

Montelupo Fiorentino and Capraia e Limite

Length: 14 km

Time needed for the journey only: 3h

Time needed considering the stops: 4h

Detailed description:

It starts from the chain which, at the L'Olivo farm, blocks access to the country road from which you come.

ARTIMINO – MONTELUPO

Immediately before the chain, take the country road on the left that descends towards the valley floor below where a small rural stream flows, which you pass, and then enter the woods slightly uphill. You come out shortly after skirting a field of olive trees continuing slightly downhill with the olive trees still on your left and the woods on the right. The bottom of the country road shows the presence of a cobbled paving of ancient origin. You then reach some houses: pass the steel rope that blocks the small road from which you come and turn right (in front of the access gate to the house) continuing on the unpaved road beaten by the passage of cars (30 ').

The road descends alongside a fence and then shows (on the left) fleeting views of the underlying Arno valley until you reach some houses again, that you pass, and then take a short climb that leads to the paved road (via Arrendevole). Take the small road on the left downhill that runs alongside the paved road and then cross it almost immediately turning right onto a wide country road at the head of a new vineyard, also blocked by a steel wire and with two large rocks of Macigno. A short stretch on a false level, with a view of the abbey of San Martino at the top right, leads you to a crossroads made up of several country roads: go straight downhill and then turn left, pass between a clump of trees and continue always downhill with a view of the underlying Arno valley, the abandoned rural village of Caterattino, in the Camaioni Plan. You go around the Casanuova farm with its dovecote tower from below, go along a last stretch parallel to the paved road until you return to this just near the bridge over the Arno (1h).

Cross the river right near the point where, in past centuries, the ship that served as a link between the two banks docked and sailed. Once on the other side, you enter the administrative territory of Montelupo Fiorentino and immediately arrive at the beginning of the cycle path, near the railway underpass. The track is part of a project co-financed by the Tuscany Region and the European Community and once finished it will see the cycle path join the city of Florence with Pisa; currently only some sections are open to the public, such as the one that goes from Camaioni to Montelupo Fiorentino. You enter the path with a perfectly flat and well-maintained surface and start walking in the Arno valley with the river on your right and, on the left, the Florence-Empoli-Pisa railway line. The excellent floor allows you to look up at the landscape that opens up around you: on your right, on the wooded hill that rises on the right bank of the river, you can see the Ruzzolapaiolo farm in a beautiful position (in 1830, Il Paiolo farm) from the singular name that dominates one

of the very rare stretches of the rocky bank of the Arno in this part of its course. On the left bank, on the other hand, at the end of the alluvial plain which in this stretch widens for a few hundred meters, due to the large left-hand bend that the Arno makes, you can see the beautiful Villa Antinori with the facade facing east, raised by a few ten meters from the floor. Below it, but hidden from the view, there are what were once the majestic stables belonging to the villa (now a restaurant), located right on the Via Pisana, the most important thoroughfare in the Lorraine Tuscany. You pass an abandoned building, perhaps pertaining to the old railway line and shortly after a barrier on the cycle path warns the beginning of a 'depression' that runs very close to the river a little raised so that, in moments of flooding of the river the water invades the path itself. To your right stands the high medieval bell tower of the former monastery of San Giorgio a Capraia just before the first ancient houses of San Miniato, beyond the railway line, to the left, where the fifteenth-century ceramic tradition of Montelupo was born. The cycle path climbs slightly out of the more narrow floodplain area of the Arno which, on the steep right bank, shows wide traces of bank erosion. Shortly after the first vegetable gardens created along the narrow strip of land located between the houses and the river, testify to the entrance into the urban area of Montelupo confirmed by the presence, further away, of the four majestic towers of the Ambrogiana, the Medici villa desired by Ferdinando I. On the right, in a beautiful position overlooking the Arno is the town of Capraia which clearly reveals its Castrensian origins. At the end of the cycle path (2h) you continue on the pedestrian path that intersects via Don Minzoni and continues along the Schifanoia ditch to then bend and continue between the railway embankment and the houses. You come out on the road just near the railway underpass, cross it and continue on the pedestrian path, go under the railway and the station, coming out into the little square in front of it. Here turn right and head to the parapet over the Pesa stream, precisely in the final stretch made artificial in its course between the 16th and 17th centuries. Opposite, the ruined complex of Fanciullacci ceramics which symbolizes the second golden season of Montelupo ceramics and which is waiting to be repurposed. Go back to the station square and continue on the pedestrian path in the direction of the historic centre which can be reached quickly by entering Piazza della Libertà where huge terracotta jars show off (2h 15').

MONTELUPO - S. MARTINO ABBEY

From Piazza della Libertà, head towards the station via the pedo-cycle path, underpass the railway and continue on the road that heads towards the Arno, crossing it with a bridge. Pay attention to the first section of the ramp that leads to the top of the bridge as it lacks a sidewalk (situation destined to change shortly since road widening works are planned). At the end of the bridge ramp that goes down to the other bank, turn right and through a few steps you enter the small square (with a drinking fountain) which we cross transversely towards the Arno; once you reach the parapet you can see how the river has eroded its own bed in the last 70 years (age of the bridge), exposing part of the two foundation plinths of the structure. You enter the narrow pedestrian passage located between the parapet of the river and the building of the former Pasquinucci furnace (now used as an exhibition centre and municipal offices) and once you come out on the other side, turn left onto the old paving starting to go up towards the castle of Capraia above. You take the flight of stairs which, on the right, continues uphill with a beautiful stone paving equipped with non-slip herringbone guides, you pass a small votive niche carved into the wall and cross via Giudea; a short detour following this road leads us immediately to a small square with a viewpoint towards the south-east, with a view of the villa dell'Ambrogiana (side facing the

