

**Trek**  
**in**  
**Italy**

**I. Alta Via 4**

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**Sept 2016**

# Alta Via 4



Willow gentian, *gentiana asclepiadea*. To 1m high. Flowers in late summer below the tree line.



The Orange Lily, *Lilium bulbiferum*, can reach up to a metre in height. This lily can often be found in sunny glades in the forest in the Dolomites.



German gentian *Gentiana germanica* is a small plant up to 25cm. It is common throughout the Dolomites

The Alta Via 4 is in the Italian Dolomites. It is called the Alta Via di Grohmann, after Paul Grohmann, a prolific Austrian climber. It is the shortest of the 10 Alta Via's, at about 80 km and 6 days, but it has some more challenging sections. It goes south from the charming Tyrolean town of San Candido in the Pusteria Valley to the Venetian town of Pieve di Cadore in the Piave Valley. There are two significant via ferrata sections, the Vandelli on Day 4, and the Ghiacciaio Antelao on Day 5.

The best time to walk the route is July to September. Earlier and snow is likely to be a problem, later and the lodges are closed. Perhaps the optimum time to walk it are the middle two weeks in July when the flowers are at their best, most of the snow has melted and the busy holiday season of late July and August has not begun in earnest. Alternatively the first weeks in September are usually blessed with stable weather.

There are a few different variations of this classic walk, especially in German guidebooks. The version

below is true to the original version. It takes 6-8 days depending on the weather; one cannot do the ferrata sections if lightning is a possibility. There are many lodges (rifugios) en route, often two a day; so the daily stages can be staggered.

The lodges will accommodate and cater for you - even if it is a mattress on the floor. Food can be obtained at all the lodges. Meals are not that cheap, but the quality and quantity is good. The simple half pension of dinner, bed in a dorm and breakfast will cost around €50 a night. Water on the mountain is scarce and at the lodges is often undrinkable, and must be bought, but is cheap.

A tent and sleeping bag are unnecessary and camping is not allowed in the national parks which the route passes through. A sleeping sheet is essential for use in the lodges. A lightweight via ferrata harness is also needed. Crampons and ice axe are unnecessary. So the weight of the rucksack should be around 5-6 kg. This is important as many of the ascents and descents are very steep.

The route is in two halves. The northern half from San Candido to Val D'Ansiei, which is 2½ days. The southern half from the Val D'Ansiei to Pieve di Cadore which is 3½ days. One each half the route starts in the forest climbs up through alpine scrub to the high meadows and jagged mountains, and stays there before coming down to the forest again.

In the northern half the route passes through the Sesto Dolomites. It climbs up through the Campo di Dentro valley gaining the high rocky plateau where the the remarkable Cimes de Laveredo sit. It then continues south through the jagged peaks of the Cadini di Misurina massif before dropping into the forests of the Val D'Ansiei valley. There are only smaller sections of via ferrata on this half.

In the southern half the route passes through Ampezzo Dolomites. It climbs up onto the Sorapiss massif and then seamlessly traverses over into the Antelao massif before coming down to the forests of the Piave valley. Each of these massifs has quite a challenging via ferrata section which lasts for a couple of hours.

