

Trek
in
Italy

I. Alta Via I

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Alta Via I



Einsel's Columbine, *Aquilegia einseleana*, is found between 800-2000m in the Dolomites



The Alpine Marmot, *Marmota marmota*, lives in colonies down burrows in rocky meadows. They must gorge themselves on grass in autumn to hibernate under the winter snows



Fragrant Orchid, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, thrives on the lime habitat of the Dolomites

The Alta Via I is the original Alta Via in the Dolomites. There are now over 10 Alta Via's but the Alta Via I showcases the finest aspects of the Dolomites. It goes from the fabled beauty at lake Lago di Braies near the Tyrolean town of Toblach to the Venetian town of Belluno. It is possible to shorten it by taking short cuts and avoid the via ferrata at the end but this is not in the spirit of the trek and diminishes its challenges and quality.

The best time to walk the route is July to September. Earlier and snow is likely to be a problem, especially on the steep descent to Rifugio Venezia. 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 with stable weather. If you walk the entire AVI as described, then allow 11 days walking and at least one weather day.

There are many lodges (rifugios) en route, often two a day. 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 €45 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 totally unnecessary and camping is not allowed in the national parks which the route mainly passes through. A sleeping sheet is essential however for use in the lodges. If one is planning to finish the trek with the route protected with cables over La Schiara a very light via ferrata harness is needed, otherwise as long as one has a head for heights, it is unnecessary. Crampons and ice axe are also unnecessary. So the weight of the rucksack should be restricted to around 5-6 kg. This is important as many of the ascents and descents are very steep.

In a nutshell the route makes about 8 climbs from the forests of the valleys up to the meadows above the treeline of about 2100m where it remains for a day before dropping back down into the forest again. About 65% of the time the route is above the trees and you are walk through flower filled alps alive with the sound of cow bells, occasionally climbing above 2400m where rock and scree dominate. 35% of the time your are in the conifer woods. The rock is dolomite, which is limestone with a good helping of magnesium. It erodes into magnificent rock towers and spires for which the Dolomites are famous and are ever present on the entire Alta Via I. The walk is easy except the long via ferrata over La Schiara, and no harness is really needed for easy via ferrata section by Nuvolau

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. They are looked after by cow herds who milk the cows and process the cheese in the mountain dairies called Malga. The farmers also cut hay from these high meadows. The hay is stored in alpine barns or taken down to the valley for winter fodder.

