

Fornaci di Barga and Loppia

Fornaci di Barga is the industrial heart of Barga. The largest industry is the huge KME factory which produces copper sheet for roofing and also the strip from which Euro coins are minted. The ancient church and village of **Loppia** are on the roman road from Lucca to Barga. The walk makes an excellent circuit taking about 4-5 hours, partly on tarred roads, partly on woodland tracks and meadows. Parts of the route are marked with the red and white symbol of the **CAI**. ■ ■

Leaving Casa Fontana go right, up the hill towards the Duomo. At the church of SS Crocifissi, the steps on the left lead up to the terrace in front of the Duomo, from which you will get a magnificent view of the Apuane mountains. If the doors are open it is worth going into the Duomo to see the carved marble pulpit and the giant wooden statue of San Cristoforo, the patron saint of Barga. It is said that during the many wars in the 13th & 14thC, the statue was held up above the walls to protect the town. Apparently iron arrow tips found in the wood corroborate this legend. Continue across the terrace and down the steep street past the gate (to your left) above which is a small replica of the giant statue. The garden and vineyard beyond the gate are the property of the bell ringers of the Duomo, and every summer there are communal al-fresco dinners or "Cena" in the vineyard.


Continue on down via del Pretorio, past the church and Conservatorio of **Santa Elisabetta**, which has several interesting della Robbia terracotta plaques, and on down to **Porta Reale**, the main gate into the historic centre. The area to your left, outside the gates is the Fosso, once a moat and later an area for markets and for playing an ancient ball game against the city walls. At the top of the Fosso take the road to the right, via Bellavista, past the entrance gates to the (sadly abandoned) Hotel Villa Libano, and on down to the next bend in the road. Here take the narrow road, via dei frati, to the right, which leads down to the hospital and convent of **San Francesco**, once a pilgrim hospital and now a modern hospital serving the area. If the gates to the convent are open it is worth a visit, and worth the €1 fee to illuminate the walls with the 15th century della Robbia terracotta wall plaques

At the hospital turn left, following the public road down past new house building and old farmhouses. When the tarred road forks, take the road to the right and on down the tarred public road till you reach a junction where there is a large oak tree. Go left here and pass a sign "Strada senza sbocca" ie No Through Road. It is however open to pedestrians. At the foot of the hill you will see gates leading up to a house perched above the road. Here go left down the forest track and immediately right down a narrow path. This is part of the ancient Strada Vicinale Gragno-Catarozzo. The track passes through a woodcutters yard and then splits with a modern forest track to the right and a narrow, overgrown path to the left. Take this path which winds down through the woods. Take care as the path is badly maintained and overgrown. Finally, passing between an old house and a house under construction the track rejoins the public road and continues down to Fornaci.

When you meet the main road turn left and **take care** as you walk a short distance along the road without pavements (sidewalks). Fornaci is not a pretty town but there are a number of shops, cafes and restaurants so it is worth a browse or stop for a gelato or some lunch.

There is a bus service from Fornaci to Barga but it is not regular and you should check the timetable before you set off if you want to get the bus back.

As you walk through the town, past the main shopping area, look out on the left for a NO ENTRY sign and the via Traversa. Take via Traversa and continue along it till you meet the strada provinciale. On the left is a small church and here you have a choice. You may return directly to Barga or you can take a longer route via Loppia.

For the direct route take the narrow road which runs along the side of the church and is marked with the red and white sign of the CAI . This road winds up through scattered houses and vineyards and open fields before becoming a grass track and then a path. There is one short steep stretch which has been provided with wooden steps and handrail. Shortly after that you rejoin the public road at a yellow house, but immediately after the road swings left and you should continue straight ahead on a grass track between vineyards, that takes you to **Villa Biondi**, a magnificent 17th century country estate which was won by the family in the 19th century in a game of cards! Continue on the path past farm buildings eventually rejoining the tarmac road, which leads up to the hospital and back to Barga.



For the route via **Loppia**, continue along the strada provinciale which leads to Barga. Take great care on this section as there are no pavements (sidewalks). The road takes you along the back of a modern industrial and commercial area, past modern housing, until on your left there is a large and imposing villa. Cross the road here and shortly afterwards the road to the Chiesa di Santa Maria is signposted to the right. Take this road past fields and you will pass the cemetery, and, up to the left, the romanesque church of **Loppia** dating from the 8-9thC. In the 14thC, as a result of the series of wars between Lucca and Florence, Loppia was totally depopulated, the church fell into ruin and its parish was absorbed by Barga. The church was restored in the 16thC, The track here continues around the north side of the church and joins the modern road to Barga. However you can continue around the church, back down past the cemetery, containing the impressive tombs of the local families, and turn to the left towards the stone bridge which leads up to Seggio and the road to Tiglio.

Instead of crossing the stone bridge, where there is a signpost set up by CAI indicating the way to Barga, take the track to the left, over a concrete bridge and following the Loppora stream. Follow this track till you see a CAI signpost indicating



the route to the left. This track curves round till it reaches a stream which you can easily ford and cross straight over to a long grassy clearing. Continue on the path (intermittently marked) crossing a surfaced tarmac drive with an electrically operated gate. Do not turn here but continue straight across and over more meadows,.You will see the Duomo of Barga straight ahead.

Continue on this path until you see an abandoned white van by the side of the stream, turn RIGHT here until you meet a well surfaced track where you will turn LEFT. Follow this track until it turns up to the left and here turn RIGHT onto the narrow path through a meadow. This path eventually meets a rough forestry track which you should continue along about 20m looking out for a narrow path on the left, marked with red and white, which takes you steeply up through the woods (it can be a bit of a scramble). You will arrive at a wooden handrail which leads up to the left. Do **not** continue upwards but turn to the right and follow the path below the cliff of conglomerate rock on which the Duomo is built. Shortly you will find huge brick arches built in the 1930s to protect the cliff from landslips, and you will arrive at Porta Macchiaia. Enter the gates and go along Via di Mezzo till you are back at Casa Fontana.