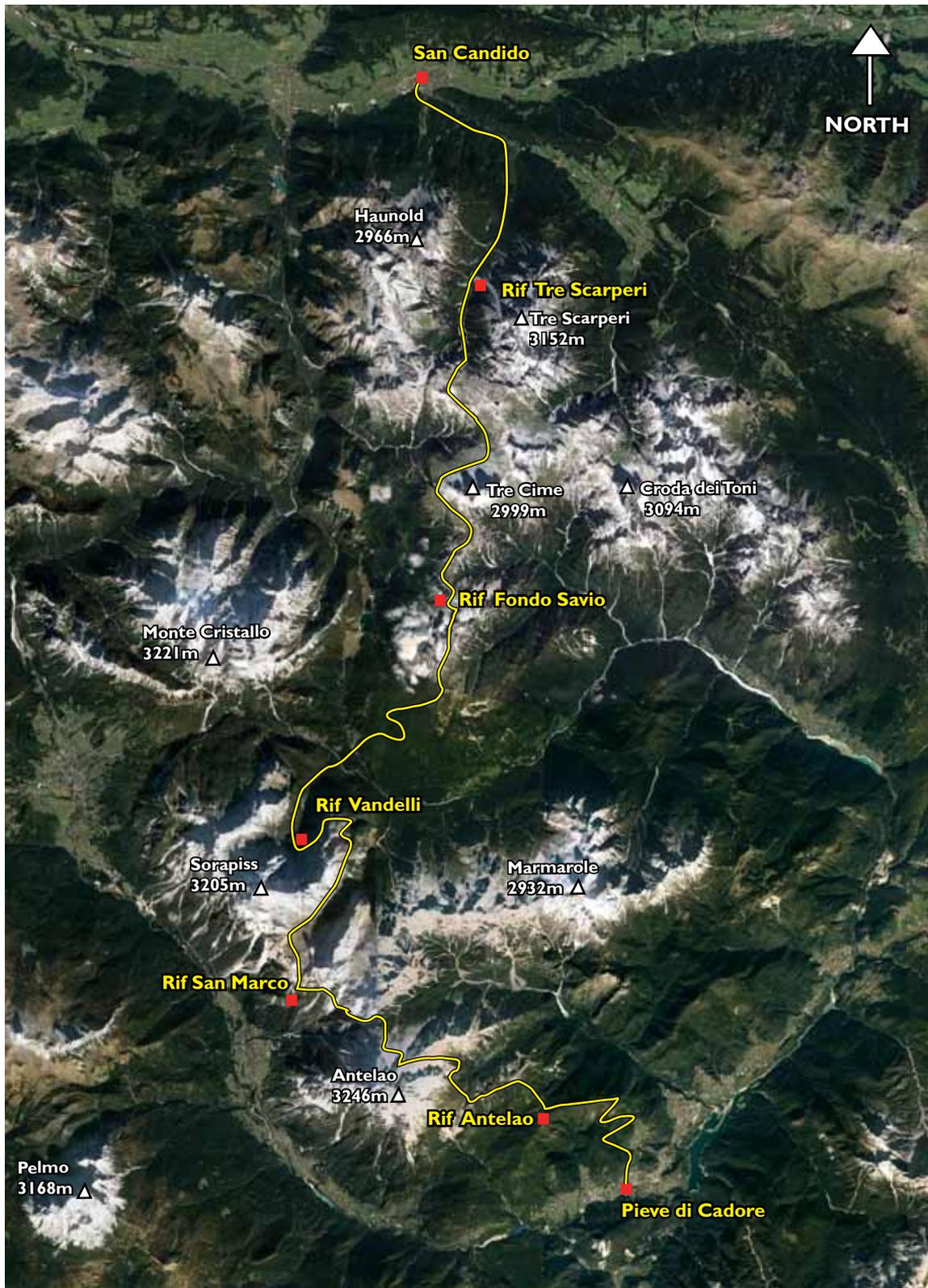
The rock is dolomite, which is limestone with magnesium permeated through it causing it to erode into magnificent rock towers and spires. There is still some transhumance practiced in the Dolomites. Cows are sent up to the high meadows and alps to flourish on the summer grasses, and in places grasses is harvested for winter fodder. The weather in the Dolomites is generally good however weather fronts and thunderstorms can bring poor weather for a day or two at a time. It is imperative to avoid the ridges and via ferrata cables during lightening.

There are many books on the Dolomites but none really cover the Alta Via 4 in detail. The Cicerone book by Gillian Price (ISBN: 9781852848200) is perhaps the best. The very detailed but unwieldy Tabacco series maps at 1:25,000 are essential. Map numbers 10, 03 & 16 cover the entire route.

The easiest way to get to the start at San Candido is by train from either Munich or Venice airports, or by bus from the latter. The easiest way to depart Pieve di Cadore is by bus to Cortina d'Ampezzo and then bus to Venice,



Day 2. Looking back at Haunold, 2966m, from the climb between Rifugio Tre Scarperi and Refugio Locatelli. This 800 metre climb takes you from the wooded Campo di Dentro valley up to the high alpine plateau where the Tre Cime mountains sit



Map of the Alta Via 4. It starts in San Candido in the Pusteria Valley and then spends 6 days weaving some 85km through various Dolomite Massifs to Pieve di Cadore in the Piave Valley. There are a number of variations but the above is the generally accepted norm and has about 5300 metres of ascent and descent.