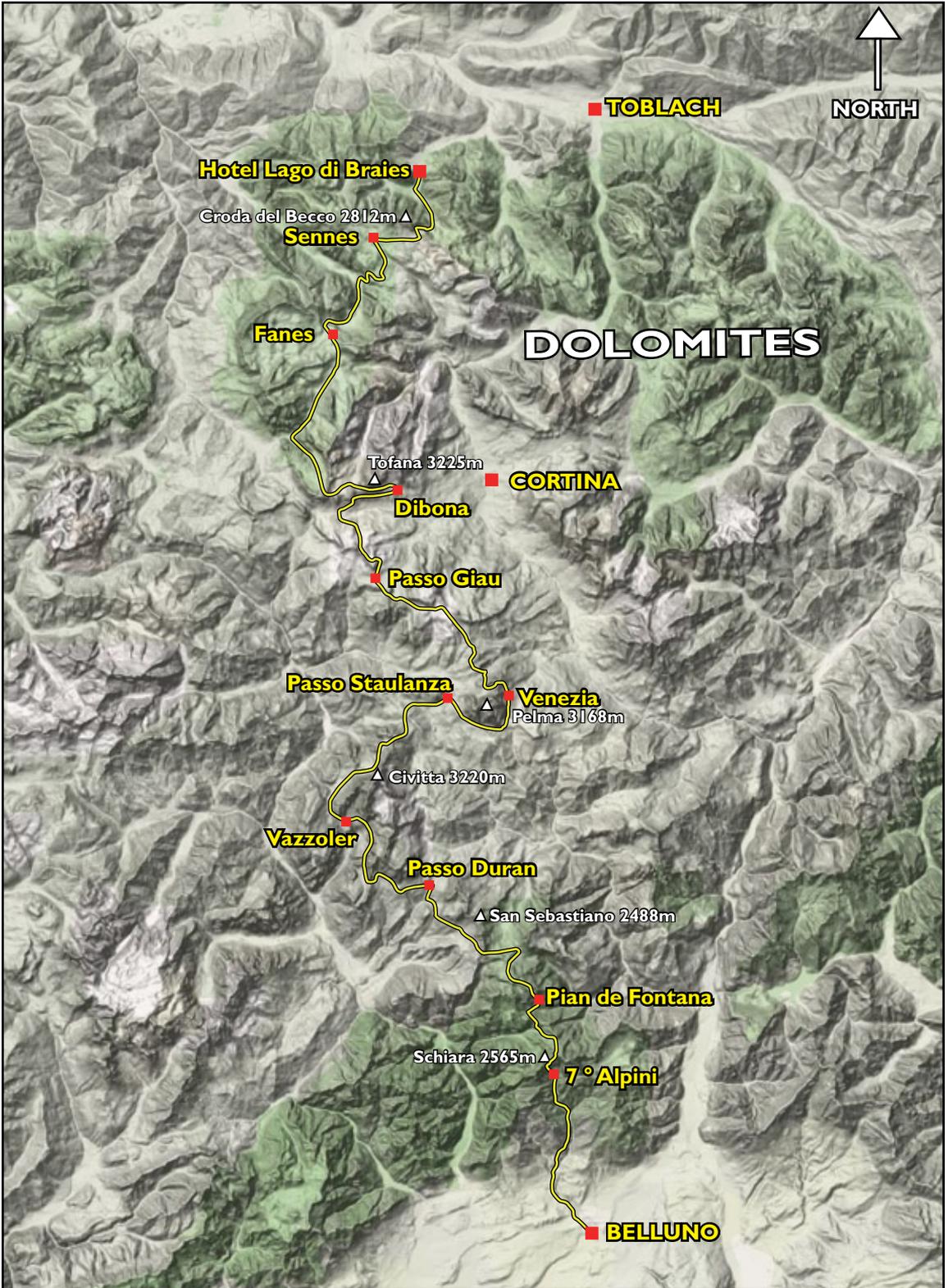
The weather in the Dolomites is generally good however weather fronts and thunderstorms can bring poor weather for a day or two at a time. Two sections; the Forcella Val d'Arcia pass to Rifugio Venezia and the via ferrata over La Schiara crave good dry weather. It is also imperative to avoid the ridges and via ferrata cables during lightening.

There are many books on the Dolomites but perhaps the best 2 for the Alta Via One are the Trailblazer book by Henry Stedman (ISBN: 9781873756836) and the Cicerone book by Gillian Price (ISBN: 9781852843595). The very detailed but unwieldy Tabacco series maps at 1:25,000 (numbers 31, 03, 25 & 24) cover the entire route, but number 31 and 24 are almost optional as they only cover a few well sign posted hours on the first and last days each.

The easiest way to get to the start at Toblach is by train from either Munich/Salzburg/Innsbruck or Venice. From Toblach there are frequent buses to Lago di Braies. The easiest way to depart Belluno is by train to Venice. Both Toblach and Belluno are small charming towns with a very rich history.



Day 8. The south west ridge of Civetta, 3220m, is a high jagged wall of spires some three kilometres long rising straight up some 500m from the surrounding forest and scree slopes. The west face of Civetta has the highest vertical wall in the Dolomites with a 1200m rockface emerging from the screes.



Map of the route from the hotel at Lago di Braies, near Toblach (also called Dobbacio), to Belluno along the Alta Via I. This 160km route has three alternative easier variations to the more characterful original route. The first two take short cuts by Dibona and Passo Staulanza, and the third by-passes the splendid via ferrata between the Pian de Fontana and 7° Alpini. These variations could shorten the trek by 2 days.



Day 1. The very beautiful and small, kilometre long lake Lago di Braies is the start of the Alta Via One. It is a popular and busy attraction and is reached by regular bus from Toblach. One walks south along the east side (left in photo) to the south end and then the path climbs the stony slopes to the left



Day 2. Walking SW across the Munt de Sennes alp with the spectacular peak of Monte Cristallo, 3221m rising on the other side of the Val Boite valley. Munt de Sennes alp is about 2100m and is just above the treeline with Scrub Mountain Pine, *Pinus Mugo*, growing just below this plateau.



