

The Civeron mountain (called "Civaron" in the Austrian maps of the late 19th century) when viewed from the northern side of the middle Valsugana valley, from Telve to Scurelle, appears as a wooded rounded hill with a vaguely trapezoidal shape. Stretching parallel to the rugged ridge of the Plateau of the Seven Vicenza Communities, with its maximum altitude of 1032 meters, it contributes to delimiting the narrow Coalba valley and the sunny "prai de Ziveron" between the Mesole area and the village of Olle Valsugana.

Not particularly remarkable in terms of elevation, especially compared to the summits above it, during the Great War, Civeron had a tumultuous and complex history that began in the first half of June 1915 with the non-violent occupation of the entire ridge by the 15th infantry division. The Austrian defenses had been withdrawn to the valley barrier at Levico (soon advancing to the village of Novaledo) even before the declaration of war by the Kingdom of Italy, leaving the middle Valsugana valley at the mercy of the Italian forces advancing from the Primolano border.

From the autumn of 1915, with the consolidation of the front line at Borgo, and the subsequent advance of the royal troops towards Roncegno and Marte in February/March 1916, Civeron found itself directly behind the Italian lines, housing medium and small caliber artillery batteries with a range covering the Val di Sella, the western valley floor of Roncegno, and the southeastern slopes of Panarotta.

Starting from 15th May 1916, the collateral actions of the Strafexpedition (the major "Highland Offensive" unleashed by Austria to reach the plain between Vicenza and Treviso) forced the Italian forces to retreat, and after fierce fighting they also abandoned Civeron, falling back to the Ospedaletto line. However, a few weeks later, the infantry of the Campania and Siena brigades repeatedly attempted to reoccupy the mountain, which had been strongly fortified by the enemy, only managing to establish themselves on its extreme eastern portion.

From the end of June 1916 to September 1917, violent battles raged on Civeron, where the opposing trenches were, in some outposts, less than five meters apart. Field fortification activities left significant marks on the terrain, many of which can still be seen, despite more than a century having passed, the proliferation of tall vegetation and undergrowth, and the human influence with timber recovery activities and the construction of forest roads.

With the establishment of this historical-thematic circuit, the ANA group of Castelnuovo and the municipal administration of the town aimed to enhance the material evidence left on the territory by the Great War, combining it with period iconography that allows events to be contextualized and the transformations of the sites caused by the conflict to be interpreted.

The proposed itinerary unfolds along a loop path, always on forest roads, which safely leads to a series of sites significant to the war history of the mountain, connecting the hamlet of Santa Margherita (municipality of Castelnuovo) with Olle (a hamlet of Borgo Valsugana) through the battlefield, and ending the circuit through the Spagolle road to return to the Brenta bridge below the medieval church. Some informative panels, strategically placed along the route, provide historical and geographical information to the hikers, making up the mosaic composed by soldiers from the two armies in two and a half years of suffering and bloodshed.

You are in the area of "Romanzina," from where, if the vegetation allows, you can enjoy a magnificent view of the basin of the middle Valsugana valley between Borgo, Castelnuovo, Scurelle, Carzano, and Telve. The area described above, a few weeks after the start of military operations in late spring 1915, had quickly become a patrolling ground for reconnaissance units from both sides: the Italians, from their fortified line under construction near the Ospedaletto railway station, pushed west up the Coalba Valley (between Mount Civeron and the northern walls of the Cima Dodici range, in the stretch from Cima Caldiera to Ortigara) to then descend on Olle and cautiously enter Borgo, which like Castelnuovo was still populated by civilians. On the other hand, the imperial troops descended from the Val Calamento at night to monitor the progress of the Italian royal forces and set up ambushes, often using hunting rifles equipped with scopes for precision shots. In one of these ambushes, on July 22, 1915, a group of guards from the XVII Battalion fell, leaving two dead on the field: guards Stefanini and Bedetti. The latter, decorated with a Silver Medal for Military Valor, has the Guardia di Finanza barracks in Trento still named after him. Similar clashes, sometimes even with German patrols and their "snipers," during the same period cost the Italians the loss of Marshal Pizzighella, a brave non-commissioned officer of the finance police who had commanded the Enego barracks before the war, and the cavalry lieutenant Edmondo Martucci della Spada, of the Treviso Lancers, who at the head of a small patrol ventured from Scurelle towards the village of Carzano.

