



ROUTE 2

THE MARSH COUNTRY OF VILLANOVA

Departure: Bagnacavallo

Circuit: Bagnacavallo - Boncellino - Traversara - Villanova - Villa Prati - Bagnacavallo

Length: km 29,53

Difficulty: medium

You don't need to be a champion to enjoy cycling in lower Romagna. There are no mountains, no hills, and the countryside is dominated by a wide river plain which is ideal for cycling. Pedalling here is a pleasure, not an ordeal. You'll pass through fields of exuberant vegetation which were formerly bog and marsh until the reclamation work of the 19th century. Everywhere the scenery is dotted with towers and buildings ranging in bearing from the humble vernacular to the imposing seigneurial. Highlight of the route is the small village of "Villanova delle Capanne", built in the 14th century on the left bank of the river Lamone and the hub of the reclamation campaign. Today, the village preserves many vestiges of its old marshland culture and the many uses of marsh grasses.

Departure point for this route is piazza della Libertà in the heart of Bagnacavallo.¹ From here, take via Matteotti,² and when you come to the roundabout pick up the cycle lane which runs along via Di Vittorio to the right. Follow the cycle lane as far as the junction with the San Vitale highway. At the traffic lights the cycle lane ends. Cross the junction and head into via Boncellino. On the other side of the level crossing, a short detour on via Antiche Terme to the right will take you to the Verna Mario winery.³ Back on via Boncellino, head straight on. At the junction with via Galavotti, bear left on via Boncellino⁴ and then right into via Reda. Follow the signs on via Reda until the motorway bridge. From here the route enters the open countryside. At the junction with via Lame keep left and take via Ponte Nuovo, then turn left onto via Malpeli. At the junction with via Boncellino turn left and continue along this road, where the sights of interest include casa Baldini⁵ and a farm, La Rondine,⁶ on the right, and another farm, Ballardini-Ricci,⁷ on the left. At the intersection with via Sottofiume Boncellino turn right and then, a little way on, left onto via Argine Lamone.⁸ At the end of the ramp, where the asphalt road continues on the right, turn left along the embankment. Following the bank of the Lamone⁹ you'll see the village of Boncellino on the left. Then, a few kilometres on, you come to the Muraglione waterfall.¹⁰ At this point, when you get near a brick-coloured house turn right off the embankment road onto via Sottofiume Boncellino, where on your right you'll see the Zini Allero farm.¹¹ At the junction with the SP253 head straight on along via Torri: on the left, note the Hercolani tower.¹² After just over a kilometre you'll come to Traversara. Here, keep straight on along via Entirate. Along this road on your way to Villanova di Bagnacavallo are several remarkable old houses on both sides of the road.¹³ Further along, via Entirate becomes via Superiore before leading into Villanova. At the roundabout in the centre of the village, turn left into via della Chiesa. At this point take a rest for an unmissable attraction: the museum of marshland culture and its unrivalled collection of reed and grass work.¹⁴ Further along via della Chiesa on the left is the Canadian war cemetery.¹⁵ Past the cemetery, turn right into via Aguta and then left into via Viazza Nuova. About two kilometres down the road you'll come to the bridge over Fosso Vecchio. Here, on either side of the river, are the "Preta" and "Valletta" reforestation areas,¹⁶ both well worth investigating. Now continue along via Viazza Nuova until via Sinistra Canale Inferiore where, turning left before the intersection, you join via Destra Canale Inferiore. At the junction with via Cocchi turn right and then left to rejoin via Destra Canale Inferiore. This stretch of the road is also known as "ciclabile del Naviglio" as it has a cycle lane. Beside the mill of Molino Quercioli is a pleasantly shady stopping place with trestle tables and a water fountain. Back on the road and before arriving back in Bagnacavallo, on the left is Liverani Falco farm.¹⁷ Go straight ahead until you come to

the wooden bridge. Cross the bridge then turn left. A couple of hundred metres further along, the cycle lane enter the village of Bagnacavallo. Keep straight on and, at the third roundabout, turn right into via Matteotti and you're back where you started from in piazza della Libertà.

