

Alta Via 2

by Martina Rooney

As Alta Via 1 is rather popular these days, only 7-10 days in duration and with few via ferrate, Alta Via 2 (AV2), from Brixen/Bressanone to Feltre, was the choice for me in the summer of 2025. My plan was to split the 174km route into 13 stages, with some allowances for semi-rest days, extra via ferrate or bad weather. Accommodation is plentiful along the route, allowing for any hut-to-hut tour you may wish to embark on. I managed to get all my beds booked in March, with only two slight deviations from my original plan. I carried two Cicerone guides with me, one on Alta Via 2 (which includes GPX downloads) and another on Via Ferrata in the Italian Dolomites, Vol 2.



Via ferrata, translated as iron path or way, developed during World War 1 as a means of transporting soldiers through the Dolomites. Using metal cables, metal rungs (stemles) and ladders, soldiers used rudimentary materials to pass from one area to another. What started as a means of protecting the Italian borders, is now a modern leisure activity, which allows those with relatively little climbing experience to visit rather inaccessible areas.

After flying into Milan, there is a four hour train trip north to Brixen/Bressanone, with a change in Verona (maybe a chance to make a stopover and head to the opera?). A note that Brixen is a German-speaking area, which is quite a shock to the system when you have to start thinking about 'bitte' and 'danke' instead of 'per favore' and

'grazie'! This is also why the town has two names, Brixen being the German name and most widely used by locals. The town itself is lovely, well worth an afternoon of exploring. I recommend staying in a hotel which offers the local tourist card, as it includes local public transport and a trip in the Plose cable car, a saving of €25 and 1000m of ascent. Furthermore, you can have the last pizza for the next two weeks in the highly rated Pizzeria Rossl, which is based in the Hotel Goldenes Rossl, where I stayed and recommend.

Day 1 for me started with a torrential downpour. Thankfully, I was having breakfast at the time but it did nothing to encourage the start of the holiday and did away with the planned early start. Nonetheless, the weather did abate and the waterproofs were removed. The 1000 metres ascent up the Plose cable car was a joy and then the real work began.

A thoroughly enjoyable day to start, with a tough, unrelenting 450m ascent up Forcella de Putia, but what views we were treated to the top! There is an option to add on an ascent of Sass de Putia (2875m). Next is a splendid 30 minute stroll to Rifugio Genova hut, however I stayed slightly further on at Gampen Alm, which involved an extra 300m ascent straight out the door the next morning. The next few days were filled with glorious views, each one surpassing the last, each day a new tough, unrelenting ascent and descent. But the views! Spectacular. My sister joined me for week



1 of the adventure and we soon approached our first via ferrata of the trip. This was a first for her and she absolutely powered through. We had a few semi-rest days where we had some extra via ferrate planned. Unfortunately on one route (Piz da Cir V, grade 2A) we, and many others, got stuck behind a gentleman who kept taking very long breaks and wasn't letting people pass. We missed out on some more adventures that day, but managed to get to our rifugio just in time to make dinner, after yet another super steep ascent (450m) and aided section. We also tackled via

ferrata Brigata Tridentina, graded 3B, from Rifugio Pisciadu , arguably one of the best via ferrata in the Dolomites.

A highlight for us was a few days later staying at Campanna Piz Fassa, a tiny, rustic hut on the summit of Piz Boé at 3152m. We woke up early to witness the sunrise over the Marmolada, queen of the Dolomites, Italy's highest point at 3342m. Then it snowed! We were kicked out of the rifugio at 8.30am and made slow progress to the precariously perched Rifugio Forcella Pordoi, which really was in a spectacular situation. A nearby cable car saved our knees and whisked us down to Passo Pordoi where we visited a WW2 museum and then approached the Viel de Pan, again an absolute highlight of the trip. This is at a much lower altitude and you share the path with many others. The Marmolada is always there keeping you company as you wander along, admiring the alpine meadows and flowers. We stayed in Rifugio Viel de Pan, at which only a few hikers overnighted and had a blast of an evening, dining outside in the sun, below the Marmolada, making new friends and sharing stories. For the past few days we had shared the path with several Germans attempting all or part of the Venice-Munich path, but the next day the routes diverged.



Our plans, however, involved a 4B via ferrata della Trincee, although once we got there with our tired bodies and heavy bags, we knew our hearts were not in it on the day. So down the hill we went to Rifugio Castiglioni and decided to head to nearby Malga Ciapela and get the cable car to the top of the Marmolada, which was an absolute treat. The next day I sadly said goodbye to my sister as she took a bus to Venice to fly home.

The hike from Malga Ciapela to Passo San Pellegrino was one of the absolute toughest of the trip for me. Over 7 km there was over 1000m of ascent. Now walking alone, I pushed myself way too hard and really struggled up to Forca Rossa, with my heavy bag.

Carrying a harness, via ferrata lanyard and helmet really adds weight to your pack. Nevertheless, I was treated to stunning alpine meadows and flowers, walking through fields of horses. When I reached the next hamlet I downed an apfelschorle, a refreshing mix of sparkling water and apple juice, just what an exhausted hiker



needs. A hotel was booked for that night, in Passo San Pellegrino, with a welcome shower and private room. The next day I met a group from the Manchester area, a younger couple with the man's father and wife and I spent the rest of my trip with them.



Whilst I enjoyed the first week of the Alta Via 2, the second week was a different beast. We moved from the Sella to the Pale di San Martino mountains, meaning more karst landscapes, fewer people, much rougher ground and lots of scree descents. Progress was slow this week, with one 9 km stretch taking us over 6

hours to cover. Nonetheless, we had a great time, including walking some very dodgy ground with massive drops on either side during a thunder and lightning storm, and crossing raging torrents that instantly appeared. Our clothes did not dry out for days, but most of us had smiles on our faces at the end. There were more via ferrate conquered, card games played and wine drank, although I was rather sick of polenta at this stage. In the rifugio's, if you choose the half board option, a 3-course evening meal is included. The first course is soup or pasta, with polenta and mushrooms or pork as main. However, a trick is to ask if you can have hearty soup for your starter and the pasta for your main. I remember doing this one night and being presented with a mountain of spaghetti Bolognese. Everyone

was eyeing my meal with jealousy as they tucked into yet another portion of polenta, and I ate every last bite of my pasta.

Whilst I had previous via ferrata experience in the Dolomites and Zillertal alps, I was surprised with the number of people who had neither via ferrata nor climbing experience and just purchased their hardware for this trip, or even didn't bring any equipment. Whilst you can get away with alternative routes, or climbing some of the aided stretches without equipment in the first week, you absolutely need equipment, and preferably experience, for the second week. Even hiking through some of the scree sections I was very happy to be wearing my helmet in case of a rockfall, or even if I fell. It also lightened my backpack, which was handy.

Unfortunately, the weather took a turn for the worse at the very end of my trip and I missed out on the last two days. I was sad not to complete the route, but I do hope to return in the distant future and experience this epic adventure again. For me, this route really had it all. Excellent hiking, fun via ferrate, superb food and cheap wine, and amazing company and new friends made along the way. Be warned, this is not an easy hike, with ~174km, ~11,600m ascent/descent and unavoidable via ferrate. But with appropriate research, planning and a few rest days built in here and there, and the occasional cable car, you really can have an amazing time.

