

# SHORTER WALKS IN THE DOLOMITES

by Gillian Price

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*To my inspiring parents, Bet and Dave, on their 60th wedding anniversary.*

### Acknowledgements

The Fondazione Antonio Berti in Venice generously made available a copy of J Gilbert and GC Churchill's fundamental 1864 work *The Dolomite Mountains: Excursions through Tyrol, Carinthia, Carniola, and Friuli*.

As usual, Nicola Regine excelled himself in mapmaking.

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*Front cover:* Rifugio Bolzano is backed by the splendid Catinaccio (Walk 34)

Austrian–Italian front, now transformed into the demarcation between German-speaking South Tyrol and the Veneto region. However, of more immediate interest will inevitably be the tempting aroma of barbecued delights wafting from the outdoor café.

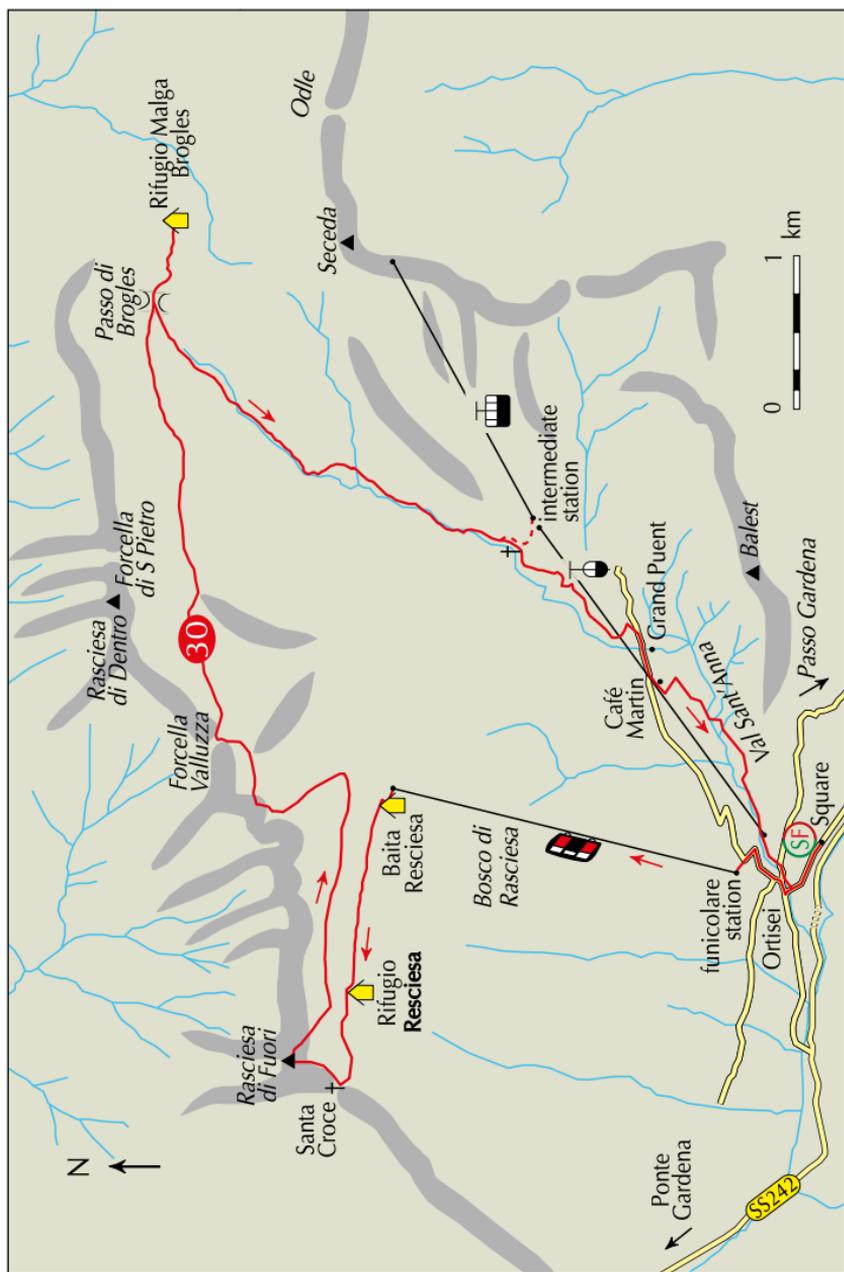
From here on the route is a gentle descent below the Croda de R’Ancona, with fleeting glimpses of the Tofane through the trees from time to time. The track now runs past a couple of lakes with wild ducks and through meadows, parallel to the road as far as **Ospitale** (1490m, bus stop, 1hr). This is a 13th-century frescoed chapel and hospice for pilgrims, which was damaged in the war years but later carefully reconstructed and transformed into an atmospheric restaurant and guesthouse.