* From **spring 2006** it will be possible to follow the bank of the Lamone as far as Marina Romea (see: "Down the Lamone towards the sea", page 48), meaning you won't have to divert onto via Sottofiume Boncellino but can continue along the river bank as far as the bridge at Villanova. From here, head down and cross the roundabout in the piazza into via della Chiesa, where you rejoin the route as indicated above. By cutting down to the flood bed of the Lamone you can avoid the level crossing with the busy San Vitale provincial highway (SP253).

WHAT TO SEE

1. Piazza della Libertà

Overlooking piazza della Libertà is the neoclassical **town hall**, built in 1791 to a design by Cosimo Morelli. Next door is the elegant **Goldoni theatre**. Opened in 1845, the interior is sumptuously decorated with stuccoes and frescoes. The impressive tempera backdrop by Bolognese painter Antonio Muzzi is a typical example of the 19th-century vogue for drama-drenched history painting. On the west side of the piazza are **Palazzo Vecchio** (originally dating from the 12th and 13th centuries but restored on several occasions since) and the **town tower**. Built in the first half of the 13th century, the tower has been rebuilt several times over the course of the centuries. Internally it's divided into three storeys. It was one of the first of such towers to be fitted with a clock, during the domination of the Este dynasty in the early 16th century. Its bottom level was used as a prison from the 17th to 19th centuries, and since then its three storeys have been known as Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise after Dante's Divine Comedy. One of the tower's most (in)famous inmates was the bandit Stefano Pelloni, nom de guerre Il Passatore ("The Ferryman"), who was imprisoned here in 1849. One curious feature: the large nails driven into the wall at the base of the tower were used as a kind of lost-and-found office. People finding lost items would hang them from the nails for their rightful owners to reclaim them.



2. Via Matteotti - Palazzo Capra

On the left before the roundabout stands the 17th-century Palazzo Papini, later renamed Palazzo Capra. Rising from a flared basement, the façade of the palace has windows decorated with raised mouldings and scrolls on the ground

floor, while the windows of the piano nobile above are topped with triangular and round pediments. Crowning the façade is a heavy cornice carried on modillions. The entrance leads into a broad atrium and court. From here a grand staircase with stuccoes and frescoed vaults leads to the apartments of the piano nobile. Queen Christina of Sweden stayed at Palazzo Papini-Capra in 1662 during her journey to Rome. The palace was partially renovated in the mid-1990s.

3. The Verna Mario winery

The winery of Verna Mario (via Antiche Terme, 1) is a member of "Il Bagnacavallo" co-operative and is open to visitors. Verna Mario produces and sells a range of vinegars including condimento balsamico bianco, made from white vinegar and grape must, and the famous L'asé d'Bagnacaval (vinegar produced in Bagnacavallo). All products are manufactured by the traditional natural wood shavings fermentation method. Tel. +39 0545-61690



4. Casa Conti Guidi

A stone's throw from the junction with via Reda on via Boncellino 113 stands Casa Conti Guidi, headquarters of "Il Bagnacavallo" co-operative (tel. +39 0545 63094). It's open to visitors, and the "Bottega della bontà" on the ground floor houses an exhibition of wines, honey, vinegar, preserves and other traditional produce. A restaurant now occupies the former stables. Upstairs are the *Sala dell'Arte e della Cultura* (Hall of art and culture), dedicated to literature on Romagnol heritage, a conference area named *Sala dei Legni* (Hall of woods) and a third hall, *Sala dei Timpani* (Hall of tympanum), which hosts educational events as well as shows, concerts and exhibitions. In the gallery outside is a market selling flowers, fruit, salamis, cheeses, wines and other traditional produce. There's also a wood-fired oven for baking bread. On Sunday afternoons Casa Conti Guidi is open for light refreshments with the delicious Romagnol bread known as *piadina*, sausage, cheeses, sweets and wines. Bikes and binoculars are available for hire. Casa Conti Guidi was built in 1883 and was the last farmhouse to be erected in Bagnacavallo by the descendants of the Guidi family of Faenza, who inherited vast tracts of land in this area in the second half of the 19th century. Every one of the estates built by the Guidi comprised two separate buildings, and in each estate the architectural features of the two buildings are identical. The buildings are located symmetrically, usually on each side of a road. Today, eleven of these buildings remain, nearly all of them in the vicinity of Boncellino.



