and interesting stream habitat, colonized mainly by pioneer species and often subject to replenished downwash material, which at each flooding renews the biological succession. Among the most striking and prized species in this habitat is the the Alps' most beautiful orchid, the Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*). Rare and on the red list of endangered species, this orchid is less threatened today than some years ago and is particularly abundant at the edge of the floods of Ampezzo's streams. Another *glareicola* species is also worthy of mention. Endemic to the southeastern Alps, it is the *Euphorbia infiora ssp. kernerii*. Near the *Pian de Loa* bridges and along the *Rio Fanes*, which is a broader stretch, you may spot two other birds found typically in mountain



▲ Lady Slipper orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*).

streams: the White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*) and the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*). The former is an excellent diver which catches



▲ White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*). (Photograph V. Verzi)

its prey in the turbulent waters and frequents even the narrowest streams; the grey wagtail instead is an insectivore that dwells near rivers and is much less common than the white wagtail.

On the way down from the *Sbarco de Fanès*, on the northern foothills of the *Croda del Valon Bianco*, and at the foot of the *Orte de Tofana* and *Inpó ra Ola*, are some steep,

north-facing slopes that receive long snow cover. Here, avalanches fall almost annually along consolidated lines. Together with the mountain pine and shrubs, this habitat is characterized by the presence of two short trees with very flexible trunks: the downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), which are accompanied by a thick cover of

primitive evergreen mosses and abundant rhododendron. If you choose to approach *Pian de Loia* from *Sant'Uberto* crossing the *Boite* at the

*Travenanzes*, you continue along a flattish path southwards for 200 metres to *Landro*, you can see the natural rock overhangs, which



▲ *Trunks of European white birch bent by the avalanche of 2009 in the Valon de ra Ola.*

mouth of the gorge of *Costa dei Sié*, and if after going upstream from the *Acquarone* bridge to the path of the Val

are used by the wildlife as a shelter. These features are an interesting ecological niche where some nitrogen-loving



plant species grow on hoofed-animal manure. The seeds are barbed, to grip onto animal fur to be carried and scattered farther afield. These are mainly two rare members of the forget-me-not (*Borage*) family: the Stickseed (*Lappula deflexa*) and the Gypsy flower (*Cynoglossum officinale*).



- ▲ Gypsy flower (*Cynoglossum officinale*).
- ▲ Stickseed (*Lappula deflexa*).
- ▶ The spectacular middle cataract of the Rio Fanes

- ▼ Back cover: the Rio Fanes canyon below the viewpoint of the Òuto bridge, downstream of the confluence with the Rio Travenanzes.







Photos and texts by Michele Da Pozzo; Printed by Tipografia Ghedina Cortina; English translation by Ivor Coward

## NATURE RESERVE OF THE AMPEZZO DOLOMITES

Ciasa de Ra Regoles - Via mons. P. Frenademez, 1

32043 Cortina d'Ampezzo - Tel. +39 0436 2206

[www.dolomitiparco.com](http://www.dolomitiparco.com) - [info@dolomitiparco.com](mailto:info@dolomitiparco.com)