Moving away from the traffic once again, the way affords views W to Monte Vallon Bianco and Fanes. ▶ After a short tunnel you bear S and the wartime **Felizion rail bridge** comes into view. Quite a piece of history with its criss-cross struts, the covered lattice structure occupies an impressive position straddling jagged cliffs 70m above a chasm. According to legend, it was home to a mysterious mother and son; clad in green, they were known to sleep with the cascading water as their blanket and a moss-covered rock for a pillow.

After crossing the bridge, the track bears S and, round a corner, enters a spacious, cool and well-lit rock tunnel. Outside again, the milky blue of the Torrente Boite comes into sight, backed by Col Rosà then the Tofane. Vast swathes of dwarf mountain pine interrupted by immense flows of scree and rubble from rockslides are traversed under the towering W flanks of the Pomagagnon, with marvellous shades of pink-red and grey-cream.

Further on, a branch drops to **Fiames** (1293m, bus stop, hotel/restaurant) but you continue on past another station and through larch wood before the residential zone and **Cortina** itself (1210m, 2hr). The route emerges directly at the bus terminal, easily recognisable as the former railway station.

Keep your eyes peeled for chamois on the opposite bank of the river – the steep scrubby rock terrain is their playground.



## WALK 35

### *Val Ciamin*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	bus stop, San Cipriano
<b>Distance</b>	10.5km/6.5 miles
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	600m
<b>Grade</b>	1–2
<b>Time</b>	4hr 10min
<b>Maps</b>	Tabacco n.029, n.06 or n.05 scale 1:25,000
<b>Access</b>	SAD buses from Bolzano via Tires reach San Cipriano. Another run from Paolina (near Passo di Costalunga) also comes here.

Quiet, pastoral Val di Tires breaks off from Val d'Adige at Prato all'Isarco to climb precipitously to the very foot of the majestic Catinaccio, which is an unparalleled backdrop with its line-up of weird and wonderful rock towers and needle-like points. En route the valley is dotted with picture-perfect farming villages nestling amid manicured emerald meadows. It ends with Val Ciamin, a wild canyon that slices into the massif and terminates abruptly under the Antermoia. Numerous natural springs occur en route.

This is a delightful stroll on good paths and forestry lanes exploring what was a heavily wooded valley – it took a battering from Vaia, a 2018 storm.

The walk starts out from the village of San Cipriano but, if needs be, you can catch a bus to Lavina Bianca and slot in at the Visitor Centre, to shorten the day's load by 1hr. In the upper valley an optional extension (with an additional 2hr 20min) climbs to beautifully placed Rifugio Bergamo.

Near the start, there is an informative Visitor Centre for the Parco Naturale dello Sciliar-Catinaccio; it occupies a showcase Venetian-style sawmill that dates back 400 years and shows the importance of woodcutting here over the centuries. It is powered by water from the adjacent mountain torrent and, amazingly, is still in working order.



*The old sawmill  
and Visitor Centre  
at the walk start*

A final suggestion – don't miss the 12th-century church of San Cipriano, a splendid landmark located a short distance from the village. With its backdrop of the Torri del Vaiolet, it provides a unique photo opportunity.