5. Casa Baldini

Casa Baldini was built in the 17th century as a country villa for the Papini family. It was acquired by the Baldini family in 1772 and converted into a farmhouse. Inside, the house retains some 19th-century frescoes and quadratura work. Beside the house is an oratory dedicated to St Antony Abbot.

6. La Rondine study farm

La Rondine (via Boncellino, 178) is a family-run farm school which is open to visitors. Orchards and vineyards occupy some eighty acres of the farm; it also raises cattle of the local Romagnol variety and numerous farmyard animals. The rural character of the Romagna plain is perfectly preserved here in the form of hedgerows, groves, and vines trained in the *viti maritate* method, i.e. hung well clear of the ground amid other vegetation. La Rondine is committed to organic farming and sells all its own produce. You're welcome to visit to take a look at the livestock and orchards, and you can also try the locally-made organic produce.
Tel. +39 347 4230464 – +39 0545 69262



7. Ballardini-Ricci farm

The Ballardini-Ricci farm (via Boncellino, 203) is another member of "Il Bagnacavallo" co-operative and is open to visitors. A family-run concern, it's farmed using only environmentally-friendly techniques. The introduction of non-yielding hedgerows and thickets has stimulated the recovery of a fast-disappearing local ecosystem, while making the scenery a lot more attractive too. The farm now produces and sells quality wines including "Il Boncellino" (a dry white wine), "L'Ambrosia" (a strong, sweet white), "Bursòn" (a red made from grapes of the indigenous Longanesi vineyard), and "L'uva dora" (a dry red made from Fortana grapes). Also sold directly from the farm are fruit and vegetables, ornamental plants, cereals and grain.
Tel. +39 0545 69303 – +39 349-3006430

8. Via Argine Lamone – the legend of Il Passator Cortese

On the left after the rise leading to via Argine Lamone is the landing stage where the father of celebrated bandit Stefano Pelloni (1824 – 1851) operated his ferry service. Pelloni was known as *Il Passatore* ("the ferryman") after his father's occupation. After his imprisonment for stealing lucerne, Pelloni became an outlaw and assembled a large band of fellow brigands. Though there's no evidence to substantiate the legend that he took from the rich to give to the poor, Pelloni was given the honorific title of Cortese in Giovanni Pascoli's poem Romagna, written thirty years after the bandit was gunned down by the papal militia. The name has stuck ever since, and Pelloni's exploits are now part of the popular imagination. Novels, poems, plays, and films continue to fuel the legend. *Il Passatore* has left his mark on the local wine trade too, and in the second fortnight of April every year Boncellino holds a festival known as the Festa del Passatore.



9. The river Lamone

The ancient "Anemo" cited by Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 AD) in his *Naturalis Historia*, the Lamone rises near Colla di Casaglia in the Apennines and drains into the Adriatic over a course of some 100 kilometres. On its way across the plain of Romagna to the sea it passes Casalborsetti, Marina Romea, Marradi, Brisighella, Faenza, Bagnacavallo and Russi. And it's namechecked in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the poet describes Faenza as "the city of the Lamone".



10. Il Muraglione

In the 1950s the waterfalls of the Muraglione were known as "the beach of Bagnacavallo". In feast days in summer the inhabitants of the town would meet here in the shadow of the 19th-century watermill to swim, sunbathe and socialize. Today, it's still a popular place for fishing and walking.