Day 2. The Tre Cime di Laveredo are one of the most iconic of all the Dolomite mountains. They rise from the plateau between the Rifugio Locatelli and Rifugio Auranzo. As the latter is served by a road this whole area is quite busy with hikers



Day 2. Heading south from Rifugio Auranzo into the Cadini di Misurina massif where the Rifugio Fondo Savio lies, with the crowds around the Tre Cime fading.. This 4 hour stretch had a few smaller via ferrata sections as it weaves a convoluted route between rock towers and across mountain faces



Day 1. Looking south towards Huanold which looms above the the main square of San Candido. This square is the start of the Alta Via 4. It does not head straight into the mountains but goes east down the Pusteria valley for a few km first



Day 1. Before the AV 4 heads up the Campo di Dentro valley and into the mountains it follows a track along the Pusteria valley through fir and larch forests until it reaches the Alte Sage resturant beside the stream



Day 2. Looking back to the Tre Cime from the route between Rifugio Auranzo and Refugio Fondo Savio. This massif of Cadini di Misurina is quiet in comparison to the Tre Cime massif



Day 2. Almost empty paths en route to Rifugio Fondo Savio. Most of Day 2 was well above the treeline in the alpine meadows and rock fields, where vegetation struggled in the hostile climate.



Day 2. The Rifugio Fondo Savio is a small well-appointed mountain refuge with just 40 beds. It serves wholesome tradional mountain fare. All supplies are brought a trolley on a cable.



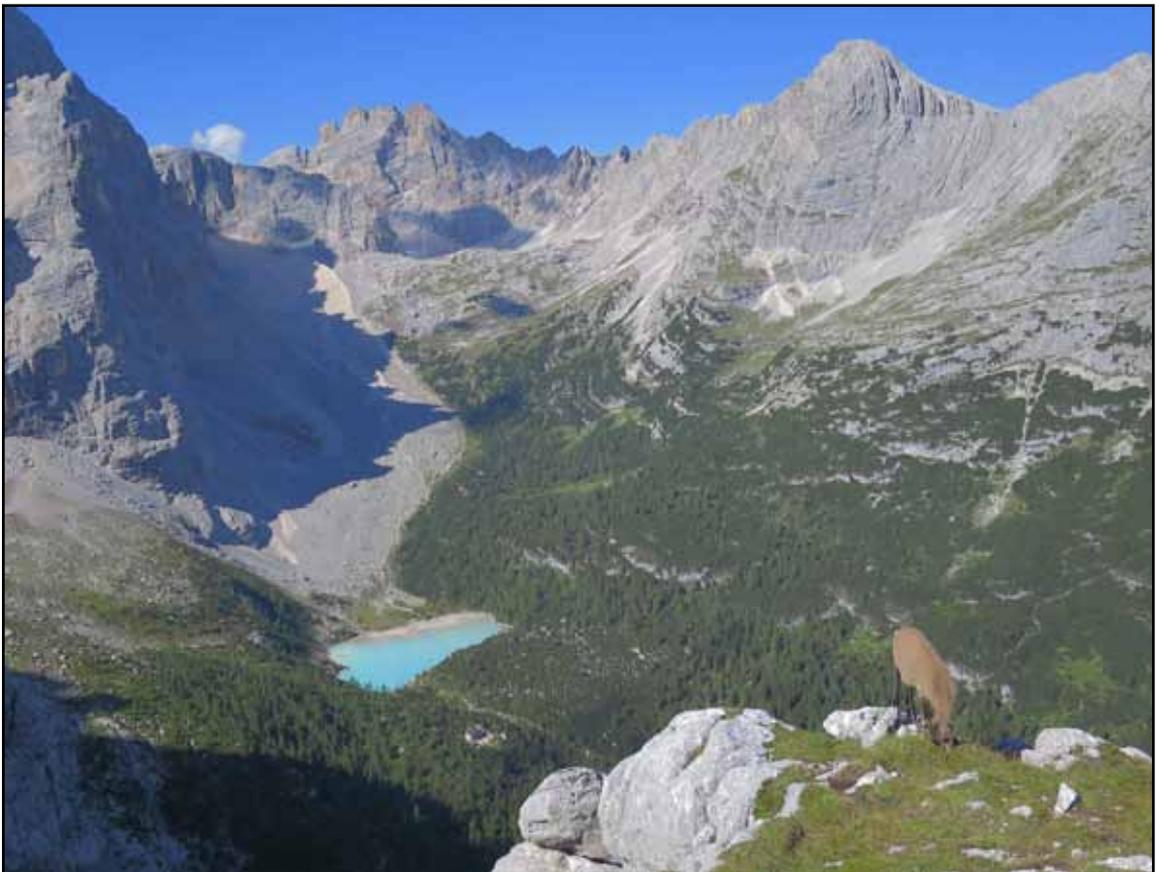
Day 3. The route between Rifugio Fondo Savio and Rifugio Citta di Carpi goes to the east of the jagged San Lucano mountain. there is a bit of via ferrata here, but it is easy.