river) and the nearby complex which until recently housed the patients of the Montelupo judicial psychiatric hospital, one of the very few left in Italy after the Basaglia law. You return to the staircase that leads to an open space overlooking the Arno river and with a view that extends to the village of Samminiatello, to the overhanging hills of Malmantile with their flat top and very steep sides that reveal their sedimentary origin (bottom of the Pliocene sea) and the action of the modeling forces of Nature. Opposite, lying on the side of the hill that rises steeply to the former parish church, is the ancient village of Montelupo enclosed by the walls still partially identifiable; in isolated position is the ancient villa Schifanoia in exposed stone. On the right, the profile of the final part of the Pesa valley dominated by the ancient river terrace on which the ugly Bobolino urbanization was built; below you can see the current conurbation (35').

Continue along Via Guelfa, pass an ancient building that still shows the remains of the arms on the facade and come out in Piazza Pucci which houses the church of Santo Stefano and the remains of the castle walls, near one of the doors. From the square, exit the village, pass alongside the parking lot and take the dirt road that goes away with a Downy oak right on the corner of the intersection. The trail shows a part of the old cobbled paving thus declaring its ancientness (perhaps it is the original stretch of via Valicarda that reached the castle), passes alongside another totally inappropriate urbanization and ends on via Valicarda near a crossroads (50').

Leave Via del Poggione on the right and continue straight on descending into a saddle with a view to the left of the San Miniato fortress and the Valdarno of the Empoli area. Continue in an environment consisting of cultivated fields and isolated houses that testify to the ancient sharecropping order and leave out all the side deviations that lead to the farmhouses in the area. At a certain point you reach a point where the road makes a sharp curve to the right and shows a sudden change in slope. You are at the point where there is a change in lithology: the pebbles, sands and clays of continental sedimentary origin are being replaced by the Macigno, sandstone that forms the structure of the whole Montalbano. The same dry stone walls on the sides of the road testify with the stone material that constitutes them the change of lithology. The point offers the opportunity for a stop and a retrospective look: the hills of Botinaccio with the Montecastello villa slope down into the Empoli plain crowded with production buildings. Behind the ridge between Valdelsa and Valdera and in the background the Livorno mountains. You resume your route and soon reach the Cantagallo estate (1h 20').

Continue following the visible country road that begins to rise gently between vineyards (on the left) and fields of olive trees (on the right); on the left, clearly visible beyond the narrow wooded valley of the Rio Guidi, the church of San Jacopo a Pulicciano, in a beautiful and solitary position. Keep left at the next intersection where a deviation continues straight through the olive trees but which you ignore. After a couple of road bends you begin to climb in a more sustained way and pass a meeting point for wild boar hunters well camouflaged at the edge of the wood; you then pass a vineyard that remains on your right and go along a short flat stretch that anticipates an intersection with a beautiful oak tree on the right side of the road (1h 40'): here keep to the left, omitting to continue straight. You continue climbing gently, and ignore the small road that enters the woods on the left, continuing instead on the wide track, always uphill. You continue uphill, now more accentuated but short, pass a new intersection with a small road to the left to be omitted and you reach a further intersection with a beautiful specimen of holm oak in the center (2h).

Keep to the left along the road bend and continue slightly uphill and then begin to cover a wide flat stretch with several small roads that branch off to the right and left (some barred) but which you ignore, keeping on the main road, clearly evident. Then follows an uphill and a flat stretch that leads to the Madonna di Valicarda, an ancient meeting point of different routes that connected the abbey of San Martino and Artimino with the Valdarno below, the castle of Capraia and that of Montelupo (2h 20').

From the crossroads, dominated by an imposing oak, continue straight on following the signs for San Martino/Terre degli Etruschi itinerary and turning to the right. You begin to descend, as you have passed the ridge of Montalbano which at this point drops to only 309 m asl, walking on a bumpy ground with outcrops of Macigno stones. On the right, among the vegetation, La Ferdinanda Medici Villa in Artimino, further away Villa Caruso di Bellosguardo (above Lastra a Signa), the hills of Malmantile and behind, in the plain, Scandicci. Continue to descend gently with more or less bumpy sections until you reach a crossroads where you continue straight downhill. A very bumpy downhill stretch now begins, which in case of wet ground is also slippery which takes you to the Abbey of San Martino (2h 40'). When you come out of the wood, near the ancient religious complex, a remarkable panorama opens up to your eyes, despite the modest altitude (217 m asl): starting from the left you can see, in the foreground, the two wooded hills of Montalgeto and Poggio ai Colli with the village of Santa Cristina a Mezzana behind it and that of Carmignano with the Fortress. In the background, the Abetone and then, moving to the right, the Natural Reserve of Acquero between Pistoia and Prato, forming a single ridge that ends at the Iavello Beeches and then descends on Monte le Coste, the 'plume' that overlooks the Bisenzio Valley. In front of this, on the plain, the town of Prato and to the right the conurbation that links it to Calenzano and then to Sesto Fiorentino, with Monte Morello behind it. Still to the right, nearby, the village of Artimino. In the centre, in front of you, the cultivated and wooded Elzana valley.