11. Zini Aliero farm

The Zini Aliero farm (via Sottofiume, 15) is another member of "Il Bagnacavallo" co-operative and, like the others, is open to visitors. Most of the farm is planted with vines and orchards, and wine and fruit are available for sale. The wines produced here include whites such as "Passito del Lamone" and "Bianco del Mulino", and reds including "Sangiovese Ravenna" and "Bursòn", available in "etichetta Blu" and "etichetta Nera" versions. Tel. +39 0545 63490 – +39 347 1365833

12. Traversara – the tower

The tower of Traversara was built in 1371 by the Ercolani family. When the Ercolani later built their own palazzo in the centre of Bagnacavallo, the tower became their summer retreat, a function which it continued to perform right through to the 19th century. It was modified in 1717 and again in 1736. Badly damaged by the bombardments of 1944, the tower has since been partially rebuilt.



13. Casa Baldi Randi, la Cagnazza, la Bubana

Casa Baldi Randi was built in 1850 as a country retreat for cardinal Lorenzo Randi, a native of Bagnacavallo then living in Rome. Architecturally the house is typical of the Veneto-Ferrara taste in country villas, with a large atrium opening onto numerous reception rooms. Adjacent to the villa is the oratory of Our Lady of the Assumption.

La Cagnazza: This building owes its rather strange nickname ("The Cur") to the sculptural feature in the form of a dog on the top of the façade facing the river.

La Bubana: built in the late 18th century, La Bubana seems to have originally been a monastery. Like La Cagnazza, it



has a curious name, perhaps a conflation of the surname of its owners, the Bubani, and an expression in the local dialect, *bubâna*, meaning abundance.

14. Villanova - Museum of marsh grasses

Villanova di Bagnacavallo is the local capital of reed crafts. This excellent museum has recovered and conserved an exceptional local heritage of the many methods of working marsh grasses, and is a good introduction to the traditional marshland culture. Special attention goes to the time-honoured techniques of reed work which flourished in the small community of Villanova from the 14th century until as recently as the 1970s. The museum organizes workshops for those wishing to learn the techniques, and every year in the second fortnight of September hosts a reed crafts fair. Tel. +39 0545.47122



15. The Canadian war cemetery

Opened in 1944 by the Canadian government, this cemetery contains the graves of over two hundred Canadian soldiers who died fighting the Nazi and fascist forces in a three-month campaign from November 1944 to January 1945.



16. The Preta and Valletta reforestation zones

Along via Viazza Nuova on either side of the Fosso Vecchio bridge, the Preta and Valletta reforestation zones are owned by the farm labourers' cooperative of Bagnacavallo and Faenza. Both areas, one just over eleven hectares in area and the other just over five, are entirely given over to indigenous vegetation, meadowland and totally uncultivated countryside. They're also a haven for animals of many species, including wild ducks, grey herons, black-winged stilts, and many varieties of eagles, hares, pheasants and quails.

17. The "Bucolica Domus" Liverani farm

The small family-run farm known as "Bucolica Domus" (via Destra Canale Inferiore, 4) is a member of "Il Bagnacavallo" co-operative and is open to visitors. The farm produces some quality wines which can be bought on the premises: reds include a "Cabernet Sauvignon" and "Petit Verdot", while "Donna Bruna" is a sweet rose wine obtained from Cabernet grapes whose skins are removed almost immediately after vinification begins. Tel. + 39 0545-62092