On the last northern slopes of the mountain, shifted to your right, stands to this day the medieval church of Santa Margherita, the center of the small homonymous hamlet, where between spring and summer 1915 various skirmishes occurred between advancing Italian forces and bellicose Austro-Hungarian rearguards.

With an uncontested advance carried out in two stages (pompously called the "second and third offensive leaps") between August 15 and 24, 1915, the royal troops extended the occupation of the middle Valsugana westward to the height of the village of Borgo. But the shifting of the front line, which had left Castelnuovo in the immediate Italian rear areas, did not spare the village, still inhabited by civilians, the trauma of daily bombardments, often with incendiary shells, carried out by the imperial artillery positioned on the mountain stronghold of Panarotta. Already severely damaged since the fall of 1915, Castelnuovo was turned into a pyre during the bombardments at the beginning of the Austrian offensive in May 1916, which brought the imperial troops back through its now ruined and deserted buildings. The Italian army, in anticipation of the Strafexpedition, in early May had forced all the populations of the villages then occupied in Valsugana to flee towards the northwest and central-southern Italy. The nascent Austrian front line, consolidated after the advance in an easterly direction in June 1916 along the right bank of the Maso stream, then transformed the charred ruins of the village into a convenient forward refuge for the reinforcement troops for the trench lines of the new front. There, the kitchens were set up for preparing meals, which were then sent to the outposts beyond the "carrette" bridge at night, while the fighters found shelter and rest in the damp but protected cellars. This attracted the attention of the imposing Italian artillery array which completed the work of devastation throughout 1917. At the end of the war, of the 72 houses in Castelnuovo, only 6 could be considered substantially intact and immediately inhabitable.

You are in the area of "La Boa," just a few steps away from a panoramic viewpoint overlooking a vertical rock wall that, during the war, had been transformed by the Austrian troops into a machine gun position protected by concrete bunkers, wood, and sandbags on the ground. From here, it was possible to dominate the entire northeastern slope of Civeron and fire precise bursts down to the valley floor up to the mouth of the Maso river in the Brenta, where the Austrian valley line ascended towards "Il Boccardin."

A deep walkway allowed access, shielded from view and fire, to the nest of the automatic weapon. The soldiers stationed here had their quarters about a hundred meters higher up, in a charming wooded basin where the barracks were hidden from view of the Italians by both vegetation and the terrain configuration.

The Austrian garrison at Civeron had at their disposal a considerable number of machine guns, deemed essential to counter the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Italian forces. However, the relatively secondary character of the Valsugana front did not prioritize the equipment available in this sector in terms of modernity and efficiency. A significant portion of the automatic weapons distributed to the mountain garrison consisted of war loot, such as the Fiat Revelli M1914 machine guns seized from the Italians during the Strafexpedition or the Russian Maxim M1910s, shielded and mounted on the characteristic Sokolov model wheeled mount, captured from the Tsarist troops in the battles in Galicia and the Carpathians in 1914-1915. The few domestically-produced Schwarzlose machine guns available in Civeron, starting from the late 1916 period, were predominantly used in an anti-aircraft function, utilizing the versatile tripod to counter the increasingly intrusive low-altitude reconnaissance activity of the Italian aviation.

You are in the locality of "Scrozo Negro" (black rock); the toponym derives from the imposing rock cliff, visible even from the valley floor, that rises above the forest road you are traversing.

With the withdrawal of the Italian troops from Civeron on May 26, 1916, the entire mountain became part of the new Austro-Hungarian front line as a barrier to the valley. Due to its position, the mountain was well-suited to visually dominate the entire basin between the villages of Ospedaletto, Villa, Agnedo, Ivano, Fracena, Strigno, Scurelle, Spera, Carzano, Telve, and Borgo from the south: positioning medium and small caliber artillery adequately would have allowed effective interdiction of the main advance routes of the royal troops, a fact not overlooked by the responsible imperial command for the sector. The summer and autumn of 1916 had been extremely demanding for the garrison at Civeron, and little time was available for field fortification works, due to repeated Italian attempts to reoccupy the old positions. The heavy winter of 1916-1917, with its abundant snowfall, further delayed the plans of the imperial-regal pioneers and sappers. However, from the spring of 1917, taking advantage of the relative lull in operations along the Brenta river valley, they had the opportunity to transform the wooded rounded hill into an almost impregnable fortified stronghold to defend a complex of field batteries that controlled the entire middle Valsugana.