Day 1. Toblach is a small charming town in the arterial Puster Valley. There are outdoor and food shops here, reasonable accommodation and frequent buses to the Hotel Lago di Braies where the Alta Via I starts



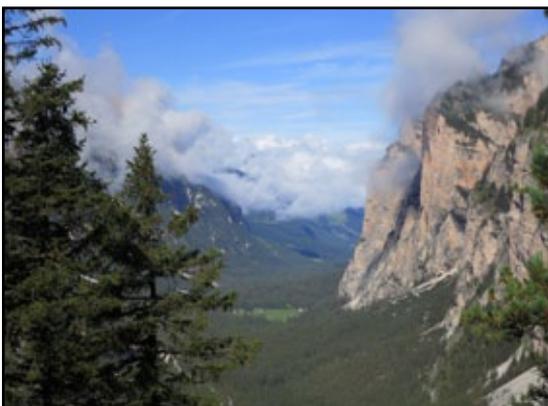
Day 1. Lago di Braies (also called Pragser Wildsee) is a clear lake formed when a large landslide blocked the valley damming the lake. Its famed beauty means it is popular with sightseers and the north end is commercial



Day 2. Munt de Sennes is a charming quiet alternative to the Rifugio Sennes. It is situated in a working cow alp and frequently visited by the Ladenspeaking farmers.



Day 2. Like many places in the Dolomites transhumant farming is still a common place on the Sennes Alp with many farmers bringing their cattle up to luxuriant summer pastures each summer



Day 2. From Sennes the path drops down the steep mountainside into the lush forested Val di Rudo valley, which is hemmed in by precipitous walls on each side of the deep slot.



Day 3. The mountains of the Lagazuoi Gran are over 2800m and rise up a good 400m above the grassy slopes at the head of Travanze valley. Near here are WWI relics by the Rifugio Lagazuoi hut



Day 3. The Croda da Lago seen from the base of Tofana de Rozes near Rifugio Dibona is a typical jagged Dolomite ridge. It does not have great height at only 2715m, but the walls and spires rise up some 300-400 metres from the mantle of scree which surrounds them



Day 4. Seen from the base of the Croda da Lago near Passo Giau, Tofana de Rozes, 3225m, (left) and Tofana di Mezzo, 3244m, (right) are 2 giants of the Dolomites. The visible south face of Tofana de Rozes rises up for 1000m from the scree slopes at its base and is a premier climbing arena in the Dolomites



Day 5. German Gentian, *Gentianella germanica*, is common in the Dolomites above the tree line in late summer



Day 11. Willow Gentian, *Gentiana asclepiadea*, are 1 metre curved stems with pairs of trumpet flowers appearing in the later summer. It is found at lower altitudes in open woods and glades throughout the Dolomites



Day 7. Fringed Gentian, *Gentianella ciliata*, is frequent in the Dolomites on dry rocky meadows in the late summer



Day 4. Civetta, 3220m, seen from the north west by the forests above Rifugio Citta di Fiume on the north side of Pelmo mountain. It is one of the Dolomites most impressive massifs with a sheer cliff of 1200m on the NW face. The east side of Civetta is seldom visited and is relatively remote



Day 3. Chamois, *Rupicapra rupicapra*, are frequent in the Dolomites. They have elastic pads on their feet to grip rock so can go on incredibly steep rock faces. They venture very high in the summer and shelter in the forests during the winter



Day 4. The town of Cortina d'Ampezzo in the Valle del Boite valley is the most fashionable in the Dolomites. It was never culturally integrated into the Austrian empire, unlike many other Dolomite towns, and retained the Ladin language



Day 2. The Sella massif is a large circular plateau at about 2500m sitting on steep ramparts which rise like a curtain from the mantle of forest. The highest peak on the plateau is Piz Boe, 3151m



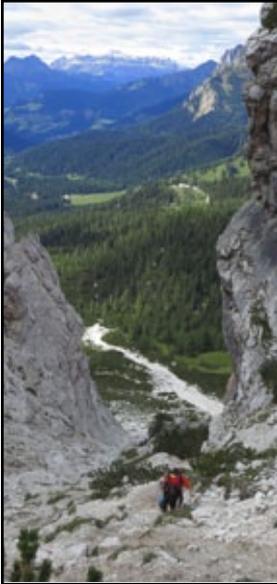
Day 4. Marmolada, 3343m, is the highest peak in the Dolomites. It lies just to the south of the Sella massif. The Marmolada Glacier on its north flank is the only real glacier in the Dolomites today