Day 3. From Rifugio Citta di Carpi the route plunges down into the Val d'Ansei valley on path 1120. There are a few farms on the valley floor before the steep climb to Rifugio Vandelli.



Day 4. The Via Ferrata Vandelli goes up from the Rifugio in one long climb. It takes about 3 hours to clamber up the cliff using the wire cables, metal ladders and chains to secure oneself.



Day 4. Looking down to the turquoise Sorapiss Lake from the top of the Via Ferrata Vandelli. This lake lies in the middle of a crescent of mountains called Sorapiss. Towards the top of the climb there was a herd of Alpine ibex who were moving across the near vertical faces with grace and confidence. Because it is this a national park the ibex had got used to humans and did not see them as a threat.



Day 4. After the steep long challenging climb up the via ferrata Vandelli, the AV 4 route goes along a mountain shelf to the east of the Sorapiss massif high above the San Vido valley, which eventually climbs up to meet the shelf by the distant tower



Day 4. Looking across the San Vido valley from the east flank of Sorapiss massif towards the Marmarole massif. On the near tower, called Corno del Dogo, there is a shelf along which the Alta Via 5 passes.



Day 5. Looking up the bare rock of the Via Ferrata Ghiacciaio Antelao. This rock face is about 40-45 degrees and is riven by channels which are used to climb up. It is secured with cables



Day 5. After the via ferrata Ghiacciaio Antelao the route descends a long rocky valley of moraine and stones before returning to pastoral meadows. This one is at the head of the idyllic Antelao valley.



Day 5. All refugios cater for vegetarians, in this case with wild mushroom stroganoff and polenta with a side salad, bread and desert. The drinks are radler (a beer/lemonade mix) and red wine.



Day 6. The old town of Pieve di Cadore, in the Pieve valley is the end of the AV 4. It is just 2 hours down the very aboreal hillside from Rifugio Antelao. There are hotels and buses here.



Day 5. The Rifugio Antelao, 1800m, sits in the upper forest just below the treeline which is about 2000m. It is a small but very homely and traditional rifugio. It is only 2 hours from here to the end of the AV 4 but it is well worth spending the final night here, rather than heading down for the end.



Day 6. On the final descent from Rifugio Antelao to Pieve di Cadore the route follows a track for the first km with a spectacular view over to big peaks of the Marmorole massif, like Cimon del Froppa, the highest point at 2,932m. Just after this view the path divides with the AV 4 going down a gravel track, while the more interesting option of path 253 goes down through woods to Pieve di Cadore also.

