

Brenta Dolomites vol. 1 Val d'Ambièz

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165 classic and modern rock routes



Preface

The Brenta Dolomites have deserved a new description for years, one which would be more suited to the developments in the range's popularity, whilst preserving their place in the context of mountaineering history.

The pressure of drastic social changes and their effects on climbing as a sport make it difficult to outline a non-banal and modern setting whilst fulfilling an appropriate editorial role. To achieve this, the authors have invested time, thought, experience of alpine culture and in particular a profound knowledge of this vast and impressive group of Dolomites.

Any guidebook of this kind not only represents a technical guide, but also a cultural one, a mirror of the times and personalities of the authors. To those who are not familiar with this kind of publishing, it is difficult to imagine the amount of work required both on the mountain and at the desk.

When Gino Buscaini continued Ettore Castiglioni's legacy whilst rewriting the 1949 guidebook, he attempted to update the guidebook without changing its mountaineering setting, without betraying the author's legacy, whilst improving the guidebook for the user. Gino admired Castiglioni's simplicity, his technical precision, his personal knowledge of the routes. On top of this, he felt a sense of responsibility towards the accuracy of updates and grading, not just for precision's sake but also for the safety of climbers using the guide.

In retrospect, his satisfaction in appreciating the work was somewhat deluded: Gino believed that an updated, exhaustive and complete guidebook would make climbers want to climb routes other than those which are always more popular. This was not the case and I hope that now, the new volumes can achieve Gino's wish, allowing for a wider knowledge of the Brenta Dolomites whilst not over-crowding the most famous routes.

The changes in mountaineering and climbing have demanded a huge restructuring of the classic publications in this genre, something which Gino hoped for the Collana Guida dei Monti d'Italia for years. I think that Gino would have wanted to be able to hand over to authors such as yourselves and I am sure that he would have recognised the quality of the work and appreciated your endeavours. I'd like to conclude these few words in his name and memory, and with my own personal wish that your volumes will spark dreams of informed and happy climbing in generations to come.

Silvia Metzeltin



Ambiez: Inexhaustible supply of emotions

Everyone has a favourite place, a secret spot, a special face, a safe reference point where is enough just to imagine achieving some of our vertical dreams.

Many of these worlds we imagine from afar; some people have only the memories, others just the fantasy; very few, the most fortunate, have this object of desire right outside their front door. If, then, this land of infinite dreams, is one of the valleys with a myriad of faces of sensational rock, blessed with one of the most solid, homogenous, clean, featured, enjoyable and enviable limestone in the Dolomites, then I believe the choice is rather obvious.

I have always regarded myself as very fortunate to live in a valley which even today has remained on the edge of the flow of tourists, distant from mass tourism and in an intact environment even if, to my mind, we need to work harder to regain old values, to preserve our alpine traditions and reconstruct the stories of the ancient harmony between man and mountain, which, sadly, is forever becoming marred.

Looking up, it would seem that the crown of peaks and faces which surround the amphitheatre of the Val d'Ambiez had been created just for that reason, to protect the unique beauty within, preserving it not only on a naturalistic and environmental point of view, but also defending it from too much exposure and keeping it safe from too many visitors.

Maybe taking the lead from this valley's reservation, the beautiful and better known Cima d'Ambiez also seems to prefer to stay off the climber's destination list.

Whilst other famous faces in the Dolomites and within the Brenta group are instantly recognised and have been made famous by the passage of mountaineering thanks to their central location and ease of access, the Cima d'Ambiez remains apart, belonging to her own reserved and quiet corner, in the company of other towers, content in the knowledge that she is recognised as the perfect rock face, the queen of relaxing climbing and guarantee of vertical elegance and enjoyable.

Maybe it was the innate call of my roots or the natural attraction to the places which oversaw my birth and to which I continue to trust my existence, or more likely the singular nature of the valley and the unique walls which surround it, but the fatal attraction remains apparent, which has transformed over the years into a burning passion, encouraging me to get to know the most hidden and rarely visited corners and consequently searching for the new and unknown on the rocks faces of distinctive rock.

And the valley still has lots of rare gems, little or unknown, on which it is possible to develop our evolution and research, you just have to explore the less visited faces.