### Walk

In **San Cipriano** (1080m) from the **bus stop** opposite the Zyprianerhof hotel, follow signs downhill for n.4A. It soon forks R around a field then drops to houses. Stay with it to the nearby valley floor where it goes R along the gushing stream in Val Ciamin.

Not far on you cross a **footbridge** to a junction – and turn R on n.3. After a second bridge the path climbs with steps through undergrowth bright with flowers the likes of wine-red columbines. Up at a lane fork L to the Steger Säge sawmill aka **Park Visitor Centre** (1140m, 30min) and neighbouring café Tschamin Schwaige.

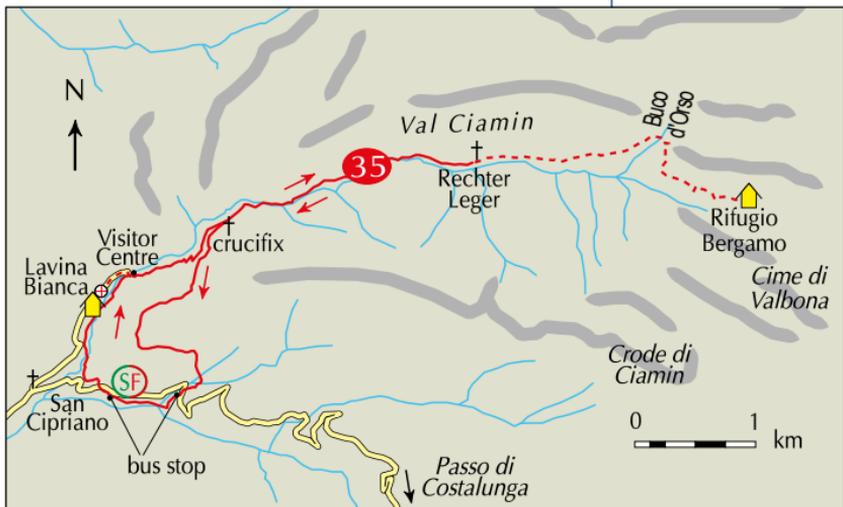
Well-trodden path n.3 now heads decidedly uphill through beautiful conifer wood brightened with alpenrose shrubs. Far below is the stream rushing under dizzy sheer cliffs.

About half an hour up you join a forestry lane and go L past a **crucifix**. Not far along is the first of two springs. Heading E the track crosses the watercourse several times. After a clearing, Schläferter Leger (1487m), continue on to the spectacular meadow, **Rechter Leger** (1603m, 1hr 45min) complete with hut and crucifix, the perfect picnic spot.

The magnificent outlook opens out to include Crøde di Ciamin and Cime di Valbona shooting up beyond the dark tree cover, while on a grassy ledge below Cime del Principe the flag of Rifugio Bergamo is just visible.

### Extension to Rifugio Bergamo (2hr 20min)

The clear path continues E, soon branching L (ENE) in more decided ascent through wood. It enters the wild, white gully of Buco d'Orso (bear's hole!), where walkers are dwarfed by the Cime del Principe. At an 1890m junction (40min), where path n.3A breaks off, fork R and cut up through wood to the rock flanks of Grasleiental. Hospitable **Rifugio Bergamo** (2134m, 50min) occupies a wonderful spot, worlds away from it all. Return to Rechter Leger afterwards.





*There are beautiful views to the Catinaccio on the return leg*

After your senses have been saturated with these wonderful mountains, backtrack down Val Ciamin. At the **crucifix** further down, ignore the turn-off for the Visitor Centre and stay on the forestry track. Mostly SW, it curves round the hillsides, soon cutting through sweet-smelling meadows alive with bees frantically harvesting pollen from the masses of gorgeous blooms. Modest timber hay chalets are dotted over the slopes. Soon peeping over the hill, and improving little by little, an exceptional backdrop appears of the resplendent Catinaccio with its fairytale towers.