Since the Italian artillery had also positioned itself advantageously on Monte Lefre, which, at its 1300 meters altitude, clearly overlooked Civeron and could target the imperial batteries accurately once spotted, the imperial-regal pieces had to find shelter. The options were threefold: 1) position the artillery in sheltered locations to fire with indirect target indications from advanced observers; 2) camouflage the cannons with foliage to be renewed every few days; 3) place the cannons in caves to make it difficult for Italian counter-battery fire, which would have to target very small openings in the rock. In the Scrozo Negro site, the third solution was chosen: the overhanging rock cliff was excavated on its southern slope, above the road where you are located, creating two different entrances that were then reinforced and protected by reinforced concrete structures (still partially visible). Inside the rock, winding tunnels were created, with frequent changes in direction to make them not easily passable for shell fragments and bullets that might penetrate from the openings. These tunnels, wide enough to allow the towing of medium caliber pieces separating carriage and gun, led to underground "casemates" that housed the individual cannons. The gun muzzles faced out through openings of small dimensions, created in the rock wall facing the enemy and called "gun ports." Two of these openings, also with remnants of old cement frames, are clearly visible on the wall above you.

It is strongly advised against visiting the underground network of the Scrozo Negro site due to the risks associated with venturing into underground cavities created for warfare purposes over a century ago and never maintained since then.

You are where, in 1916/17, stood the "Barackenlager" (stable camp, structured with lodgings made of local wood) of the advanced garrison of Boccardin. A network of paths branched out from this area, immediately behind the front line. Here, the wounded would converge to be evacuated towards the valley, passing through the "prai de Civeron," and from here, the laborers carrying ammunition and provisions needed to pass for the forwarding of supplies to the advanced positions.

The size of the camp is significant, attesting to the strength of the troop contingents that were stationed here. The wooded peak of Boccardin played a fundamental role in allowing the imperial troops to maintain control of the entire Civeron: the loss of the position to the Italians would have enabled the royal troops to substantially penetrate the plain, both to the south and north of the ridge, utilizing the cover provided by both the vegetation and the terrain folds, bypassing the Austrian positions in the plain of Castelnuovo, located to the north at lower altitudes.

In the garrison of the crucial peak of Boccardin, between 1916 and 1917, the various companies of the two marching battalions of the Imperial-Regal 59th Infantry Regiment "Archduke Ranieri" from Salzburg, and the 14th Infantry Regiment from Linz "Baron von Hessen," would rotate. One company was constantly on standby, in case of emergency, at the camp where you are, from where the soldiers could flow to the loopholes behind the barbed wire of the front line in less than five minutes.

You are at the beginning of the short circular path in the locality of "Boccardin."

The rounded hillock of q. 790 from the Austrian cartography, locally known as "Boccardin," appears as a simple wooded step on the otherwise regular ridge that slopes gently from the summit of q. 1032 of Civeron. The character of "interruption" of the ascent to the west had prompted the Austrian garrison of the mountain to transform this step into a perfect example of field fortification, a redoubt capable of defending itself from all sides, even if bypassed on the steep flanks, aimed at stopping any offensive return by the royal troops. The skillful excavation in rock, the use of concrete (often actual reinforced concrete), the underground shelters for the troops, and the protection of the advanced machine gun nests in deep armored trenches with stones and wood, between the summer of 1916 and the autumn of 1917, allowed the imperial-regal engineers to create an almost impregnable intermediate strongpoint on the mountain's hump. Here, all the Italian infantry advances were shattered: after the relatively easy return to the first terraces of Civeron, which had already occurred at the beginning of June 1916, the altitude 596 (locally known as "Col delle Merde," overhanging the Busetta area where the Coalba stream abruptly bends north and the homonymous valley opens into Valsugana), had become the starting point for the battalions of the Campania and Siena brigades that took turns in garrisoning the area.

All the offensive attempts to occupy Civeron had to climb the ridge from q. 596 and would invariably crash against the defenses of Boccardin, where the acacia and beech forest from before the war had given way to a lunar landscape of charred trunks, blackened rocks, disturbed barbed wire, struggling shrubs covered with abandoned equipment and weapons mixed with the meager remains of the fallen in previous assaults. Reluctant to admit the insurmountability of the obstacle posed by the fortified stronghold of Boccardin, the Italian commands demanded that the attacking units, once repelled by the Austrian positions and pinned before the barbed wire, entrench themselves without yielding further ground, even in the face of the enemy. This led to absurd and unsustainable situations: the most advanced Italian trench on the hump of Civeron came to within just five meters (!) of the Austrian outpost facing it. The extremely narrow no-man's land was a hallucinatory tangle of barbed wire and other passive obstacles, and both sides, to make the survival of their very few men in their respective garrisons "possible," had practically been forced to cover paths and trenches with metal wire nets inclined towards the opponent to limit the danger and damage from the almost constant hand grenade throw.