There is a profound connection between man and his mountain, which can create those subtle

signs of preference. I can easily remember that I was always drawn to the absolute vertical nature of the walls of the Val d'Ambiez, but without ever being too obsessed by them: of deciding to try this type of clean and elegant climbing, but never becoming dependant on it; to experience the aesthetic fascination with the rock and the freedom of its surroundings, whilst forever keeping the mind free from fixation.

A true passion first must be chosen, then can be taken deep into your free spirit, in harmony with yourself and others: all this whilst trying not to become a slave to it, or a sterile fanatic of your own passion.

Every time I find myself going over these old historic climbs, I enjoy the privilege of putting a foot back in time and I often find myself imagining what went through the heads of our predecessors as they conceived and climbed these walls with the limited gear and material they had access to.

Climbing these routes signifies reliving intense moments, fragments of history, and thinking of the elegance and simplicity of the mountaineering of days gone by. Mountaineering with a capital "M", made of determination, passion and sacrifice.

Cima d'Ambiez and the towers which surround it, Cima Tose, le punte dell'Ideale, Steck and Castei, the walls of Pratofiorito, Tose, Cima Susat and d'Agola, the Cede range and the spires around it, the huge Cima Ghez and other lesser known faces represent only a fraction of mountaineering history, yet these rare and sought-after pieces make up and complete the great jigsaw of the mountain.

How great and unique it would be to hear the thoughts and feelings that Marino Stenico, Pino Fox, Marino Armani, Ettore Castiglioni, Armando Aste, Claude Barbier, Heinz Steinkötter, Dietrich Hasse, Lotar Brandler must have felt in their own words, to mention but a few of the first visitors to these faces who left their mark both on the rock and in history.

And how, inspired by these thousands of fragments of memory, I myself still feel the son of great dreams and fantasies, emotions which I tried and still try to realise in these idealised and imagined lines which wend their way up high.

Already from my first approach along these folds of perfect rock, I felt immediately drawn in by the continual search for lines and in finding myself free in my movements and fantasies, and as the years have gone by this link with the vertical world remains unchanged, in fact, every pretext to go and experience this limestone is irresistible.

After my first adventurous and at times reckless experiences of climbing the unique wall of the Ambiez, the spires surrounding it, and, remaining in the valley, the dozens of other faces where



I was able to complete the first repeats of many routes, receiving invaluable lessons in style and little gems of knowledge which were necessary for maturing as a mountaineer, the fascination for the new and known overcome the curious side of my dreams.

My only concern?

Talking about them, writing them down, letting people know about them; because the satisfaction of climbing alone just to do it, to feel in physical and perfect balance with your own mind is always so great...or maybe also because of the strange pangs of embarrassment in admitting to have once again been drawn to the madness, bewitched by this excessive - if super calculated - risk, which remains so subject to the unexpected.

Witnesses?

Not important. But certainly the rock, the sun, the wind, the sky, the mist, sometimes even the snow, very occasionally a slightly intimidated climbing partner or, more often, the binoculars of a friend, but above all Ignazio and Roberto, the managers of Rifugio Agostini, who, when I returned to say hello maybe on the "late side of things", accompanied me with the solemn feeling that the real madmen are those who "stay outside" in freedom and not those shut in the asylum.

I realise that the result of a passionate and methodical search for the so-called sense of closing in on a climb, particularly on such a beautiful face as the Ambiez could appear exaggerated

to some people. Nevertheless I still love to trace possible lines, if only to demonstrate the fact that, if you don't put limits on your imagination, much is still possible; however this is on the condition that you don't tamper with the masterpieces already in place, always aware that the true value of a new ascent depends also on the originality of the previous routes and the consideration of what others are doing.

And time, as we know, can be master of experience for motivated and sensitive souls, ready to create emotions of knowledge and feelings of adventure.

