

1 STAGE

→ Prato

→ Artimino

Length: 19.2 Km

Time needed for the journey only: 5 h 40 ‘

Time needed considering the stops: 9 h

Detailed description

It starts from the parking area located at the northern entrance of the Cascine Park, in Via Traversa del Crocifisso, in Prato.

As soon as you enter the historic area, delimited by a wall that surrounds it from north and west, you walk along Viale dei Lecci which is flanked on the left by the Pavoniere Wood (at the time of the Medici used as a hunting reserve) and on the right by a large meadow, once an area used for grazing cattle and buffaloes kept in a semi-wild state. While walking along the straight avenue, flanked by specimens of holm oaks with a majestic bearing, you can see on the left numerous historical artifacts (passages over ditches, dry stone walls, canals, etc.) relating to the intense use that the area has undergone after the sixteenth century. We pass the Casa del Guardia (on the right), located almost at the end of the avenue, and also a passage in a fence once equipped with a gate, to continue our journey by climbing the small stone bridge that crosses one of the many water canals present in the estate. Go down the other side and turn right shortly afterwards, starting to walk along another long tree-lined avenue (Viale del Caciaio). On the left, we pass the Polline rural residence with its classic rectangular plan, four-pitched roof with an advanced central turret, and immediately after we reach the Caciaio's House (on the right). Shortly after, emerging from a short stretch where the avenue winds its way under a vault of trees, you can see the magnificent complex of the Cascine, in a state of neglect (25 ‘).

Turn right and immediately left to arrive quickly on a new tree-lined avenue that straight joins the southwestern elevation of the Cascine with the Manetti Bridge. You walk along it having in front the entire ridge of Montalbano which rises just above the umbrella canopy of the suggestive maritime pines placed on the sides of a further avenue, and also the two hills of Bonistallo (on the left), with the church, and Cerretino (right). You arrive at the tensile structure that allows the passage of the Filomortula, an artificial canal that collects all the drainage channels of south-western Prato plain, after which you continue on the gravel road that quickly leads to Podere Bogiaia 2 and the beautiful Manetti Bridge (45 ‘). After crossing the bridge, you immediately arrive at the entrance of the Barco di Bonistallo, beyond the busy state road 67 (50 ‘).

You enter the Barco from the western access at the parking lot, immediately encountering the signs relating to the Cascine di Tavola protected area of which the Barco di Poggio is an integral part. Immediately take the small road to the right that moves away from the old multipurpose building that appears in front of you and enters the woods that immediately show very old isolated specimens (cedars and, above all, oaks). At one of these (*Quercus ilex*, holm oak), turn right starting to climb gently, pass a majestic oak specimen and a series of curves until you

reach a right turn with a ruin of a building in front of you: you leave out the deviation to the left and continue flat until you reach one of the historic entrances to the Barco with a beautiful seventeenth-century ashlar portal and (worn) stone coat of arms placed in the vaulted stone (17 ‘). Immediately before the portal, a water fountain can be a valuable stop during the hot months.

Go back from the portal to turn right immediately, continuing along the old boundary wall and then right again at the next crossroads, continuing to walk parallel to the old wall. Where this shows a pronounced edge we find ourselves at a new intersection where we continue straight downhill always parallel to the wall. The small wood of Barco shows its best in this section with several big specimens. You will touch a farm that historically belonged to the Poggio a Caiano farm annexed to the Villa. You begin to descend and at the sharp hairpin bend to the right you keep to the right (ignoring the deviation to the straight), you pass suggestive slabs of boulder, descend again until you reach the east entrance of the Barco, near the state road; also it has a beautiful ashlar portal similar to the other (40 ‘).

As soon as you leave the Barco, on the right, the Cammino della Costituzione starts uphill, built by the Municipality of Poggio a Caiano, which leads to the church of Bonistallo above (see below). We continue straight on taking the pedestrian-cycle path, cross Viale Europa (nearby is the Il Barco Bar, for a possible stop), and then the main road when we are in front of PAM supermarket pointing towards the nearby Villa, clearly visible with its massive bulk on the top of the hill. Continue along the pedestrian crossing alongside the road beyond which we can see the old wall that encloses a plot that historically belonged to the Villa and called Il Chiuso. You pass next to a building characterized by a low dovecote tower (it was the site of the farm annexed to the Villa), climb the hillside and reach the entrance to the Villa of Poggio a Caiano (45 ‘). Two kinds of visits are possible: one limited only to the garden and park (free, about 30 ‘), the other to some internal parts of the Villa (accompanied, about 1h).