Day 7. Walking across the meadowy alp at Poida between Passo Staulanza and Rifugio Coldai with the north side Cima Coldai, 2403m. This peak is easy to climb from the lake near Rifugio Coldai



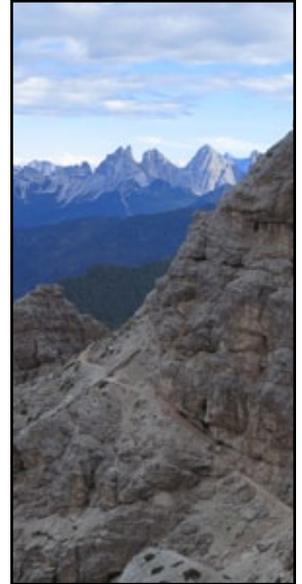
Day 8. Rifugio Vazzoler lies in a deep, forested bowl formed by the two jagged south ridges radiating out from lofty Civetta summit 3220m. Each serrated ridge ends in a spectacular tower



Day 4. The climb from Rifugio Citta di Fiume to Forcella Forado pass and Val d' Arcia is up a steep gully for a good hour



Day 4. Val d'Arcia is a high, scree-filled valley where lingering snowfields have replaced the glacier. The Forcella Val d'Arcia pass, 2467m, in the middle of the photo is gained by a path across steep loose scree on the photo's left



Day 4. The descent from Forcella Val d'Arcia is steep and loose, until it veers to the right side under cliffs shown above



Day 9. The massive block of Pelmo, 3163m, stands alone as one of the great massifs of the Dolomites when seen from all angles, especially the south here. The AV I goes over the Forcella Val d'Arcia, round from the very right, to Rifugio Venezia. It then circumnavigates the south side (shown) to the Rifugio Passo Staulanza on the very left. In 1857 was the very first mountain in the Dolomites to be climbed,



Day 5. Monkshood
Aconitum tauricum likes damp places. 1000-2000m



Day 7. An AVI trail marker and a Mezereon, *Daphne mezereum*. It grows up to the tree-line. The stem and berries are very poisonous



Day 7. Woolly Thistle, *Cirsium eriophorum*, late flowers below tree line



Day 8. An alp on the descent to Passo Duran. The massif in the background is San Sebastiano, 2488m on the left and Monte Tamer, 2547m, on the right



Day 9. The view south from Forcella de Zita Sud, about 2400m, normally gives a view to the south of the last ranges and the Ventian plain beyond



Day 10. Rifugio Pian de Fontana, 1632m, was a ruined alp dairy up to 20 years ago when it was lovingly restored and used for trekkers. The accommodation is simple and crowded and sited in old dairy outbuildings, but the dining area and kitchen is in the spacious and characterful main building.



Day 10. The view from Forcella Nerville up to La Schiara. The route goes up the rock right of the snow to the deep saddle of Forcella del Marmol, about 2260m, It then climbs over the shoulder on easy cables and drops to the Marmol shelter



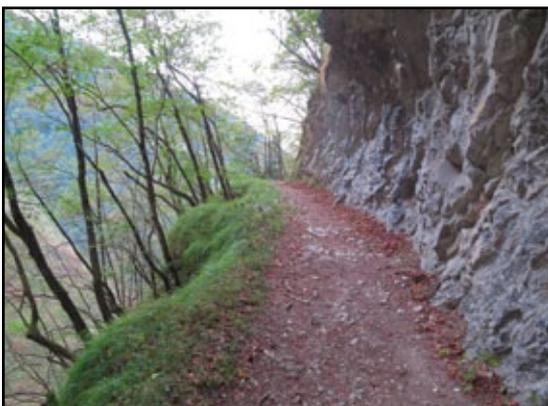
Day 10. From the shoulder of La Schiara looking down onto the Marmol shelter, 2262m. This simple shelter marks the start of the more challenging sections of the via ferrata down the south face of La Schiara which takes 3 hours to complete



Day 10. The 4th section seen from the 3rd section of the descent. It is an airy traverse along a ledge with a climber just visible in the middle. Beyond him is a via ferrata down to the grassy spur.