Elio Orlandi



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CIMA DI PRATOFIORITO 2908 m

Aste Corner

EAST FACE

FIRST ASCENT:

Armando Aste,
Fausto Susatti
(31st July- 1st August 1953)

FIRST SOLO ASCENT:

Andrea Taddei
(11th July 1976)

LENGTH: 350m

GRADE: V+ VI A0 A1

STYLE: Trad

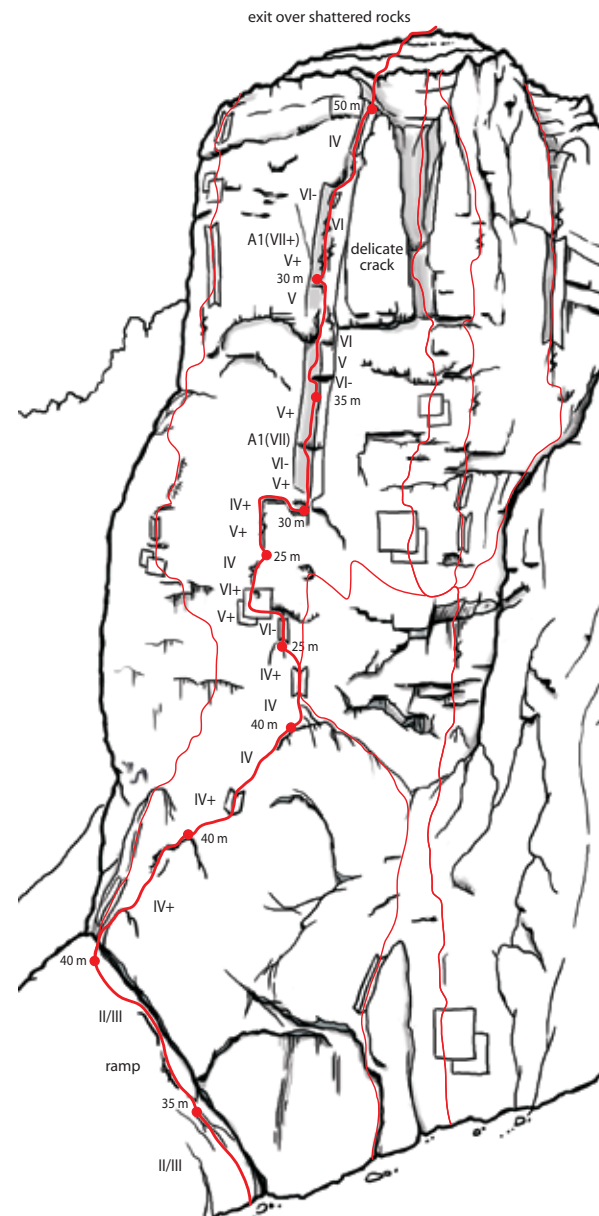
PROTECTION:

Good, large cams useful

ROCK: Excellent



013



Impressive and challenging route even if not particularly long, one of Armando Aste's true masterpieces. The route reaches and overcomes the regular and vertical corner which carves through the upper section of the east face. The climbing is continually sustained, predominantly freed with a few aided sections. Medium and large cams are advised.

APPROACH

From Rifugio Agostini head towards the chapel. A path branches off right and ascends over grass towards the base of the face. The start of the route is on the obvious leftwards ramp at the base of the face (0.30h).

ROUTE

P1. Climb the base rocks via a leftwards-trending diagonal ramp (35m, II, III, belay with 2 pegs).

P2. Follow the ramp until its end, level with a small saddle (40m, II, III, belay on 2 pegs).

P3. Climb obliquely right over ledges and small walls to reach a pulpit (40m, IV, IV+, 2 pegs, belay on 2 pegs).

P4. A few metres to the right, climb the small corner then move further right to a ledge (40m, IV, IV+, 1 peg, belay on 2 pegs).

P5. Move onto a ledge under-



neath a large yellow roof, then follow a crack until below the roof. Traverse left for 6m and climb into a niche. Exit this to the left and climb a crack to reach an uncomfortable belay (25m, V+, VI+, 7 pegs, belay on 2 pegs).

P6. Continue climbing the crack (V+) for 10m until a small ledge. Protect yourself from above on 2 pegs then descend right to a narrow ledge. This leads rightwards to the middle of the corner (30m, V+, IV-, 5 pegs, belay on 2 pegs).