# Alta Via 4

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
1	San Candido	Refugio Tre Scarpèri	10	470	40	3.5	Day 01. From San Candido, 1180m, head to the south of the charming town with mountainous backdrop to reach the Sesto stream track. Follow it east along the north bank for a km through conifers before crossing to the south bank. Follow the path along the south through conifer wood for another 3 km to reach Alte Säge restaurant, where the Campo di Dentro valley comes down from the south into the main Sesto valley. Leave the Sesto valley track here and head up east of the Campo di Dentro stream. The route alternates between track and path as it climbs the wooded valley crossing the stream and the small road occasionally. There are tantalising glimpses of the jagged peaks each side of the valley. After an hour the conifer trees are often replaced by dwarf pine in some of the scree clad or rockier areas as the track climbs for a further half hour to reach a perfect flat meadow surrounded by conifer wood and then jagged peaks. Sheep graze the meadow and the woods around it. On the east side of the meadow is the Tre Scarpèri hut, which is a small hotel, 1626m. It is a short day but there is another 4 hours with a 800m climb to Locatelli hut.
2	Refugio Tre Scarpèri	Refugio Fratelli Fondo Savio	18	1490	770	8	Day 2. Head up the valley across the meadow of grass and then stone to reach the bottom of the steep small ravine the Rio San Candido descends. Climb up the good path for 2 hours gaining 800m to reach the pass at 2457m. There is a great view of the Three Cimes of Laveredo from here. It is a quick half hour descent to the busy Refugio Locatelli, 2405m. There is a great view from the terrace of this lodge but there are crowds of people. Descent into the valley between the lodge and the Three Cimes and then climb up to the plateau on the north of the Three Cimes where there are small lakes beside a restored shepherds house. It is now a short climb over the Mezzo Pass, 2315m. There is now a short descent to the even busier Refugio Auronzo, 2320m. So busy it is best to continue south 3 hours to Refugio Fratelli Fondo Savio. Initially the route is easy across the slopes of La Cianpedele, but at the south end of this it descends a relatively easy via ferrata for a good half hour to reach Rinbianco Pass 2176m. From the pass there is a stoney 200m ascent in tremendous surroundings to reach the small, often full, Refugio Fratelli Fondo Savio, 2367m.
3	Refugio Fratelli Fondo Savio	Refugio Vandelli	15	980	1370	8	Day 3. There is a choice of 3 routes heading south from Fondo Savio, 2367m. From the west is route 117. The middle is 116 and the easterly one is 112. The latter is supposed to be the most scenic but longer. Take it (116) for 3 hours over 3 passes, all about 2400m, and some easy via ferrata to the lovely Refugio Citta di Carpi, 2130m, where this spectacular sections ends. Now follow the track west descending, if you dare, through the open but pathless forest to shortcut the hairpin bends. Once you reach the tarmac road follow it west for 2 km until you reach 1600m. Here the road veers south and you leave it and descend SW on forest path then track for 2 km to reach Cristallo Hotel at 1370m in the valley. Continue over the road, past a idyllic alp farm and then SW for another 2 km of beech forest. Here you start to climb relentlessly for 600m through mixed woods, past a waterfall and then into lovely larch forest. The Refugio Vandelli, 1928m, is situated in an ideal setting on the edge of the turquoise lake surrounded by huge rock towers.
4	Refugio Vandelli	Refugio San Marco	14	1140	1220	9.5	Day 04. From Refugio Vandelli, 1928m, head SE up through dwarf pine and then across rock to the bottom of the cliff face. The Via Ferrata Vandelli starts here and it goes up steeply with many exposed sections for almost 3 hours. A harness and helmet are essential to climb the cables and ladders. There are great views from the cliff face especially to the azure Sorapiss Lake. At the top, at 2380m, descend meadows where chamois frequent into a bowl and then descend a valley to then contour round a spur covered in dwarf pine. After an couple more short easy sections of cables you descend to the tiny bivouac of Comici, 2000m, where there is no water. Climb a short pass, 2128m, to gain a shelf on the west side of the Sorapiss Massif and high above San Vido valley. This narrow shelf extends for 4 km keeping around 2150m, and is quite exposed and tiring at times. There are 4-5 easier cable sections where clipping in is optional, but a slip is fatal. Eventually you reach the head of the San Vido valley with tremendous peaks. Contour round the head to Grande Pass, 2255m, before the steep descent to the lovely authentic Refugio San Marco, 1828m.
5	Refugio San Marco	Refugio Antelao	14	1170	1170	9	Day 5. From San Marco, 1823m, traverse east across the large scree and dwarf pine bowl climbing slightly to Forcella Piccola, 2120m. Here a route goes up Monte Antelao, the second highest mountain in the Dolomites, but the route is unsecured, demanding and dangerous. Drop down 20 minutes after Piccola pass to reach the large Refugio Galassi, 2018m. Now head south initially through dwarf pine and then across rock and scree climbing 400m to reach the bottom of the via ferrata. It is 200m high and climbs at 40-45 degrees. Nearly all is secured and a harness is handy due to the exposure. The via ferrata takes well over an hour. At the top, about 2550m, is a exposed 200m traverse west along an arete apex which is unprotected, before the route drops off the end of the arete down to the remnants of the glacier. Double back and head east across moraine debris for an hour before beginning a long 500m descent down to the head of the beautiful Antelao valley, a pastoral Shangri La. There is now just an easy 200m climb up to the Pritia Pass, 2100m, then an easy, 3 km, hour's descent into conifer woods to the very lovely Refugio Antelao, 1800m.
6	Refugio Antelao	Pieve di Cadore	7	10	900	2	Day 6. Follow the track SE from the Refugio Antelao, 1800m, for a good km descending through the conifer forest until you get to the small cabin on Forcella Antracisa. Here a path heads off to the south and then immediately forks left onto the path called 253. Follow it down through the spruce trees for another km until you reach a stony bowl. The path skirts round the bowl descending all the time to get to a forested ridge on the east side of the bowl. Cross the ridge at 1530m and then descend more steeply through mixed woods for another 2km. This is the last natural section of the Alta Via 4 and is easy to enjoy as you pass through wood full of birdsong. Finally emerge at the upper houses of Pozzale village. Walk down the small road to the sleepy village centre by the church tower. Continue down through the village until a track leaves the road on the left. Follow this track down for a km beside the road to reach the top of Pieve di Cadore. Head down through lanes heading for the church and town hall towers in the main square, 900m, of this small but ancient town and the end of the Alta Via 4, 2 hours from the Refugio, with hotels or buses.
			78	5260	5470	40	