Day 10. The narrow part of section 4 along the ledge, before the ladders down to the grassy spur, which is a small respite before another 3 sections of exposed cables and ladders before the Rifugio



Day 11. Before the end of the AVI the path climbs up the side of a narrow gorge on a high precipitous path which maybe a relic from WWI. At the end of the path is Case Bortot hamlet



Day 11. After walking 2 hours from Case Bortot into Belluno you can look back and see the south face of La Schiara you descended yesterday. It is in the middle between the cloud and the rooftop

Dolomites: Alta Via I

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
1	Lago di Braies	Munt de Sennes	10	1160	360	5.5	From Lago di Braies, 1490m, head up the east side of the beautiful lake for a km to the south end where the AV1 starts. It climbs through a stony landscape with shrub pines. After an hour reach a steeper section and veer east to climb a ravine. At the top the path gains a small forested ridge and climbs the west side of this ravine, opening into a hanging valley full of larch in a karst landscape. Traverse the side of this bowl climbing steeply out of its rim to gain another valley at 2186m, called Forno, lying on the south of the jagged east ridge of Crodo Del Beco, 2810m. Walk west up Forno climbing limestone rubble to Forcella Sora Forno pass at 2388m. If the weather is good climb the 400m to Crodo Del Beco for great views. If not descend 10 minutes to the small Rifugio Biella. Now the AV1 follows a track west for a km to a junction where a 2 km path cuts over a small karstic rise to regain the track. From here go 5 minutes east to the large busy Rifugio Sennes, or 15 minutes west to the characterful working alp of Munt de Sennes.
2	Munt de Sennes	Rifugio de Fanes	11	600	730	4.5	From either Sennes lodge head east on the track with spectacular views to the jagged peaks of Crodo Rossa massif. After the alp ends the track veers south going through pine shrub and then mixed conifers, descending past a couple of hairpins to an idyllic small valley at 1900m. From here the track now plummets 500m down steep hairpins to reach the Valle di Rudo, a massive, cliff-hemmed valley with Rifugio Pederu, 1550m on the valley floor. Now head south up the Valun de Fanes. This pleasant open valley with pine scrub lies between vast scree slopes at the base of the jagged spires. Follow the path for 4 km and then the track for 2 km as you climb up in a wide sweeping arc to reach the picturesque alp and herdsman's chalets at Pices Fanes. A few hundred metres later the track forks to each of Lavarela and Fanes, 2 similar Refugio, both sharing the same pine-clad karst bowl around the Le Vert tarn at about 2050m.
3	Rifugio de Fanes	Rifugio Dibona	23	1180	1200	8.5	Climb SE up the track for km to the picturesque Lago de Limo lake. Now descend a km to the pastoral Gran Fanes chalet. Continue SW down the wide, green, pastoral valley for 4 km until the AV1 path veers south and climbs up stones and scree to the Forcella di Lech pass, 2486m. If the pass is closed make the long detour down the valley to Campa Alpina, 1720m and up to Rifugio Scotoni and beyond to rejoin the main AV1 path. Now walk the spectacular 4 km south up the stony path to Forcella Lagazuoi, 2570m. Either climb the 200m to the Rifugio Lagazuoi here or continue east down the spectacular head of the Travenanzes valley to the base of Tofana de Rozes. Walk along the steep narrow path at the base of this massive 1000m cliff with stunning views of Dolomite spires across the valley and the glacier-clad Marmolada over your right shoulder. After an hour's traverse the comfortable Rifugio Dibona appears below in the trees, just some 5 km from Cortina.