From the main entrance of the Villa, take Via Giuliano da Sangallo, keep right in the square of the Madonna del Rosario Church and enter Via dell’Ambra; turn in that direction at the first street on the right (via San Francesco); in front there is a view of the Bonistallo hill towards which our road leads with a perfect straight line, the result of a historical overlap between the eighteenth-century viability inside the Grand Ducal possessions facing the Villa and the present one. Go straight down passing the first intersection (Via dei Condotti), and then cross the small bridge over Montiloni stream and also the next roundabout in the direction of the church of Bonistallo. We begin to climb between the houses (on a perimeter wall you will notice a small tabernacle as proof of the antiquity of the route) and then leave them behind you as the climb becomes increasingly steep, you miss a deviation to the right and you crosses the last stretch among the olive trees reaching the church square, right near an observation point and also where the Costituzione path previously seen ends (1h 10 ‘). A few minutes of rest allows you to cast your gaze on the panorama that opens in east/ south-east direction.

Continue down the hill using the asphalted road and passing the parking lot with the Barco wall and the portal previously seen on your right; continuing on the small road you reach the crossroads of the Madonna del Violo where stands a beautiful tabernacle dated 1847 and recently restored, with a view of the beautiful complex of Cerretino towards the west. Turn right into Via Pietraia and, immediately, you have the feeling of leaving the town behind, entering the countryside of olive trees where muffled noises take over: on the right the fortified complex of Cerretino and on the left the Castellaccio, eight- nineteenth-century villa (with twentieth-

century modifications) which insists on a medieval garrison as evidenced by the internal walls in regular row of sandstone. A short climb leads to the crossroads for the small rural village of Petraia (on the left) which is worth a quick visit (1h 25 '). The intersection is also a good observation point to the east and south-east.

Continue along the narrow road (pay attention to the rare cars that pass) between old stone walls and olive trees and after a short climb you reach a new intersection (1h 40 '): in front of you the road that leads to the Villa di Trefiano (private and not open to visitors), an ancient possession of Rucellai family on a project attributed to Buontalenti (or one of his pupils); on the left the descent that leads to Poggetto and on which, very close, the detour to Villa del Cerretino is, on the left our direction towards the seventeenth-century Villa of Canida which we quickly reach after a short flat stretch (1h 50 '). At the gate of the villa, keep to the left, leaving the road and continuing parallel to the enclosure wall which contains a small aedicule as evidence of its antiquity, also testified by the numerous volumes that over time have been added to the original 16th century core. At the end of the wall, continue along the country road which begins to climb steadily to quickly arrive on Via Pistoiese, just below Villa Rasponi, in Carmignano (2h). Here turn left into Via delle Loggette which goes slightly uphill while on the left the view opens up on the underlying Villa of Canida and on the plain of Seano with the artisan buildings. Pass the north entrance of Villa Rasponi with, in front of it, an old farm with a beautiful majolica coat of arms of Rasponi family on the facade. As soon as you pass the rural dwelling, at the Enel pole, take the cart track that points between the olive trees to the visible 100-year-old holm oak, clinging to the side of the hill. It is one of the green patriarchs of the entire provincial territory duly reported in the provincial list of secular trees. Go back and continue on the narrow asphalted road until you reach Torcicoda intersection, a real 'hub' of the past (the homonymous rural house bears the same coat of arms on the facade as seen before) (2h 10').

Pass Carmignano provincial road and take Via Nella Borchii downhill and then continue along Via Redi - slightly uphill - to the top and then take Via Lorenzo il Magnifico on the right, along the old wall, which climbs along the villa of Ippolito Niccolini (left) and their respective stables (right). At the crossroads, turn right downhill (Via Lapo Mazzei), pass a tavern and turn left into the coves that lead us to the square of Carmignano, with the nineteenth-century fountain, the town hall (formerly Malaspina farm), cafes, groceries, fountains, restaurants and taverns. In short, everything you need for a refreshment stop (2h 15 ').

After having completed a tour of the square - the well in front of the town hall dates back to the mid-nineteenth century and has recently come to light - continue along the main street in the direction of Montalbano and quickly reach the Church of Santi Michele e Francesco which preserves the precious painting by Pontormo (the Visitation) and a beautiful cloister, certainly worth visiting.