Back in woodland, ignore the fork for n.12 but not far after it turn R off the lane for the path cutting down to the road and a **bus stop** at Runggen. If you don't catch the bus here to return to the walk start, take the narrow path (n.3) that plunges through wood, parallel to the road. It joins a lane which brings you out at the bus stop in **San Cipriano** (1080m, 1hr 45min).

**Rifugio Bergamo** Tel 0471 642103, May to October [www.tiersertal.com/grasleiten](http://www.tiersertal.com/grasleiten)

## WALK 38

*The Latemar Labyrinth and Lago di Carezza*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Grand Hotel Carezza
<b>Distance</b>	10.8km/6.5 miles
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	450m
<b>Grade</b>	1–2
<b>Time</b>	2hr 45min
<b>Maps</b>	Tabacco n.06 or 029 scale 1:25,000
<b>Access</b>	The Grand Hotel stands 2.5km W of the Passo di Costalunga road pass – see Walk 37.

The Latemar is an imposing and severe massif that emerges from a thick forest of pines. Its airy culminating crest is a jagged line-up of slender eroded rock spires and towers, petrified dolls according to one imaginative tale.

During this walk visitors will notice vast swathes of open land, tree stumps and mountains of timber awaiting transport – the effect of the October 2018 storm Tempesta Vaia. The ‘good news’ is that the gorgeous lake is now visible from many different viewpoints!

The name Latemar was probably given to the mountain by the 14th-century Ladin population – taken from *mora* (or *mara*) for the unusually abundant flows of scree it produces. In fact, the massif is composed of limestone but run through by countless veins of metamorphic rock; the many contact lines and faults spell weak points, facilitating erosion. Its mineral content is high, and the northern sectors were mined at length, with settlements of Germanic workers founded nearby. Over 200 million years ago (preceding the formation of the Alps), the Latemar was part of a massive volcano; its erstwhile centre at what is now the town of Predazzo in Val di Fiemme.

Beneath the north face, a basin rimmed with pine trees harbours a delightful sparkling lake that reflects the mountain. Lago di Carezza (Karersee in German) is renowned for its brilliantly coloured crystal-clear waters, the result of precious jewels buried in its sandy



*Lago di Carezza*

floor according to one legend. Another Ladin tale stars a graceful nymph who spent her days singing at the water's edge. Alas, she attracted a crafty wizard who, scheming to carry her off, forged a marvellous rainbow to dazzle her. However, the plan went awry, the nymph was saved and, blind with anger, the wizard smashed the rainbow into smithereens. The pieces fell into the lake, where the colours dissolved in the water.

1534m above sea level, Lago di Carezza is 250m long and 125m wide, with a depth that varies between 5–17m, depending on the quantity of meltwater (from snow) that feeds it, in addition to its underground sources. The best period to visit is early summer, when it is more likely to be full.

Tourism discovered this area in the mid-1850s, when ingenious engineers cut a road through the dramatic red porphyry gorge Val d'Ega, to create a link with Bolzano. The Grand Hotel was inaugurated in 1896, and it rapidly became a glamorous summer residence for aristocracy. After World War One it was popular with foreign visitors including Winston Churchill and Agatha Christie, who set the conclusion to her 1927 thriller *The Big Four* on the Labyrinth route that runs below the Latemar's dramatic north face:

*We were hurried through the woods at a break-neck pace, going uphill the whole time. At last we*

*emerged in the open, on the mountain-side, and I saw just in front of us an extraordinary conglomeration of fantastic rocks and boulders. This must be the Felsenlabyrinth of which Harvey had spoken. Soon we were winding in and out of its recesses. The place was like a maze devised by some evil genie.*