4	Rifugio Dibona	Hotel Passo Giau	14	890	700	6	Head west contouring the treeline of 2100m for 3km, just 300m lower than yesterday's scree traverse in the opposite direction. After an hour's walk through chamois country, with views of Marmolada and Sella massifs, you reach a track which goes through a tunnel just 15 minutes below yesterday's path. The track descends through larches to a T junction. Here a path continues down through the woods for a km to reach the valley road at Ospizio Vecio, 1985m. It is an easy hour's climb through mixed conifers to the treeline near the five pillars of Cinque Torri. As you pass a ski lift the path divides, with a route heading to Rifugio Averau, at the saddle, and Rifugio Nuvalau just 30 minutes further, 2575m. The path continues SE down an easy 20 metres via ferrata on the spine of the ridge, then crosses the steep rocky mountainside to an easy 30m via ferrata. The path now descends rock and scree to reach pastures where horses graze. A km across these is the comfortable, but expensive, Rifugio/Hotel at Passo Giau.
5	Hotel Passo Giau	Rifugio Venezia	18	1050	1320	7.5	Traverse SE across the hillside over 2 small saddles before dropping into a north facing bowl and climbing Forcella Giau pass, 2360m. There is now a delightful 6 km, 2 hour walk across a high grassy, marmot-covered, plateau called the Mondeval, with great views to many of the famous 3000m plus massifs. Then descend gently to Forcella Roan saddle, 1999m and enter conifers with the nearby sound of cowbells. After 2 km of forest reach the small Rifugio Citta di Fiume, 1918m. After this refuge the day takes a different character with a steep, loose, climb up a gully to Forcella Forada pass and the remains of the Arcia Glacier. An hour to the east across scree and moraine is the Forcella Val d'Arcia pass, 2476m. From this lofty pass the descent is on steep loose scree for 200m before the route veers to the right along narrow ledges at the bottom of the cliffs on this east side of Pelmo mountain. Soon it reaches more gentle scree at the bottom of which is the warm friendly Rifugio Venezia hut, 1946m, sited on an alp.
6	Refugio Venezia	Rifugio Staulanza	9	200	360	3	From Venezia head round the east side of massive sheer bulk of Pelmo, crossing alpine meadows where horses and cattle graze before the path descends into the scrub pine. The path skirts round the base of Pelmo whose faces soar 1000m. Across the Val di Zoldo valley the next precipitous massif, Civetta 3220m, soars. After 2 hours of pleasant walk through pine scrub you reach a junction. Here an AV1 alternative descends 400m to the dormant ski station of Pala Favera in the Zolda valley where there are a couple of roadside refuges, before climbing 350m to reach the base of Civetta. The recommended AV1 path continues to skirt round the now western slopes of Pelmo for a further hour descending gradually through mixed conifers to reach Passo Staulanza where there is a good Rifugio/Hotel Staulanza, 1776m. It is just an hour's walk from yesterday's lunchbreak at Rifugio Citta di Fiume via the short way. This way does not traverse the Pelmo massif and is the bad weather, or limited time, option.