DIRECTION (km count)	NAME OF ROAD	KM of stretch	ROAD SURFACE	NOTES _ WHAT TO SEE
Departure point	Bagnacavallo piazza della Libertà	00,00	flagstones	departure point - n. 1 buildings on piazza della Libertà
Straight ahead ↑ km 00,00	from piazza della Libertà towards via Matteotti	00,25	asphalt	- n. 2 Palazzo Capra
R → km 00,25	enter cycle lane from roundabout on via Matteotti	00,10	paving tile	traffic lights at S. Vitale highway visible ahead
L ← km 00,35	leave cycle track at traffic lights / pedestrian crossing and cross S. Vitale highway	00,05	asphalt	reduce speed, careful at junction, press button at traffic lights
Straight ahead ↑ km 00,40	cross S. Vitale highway to enter via Boncellino	00,75	asphalt	- n. 3 the Verna Mario winery
L ← km 01,15	follow signs for via Boncellino	00,05	asphalt	- n. 4 Casa Conti Guidi - "Il Bagnacavallo" cooperative
R → km 01,20	turn into via Reda	00,15	asphalt	bridge across motorway visible from here
R → km 01,35	follow signs for via Reda at end of motorway bridge	00,55	asphalt	
L ← km 01,90	keep left to enter via Ponte Nuovo	01,40	asphalt	
L ← km 3,30	turn into via Malpeli	01,35	asphalt and gravel	
R → km 04,65	via Boncellino	01,25	asphalt	- n. 5 Casa Baldini - n. 6 "La Rondine" study farm - n. 7 Ballardini-Ricci farm
R → km 05,90	via Sottofiume Boncellino	00,20	asphalt	
L ← km 06,10	via Argine Lamone	00,19	asphalt	
L ← km 6,29	the asphalt road continues right; turn left along the river bank	02,22	grass and earth trail	- n. 8 the legend of the bandit Il Passator Cortese
Straight ahead ↑ km 8,51	continue along the river bank, ignoring the broad ramp that descends towards the river	00,67	dirt	the earth track is not always visible - n. 9 the river Lamone - n. 10 Muraglione waterfall
L ← km 9,18	downhill near a brick-coloured house	00,07	dirt	careful at the barrier; from spring 2006 it will be possible to follow the Lamone as far

DIRECTION (km count)	NAME OF ROAD	KM of stretch	ROAD SURFACE	NOTES _ WHAT TO SEE
				as Marina Romea without having to leave the river bank
Straight ahead ↑ km 9,25	via Sottofiume Boncellino	01,85	asphalt	heavy traffic and narrow road (no cycle lane) - n. 11 Zini Aliero farm
Straight ahead ↑ km 11,10	intersection with S. Vitale highway (SP 253), level crossing via Torri SP 25	01,30	asphalt	dangerous intersection with poor visibility heavy traffic – keep your wits about you! - n. 12 Torre Hercolani
Straight ahead ↑ km 12,40	Traversara (bend) – towards via Entirate	03,50	asphalt	a narrow road with heavy traffic and no cycle lane
Straight ahead ↑ km 15,90	via Entirate changes name to via Villanova Superiore in Villanova	01,30	asphalt	- n. 13 Casa Baldi Randi, la Cagnazza, la Bubana
L ← km 17,20	at roundabout take via della Chiesa	00,80	asphalt	- n. 14 Marshland museum (Ecomuseo delle erbe palustri) - n. 15 Canadian war cemetery
R → km 18,00	via Aguta	00,50	asphalt	
L ← km 18,50	via Viazza Nuova	02,50	asphalt	- n. 16 Preta and Valletta reforestation zones
L ← km 21,00	via Destra Canale Inferiore (Naviglio cycle lane)	02,50	gravel for 00,80 asphalt for 01,50	
R → km 23,50	at junction turn into via Cocchi	00,10	asphalt	
L ← km 23,60	cycle lane on via Destra Canale Inferiore	03,11	asphalt	
Straight ahead ↑ km 26,71	Quercioli mill	01,39	asphalt	stopping point with benches and drinking fountain - n. 17 the "Bucolica Domus" Liverani farm
R → km 28,10	cycle lane crosses wooden bridge	01,23	asphalt and coarse sand	careful with all the roundabouts and intersections
R → km 29,33	via Matteotti	0,20	asphalt	
Arrival	piazza della Libertà	--	asphalt	end of route km 29,53