P7. Climb the corner on excellent grey rock, passing a roof on the left to reach a red overhang (35m, V+, A1, 6 pegs, belay on 2 pegs).

P8. To the left follow a crack on delicate rock to reach a yellow/black overhang (20m, VI A1, 9 pegs, peg and thread belay).

P9. Traverse right over a slab, then climb an arête for a few metres to then move back left reaching a grassy ledge underneath another large overhang. Now climb a black crack, overcoming a loose overhanging bottleneck by moving to the left into an easier corner which leads back right to reach a ledge (40m, IV, V).

P10. Scramble over broken rock to reach the summit ridge and Cima Sud (II III).

DESCENT

From Cima Sud, follow a small ridge to Cima Centrale. Follow the narrow but easy ridge northwards. Leave Cima Nord on the right and descend (snow possible) until the Bocchetta di Pratofiorito, leaving you on the shoulders of Cima Nord and Torre Lenzi. Go west around the Cima Susat, descending the Vedretta di Pratofiorito for 100m. Contour over rocky ground around the base of the rocks until reaching the path which leads from Rifugio XII Apostoli up to the Bocchetta dei Due Denti. From here, descend the steep via ferrata Castiglioni until the scree at the base of the face. From here continue to reach Rifugio Agostini (1.30 – 2h).



MASÈ-MAROLDA VARIANT

Grade V+, A2

In September 1958 Toni Masè and Alberto Marolda opened a direct start variation to the Aste-Susatti corner. This begins ten or so metres right of the ramp of the Aste route, and just left of a yellow-grey pillar leaning against the base ledge. Climb to the top of this then continue up a crack to arrive below some large overhangs. Contour around these to the left rejoining the Aste route at the fifth belay. Rather than traversing left, continue direct overcoming an overhang to reach the start of the corner.

Which one is stupid, man or rock?

30 years have gone by since a summer's evening when I found myself below the Cima di Pratofiorito and looked on its beautiful east corner and the Aste-Susatti route with admiration. As a German tourist, I knew nothing about the climbs but despite this, the corner attracted me a great deal, and I couldn't help but go and have a look that very evening.

Right at the start I found some gear, a hexcentric 7 with a sling. "What modern gear!" I thought and put it in my pocket. I hadn't brought anything with me, no rope, no carabiners, because I was used to climbing classic routes with no protection. And this corner certainly gave the impression of a classic route, more than classic! I continued towards the top, after a traverse left following excellent corners, and just as I saw that the summit was already close, almost within reach, a smooth crack barred the last few metres before the easy top section. I tried jamming my hand in the crack numerous times, but just where it might have been possible, there was a broken chock in the way, beyond use. My boots were too wide to find a good placement in the crack.

So there I was, a long way from the ground and this stupid crack was ruining the entire adventure. Go back? No, it was too late. I mulled the situation over. Maybe it wasn't a stupid crack, I began to think, and this was already my philosophy, that only a human being is able to be stupid. It is very easy to project our own failings on innocent rock formations. So the crack was stupid, because it was in the way. I wanted to take the chock out, to jam my hand in. But I couldn't, it was wedged fast. In my desperation I stuck my hand in my pocket and drew out the retrieved hex. It fitted like a glove! With a good tug on its sling I was instantly beyond this "stupid section".

During the descent, which ill advisedly I had taken immediately on the right, I reached another obstacle, but with a long traverse out of the steep ravine I arrived back on the scree. What a stupid descent, I thought, with no cairns, so easy to go wrong! That there was a good and safe descent I discovered only years later. And that modern hex, my salvation, accompanied me on my future adventures for decades to come.

Heinz Grill



Manuel Zambanini on P9 of the Aste Corner
(Photo: Luca Cornella)

CIMA DI PRATOFIORITO 2908 m

Joshua

EAST FACE

FIRST ASCENT:
Giuliano Stenghel,
Mariano Rizzi,
Marco Cavaliere
(13th August 1993)

FIRST REPEAT:
Fabrizio Miori, Walter
Maino (16th July 1995)

LENGTH: 450m

GRADE: VI VI+ A3

STYLE: Trad

GEAR: Nuts, cams and
pegs

ROCK: Excellent

*Description by Giuliano
Stenghel*



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