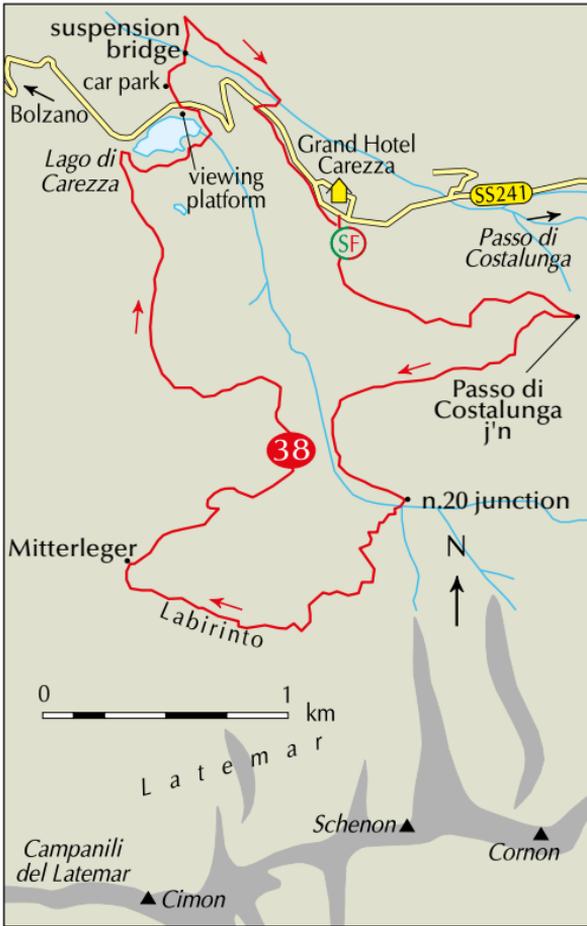
A well-kept path these days, equipped with red arrows and cairns, it makes for a delightful, leisurely half-day walk, and it is a good first walk in the Dolomites – especially as this loop version also takes in the gorgeous lake.

**Warning** Rockfalls are not uncommon and the path may be temporarily closed.

### Walk

Opposite the marvellous old-style **Grand Hotel Carezza** (1609m) is a path that quickly leads R to the start of a forestry lane L, marked n.13. Not far up ignore both the fork n.10 R (the return route) and a track L. The Latemar rears above the trees ahead as you climb easily S then E, through clearings in the pine forest left by a 2018 storm. The lilac flowers of adenostyles and their spreading leaves account for the undergrowth, as well as purple orchids.

Up at a signed **junction** (1750m) where you are joined by a route from Passo di Costalunga, turn R on n.13 but leave it only metres on for path n.21, R. This is a lovely route SW through the forest with shoulder high plants and the occasional muddy spot. A short descent brings you to a lane **junction** (1750m, 50min) where you turn L on n.18. An opening in the wood shows the proximity of the towers and sheer flanks of the Latemar. Not far along n.20 forks R (SW) to cross a silted basin at the foot of the mountain. It quickly becomes clear why this is known as the **Labirinto** as guided by red/white waymarks you find yourself weaving in and out of – not to mention beneath – gigantic toppled boulders left by ancient rockslides. The ground has been colonised by thick carpets of mountain avens, while streams of stones illustrate the interesting mix of light-coloured limestone interspersed with black fragments of volcanic origin.



Some clambering is involved on the way to the 1900m mark below the Latemar's crazily eroded spires (Torri del Latemar), while the spread of the beautiful Catinaccio appears behind you. The path re-enters woodland before traversing dramatic rivers of scree. It emerges at meadows and a huddle of timber huts at **Mitterleger** aka Lega di Mezzo (1840m, 50min).

Turn R down the wide forestry lane (n.11) for the leisurely descent N. Down near the road is **Lago di Carezza** (1519m, 45min) and its extraordinary colours, ensconced

*On the Labyrinth path*



in the dark green fir forest. Fork R to circle the lake, and take time out at the viewing platform.

Afterwards go through the tunnel under the road to the toilets, cafés and shops, then head through the **car park**. Turn R for the path over a marvellous **suspension bridge** then take the next fork R (n.6 signed for Paolina). Up at a minor road turn R again and follow the tarmac the short distance to the main road. Here cross over and go L on lane n.10 for the stroll back to the **Grand Hotel Carezza** (1609m, 35min)