In front of the church there is an uphill pedestrian street (Via del Borgo) which leads to the hill above where the Campano, symbol of Carmignano, and the complex of medieval fortifications is - completely rebuilt in the late nineteenth century with the original material - which formed the great castle of Carmignano, fought several times in the fourteenth century between Florence and Pistoia due to its strategic position that extends over the Florentine-Prato plain. At the top of the ramp, turn left (Erta di Pogginari) continuing to climb, cross the road that comes from the town and take the walkway under the walls to the panoramic point (an excellent tool for recognizing places in the Province of Prato). Continue the pedestrian path along the walls until

you cross a deviation downhill to the left that you take and that immediately leads to the road below. Cross it and aim for the grassy walkway which descends parallel to a property boundary. In a few minutes you are again in front of the Church of Santi Michele and Francesco (2h 40 '). Go along Via Parenti with a beautiful view of the underlying Elzana valley, crossed by the Medici pipes, Artimino, the hills of Roveta, Florence and Chianti. At the end of the street, in front of the Institute of the Sacred Stigmata, turn left downhill and then immediately right onto the pedestrian path "Belvedere Padre Bocci" which quickly leads to the underlying Via Nencioni. Then take the country road that starts from the farmhouse and goes around it from the South-East passing alongside a group of cypresses and continuing well marked out in the fields of olive trees in a slight descent up to a sharp curve to the left: you are near one of the springs that supplied the pipes of the Villa of Poggio a Caiano. Continue along some ugly sheet metal huts (on the left) and, on the right, further down, a historic grove called Ragnaione. Always continue slightly downhill with the track that becomes smaller but still identifiable, you pass under a small Enel pylon and then turn left towards the lonely cypress located a few tens of meters below; go along a vineyard (on the left) and reach another big solitary cypress with border functions. In front of you passes the historic pipe that brings water to the Medici Villa of Poggio a Caiano. Turn right into the open field, keeping close to the ditch and the brick bridge, cross it and immediately turn right, continuing parallel to this until you reach the beautiful stone pyramid that marks the underground passage of the pipes (30 ').

Go back slightly, go over the ditch again and turn left continuing parallel to it on the flat until you cross another ditch that you overcome by entering on a cart track that you go to the right starting to climb and flanking trees. Continue steeply uphill, always parallel to the ditch half hidden among the trees, pass large boulders and terraces to reach the Pietranera farmhouse. Then take the asphalted road (Via degli Asinai) always uphill until you reach the municipal road of Citerna. The point is optimal for a stop and to observe the view towards the East with, on the left, the Campi Bisenzio-Sesto Fiorentino-Florence conurbation, Mount Morello (behind), the nearby hill of Montalbiolo, the village of Carmignano and behind Monte Iavello and Acquerino reserve. On the right, instead, the wooded hill of Bellosguardo which lies between Florence and Scandicci, in the background Mount Giovi and then Florentine Chianti. Continue left in Via Citerna, passing the beautiful Villa Verzani and facing the steep hill of Artimino; a flat stretch between vineyards and olive trees anticipates a descent at the end of which, in the saddle and under the power line, you leave the paved road by turning right and following the signs of the RET - Tuscan hiking network for Artimino (50 ').

A small path passes next to a beautiful tabernacle and slips downhill into the woods, quickly arriving at a stream that can be easily waded, continuing on the other slope uphill and always in the woods until it reaches a new tabernacle (sign of the antiquity of the path) located on the edge of the cultivated fields that you skirt along following the track that runs alongside old stone walls. You quickly arrive at Campisalti farm and at the following crossroads with a new tabernacle: continue downhill bending to the right and then, immediately after the intersection, to the left towards Comeana-Poggio a Caiano (RET sign) thus overcoming a very suggestive part in a beautiful cypress forest with old stone walls. Leave the wood and continue downhill towards the nearby La Borriana farmhouse which you pass by keeping to its left and descending steeply towards the asphalted road below with the wooded Artimino hill in front (1h 20 ').

At the end of the descent, where you cross Via delle Ginestre, turn right and then immediately left in the direction of the small building that you touch and then cross the municipal road

and ford the small stream in order to continue on the cart track that, touching the remains of the Barco Mediceo wall on the left, slips into the woods starting to climb with tight bends. At the second, on an intersection, keep left uphill (signs of the System of Protected Areas of the Province of Prato), pass some boulders and reach a new intersection where you keep to the left. A few tens of meters uphill and you are at a new intersection where you continue to the right passing under the telephone line and then emerge in a field of olive trees near Bel Pianale farm (1h 40 ‘).

Nice glimpse of the Ginestre farm, the Church of San Pietro in Verghereto, the nearby hill of Montalgeto and behind the hills of the chaotic complex that lean against the boulder sides of Montalbano. Above the wooded summit of Pietramarina. Continue on the access road to the farm and quickly arrive at the beautiful parish Church of San Leonardo in Artimino and the village (2h).

After visiting the village, it is absolutely worth taking the straight, tree-lined and panoramic avenue that leads to the Medici Villa located on the other end of the hill (2h 10 ‘).