Dolomites: Alta Via I

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
7	Rifugio Staulanza	Rifugio Vazzoler	18	810	840	6.5	Head west on the road, then track, for 2.5 km, where the track divides. Take the lower fork across a stream and up to the working alp of Vescova. Leave the track climbing meadows to gentle pass then drop down to the alp farm at Pioda, 1816m. Now start a series of zig-zags 300m up the mountain to Rifugio Coldai, below Civetta which looms behind it. Head west over a small saddle to a bowl with a lake. Skirt the lake and climb to another small saddle, 2203m where views to the SW suddenly unfold with Civetta towering up 1200m and Lago di Alleghe 1200m below. Between the two is a large bowl with Tisse Refugio at the far end 2km away above Forcella Rean saddle, 2107m. Cross this bowl to the saddle and then descend 1/2 hour to a meadow among larch under the jagged Civetta. The path now climbs gently to Sella di Pelsa, 1954m, before it descends gently through pine scrub on the south side for a good km to reach the towering serrated SW ridge of Civetta. The path meets a track descending 2 km through boulderfields and scrub as it drops down beneath truly gigantic cliffs and towers to reach the beautiful Rifugio Vazzoler, 1714m, nestled in the trees, but looking at the huge cliffs on the south side of Civetta mountain.
8	Rifugio Vazzoler	Passo Duran	13	690	830	5.5	Descend from Vazzoler into the deep bowl formed by a vast crescent of jagged spires and towers. The track swings round the bowl for 2 km dropping to about 1400m where there is a path heading off to the SE. The path crosses pine scrub and scree then enters beech woods and mixed conifers as you traverse up to Forcella dell Orso pass. The final climb to the pass is steep. From this pass there is a long 2 km contour round a bowl full of pine shrubs. After passing a meadow the path veers east and climbs a small wooded ridge to gain the Forcella del Camp pass, 1933m, and the highpoint of the day. At this pass the spectacular vistas return with more vast cliffs on Moiazza peak, a southern subsidiary of Civetta. The path follows the base of these cliffs through dry pine scrub and then climbs a conifer ridge to reach the superb Rifugio Carestato, which has unbelievable views from its sunny terrace. Follow the track from this refugio for an hour descending idyllic alps and mixed forest. The next massif of San Sebastiano, 2488m, dominates view ahead. Through the trees the alp around Passo Duran appears with the clanking of cowbells. There are two refuges here at the pass between the Civetta and San Sebastiano which lies at just 1600m.
9	Passo Duran	Rifugio Pian de Fontana	17	1190	1140	8.5	Follow the road south for 2km, and at 1500m start to climb SW through mature conifers to Forcella Dagarei pass. The path now veers SE traversing across a 4 km wide bowl of scree above conifer on the south of San Sebastiano/Tamer massif, until bearing south you reach the idyllic alp at Moschesin. Now climb east up zigzags to a pass, 1966m, to start a lovely undulating 3 km walk east through larch and pasture with great views. After an hour Rifugio Pramperet appears on a grassy ledge in a wild wooded valley. Here turn south at a junction and start the work of the day, a 500m climb broken into three half hour stages. The first is up to Portella dei Pezedei, the second is up gentle rock and scree to a ridge on Talvena mountain, 2542m, and the shorter third stage is a hike up this ridge to the Focella de Zita Sud, about 2400m. To the south the view is of tomorrow's La Schiara massif. From this pass there is a 750 metre descent to Rifugio Pian de Fontana. The first half of this descent is through a high grassy valley with frequent marmots while the lower half is steep and relentless but there are a few chamois about to break up the descent. The Rifugio Pian de Fontana, 1632m, is a small friendly mountain hut on a steep alp.
10	Rifugio Pian de Fontana	Rifugio 7° Alpini	9	980	1150	7.5	Descend 100m through beech to the floor of the valley and then climb to the idyllic alp at Forcella La Varetta, 1769m. Now contour across steep grassy slopes for 2 km with tremendous views down the heavily forested Vescova valley until the path forks with a branch descending down Vescova valley, and one going over La Schiara, 2537m, which is only possible in good weather. To take it contour and then climb an hour to Forcella de Nerville, 1953m, then climb an hour up stone slabs west of a snow gully to Forcella del Marmol, 2260, where the via ferrata down La Schiara starts. It has 7 sections. First, over the airy shoulder of La Schiara to the shelter. Second, down 100m on a slab and very steep cable to a cleft. Third down 200m on a steep face west of the cleft to a large deep gully. Fourth is a 50m airy traverse on a ledge, then cables and ladders to a steep grassy spur. Fifth is a 50m cable section in and out of a deep dark ravine. Sixth is 100m straight forward loose path among pine scrub leading to the seventh 100m section down 2 narrow chimney-like clefts with cables and ladders to finish this 3 hour via Ferrata. Now just descend a path for 200m to reach the Rifugio 7° Alpini, which is small and cosy with a great view up to your airy descent.
11	Rifugio 7° Alpini	Belluno	16	180	1240	5	The path descends steeply into the Val d'Art gorge through deciduous woods and between huge limestone cliffs. The good path crosses the stream on small concrete bridges from the west to east and back. After 90 minutes the path settles on the east side for half an hour then descends to the confluence of the d' Arte and de Rui Fret valleys, about 5km from Rifugio 7° Alpini. Here the AV I crosses a substantial footbridge to the west side and climbs for 100m on a wide, precipitous path down the gorge for 2 km which eventually turns into a track for the final km to Case Bortot. This small seasonal cafe high above the river is the end of the AV I. However you will still have to walk another 5 km down a tarmac road, passing old homesteads, to the rural hamlet of Gioz and then the small town of Bolzano. From Bolzano you have another 3km walk down a busier road, often without pavements, until you reach the outskirts of Belluno, 400m. When the road veers right at a junction take the quiet left fork down past tennis courts and over an old concrete footbridge to be discharged into the northern end of Belluno. There is an ample range of accommodation in this town to soak your bones at the end of the AV I.
			158	8930	9870	68	