Despite the daily drip of losses, the royal troops stubbornly clung to the edge of Boccardin until the end of August 1917, when the general realignment of the Italian deployment in Valsugana allowed the infantry to retreat to positions in the right Coalba, completely abandoning the tormented (and completely useless to them) Civeron.

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You find yourself at the most suitable panoramic point to understand the complex and articulated Italo-Austrian front on the right side of the Brenta, between Civeron and the northern slopes of Ortigara. The ridge of Civeron, despite its medium-low altitude (just over 1000 meters as the highest elevation) compared to the dominant edge of the summit plateau of the Seven Vicenza Communities that overlooks it from the south, proved to be extremely valuable for the imperial forces for the indirect control of the Borgo and Castelnuovo basin and directly, of the Coalba Valley. It offered the Austrians an unparalleled vantage point over the Italian positions: both those in the valley between Strigno, Castel Ivano, Agnedo, and Ospedaletto, and those facing the rugged slope that descends from Colazzo, Cafelòn, and Cafelòto of Ortigara hosting almost impregnable trenches.

For the Italians entrenched on the "Sasso Gambarile" (a rocky outcrop near the valley bottom that became the pivotal link between the barrier of the Brenta valley and the slope of Col del Zibilo on the right bank of the Val Maora), any hidden movement was hindered: from Colazzo, Cafelòto, but especially from Civeron, the vigilant eye of the imperial observers could penetrate the immediate enemy rear regions, anticipating any preparatory activities for assaults.

Remaining in deep Italian rear areas until the Austrian offensive in May 1916, the entire Coalba Valley, with its two slopes, had been occupied by the imperial forces within a couple of days between May 25 and 26 while the royal troops were retreating to the Ospedaletto trench line. The Austrian-Hungarian sector command had not overlooked the tactical significance of the wooded mounds that acted as buttresses to the steep wall of the plateau: thus, even when counter-offensive actions by the 10th Italian Division had induced the imperial troops to withdraw, the chosen line on the right side of the Brenta river was maintained more prominently than the one to the north to retain possession of the entire left slope of the Val Maora.

From June 1916 onwards, the Italians, in their attempts to approach Civeron, advance into the Coalba Valley or simply establish themselves in the Mesole region and organize their line of resistance, had to only act at night or in fog, because the entire area was completely dominated by enemy observers. Even the funerals and burials of Italian fallen soldiers in the area near the military cemetery in the locality of Busette could only proceed with the tacit approval of the imperial-regal machine gunners entrenched on Colazzo and Cafelòto. However, should an Italian officer imprudently direct their binoculars towards the opposing front, intimidating bursts of warning fire would be promptly aimed at them.

From July 1916 to September 1917, the area experienced a substantial operational stalemate, where the front did not shift significantly in either direction, except for a few tens of meters. This, however, did not mean tranquility for the garrisons, as local minimal operations, patrols, and bloody skirmishes were a daily occurrence. The Cafelòto, lost by the Italians on July 2, 1916, was partially retaken a few days later, establishing a tense coexistence between the troops of the two armies, with outposts located twenty meters apart, until February 1917, when a surprise attack by two disguised assault patrols of the imperial forces bearing white cloaks led to the temporary occupation of the position and the capture of around eighty astonished soldiers of the Siena brigade, who were taken prisoner in a frantic nighttime march, many barefoot in the snow, to the Austrian rear areas of Civeron. By the end of February, the Italians once again climbed beneath the Austrian trenches of Cafelòto, stubbornly clinging to them until mid-August of the same year, when the command of the XVIII army corps decided to withdraw the front line east of the Coalba stream, abandoning both the eastern part of Civeron and the slopes of Cafelòto, thus putting an end to the exhausting and pointless drip of losses.

You are at the head of the Coalba Valley, where the concavity of the Austrian field defensive system between Civeron and Colazzo reached its maximum retreat. From here, the rugged and dangerous path, passable by men but not by mules, started, allowing for the supply of the advanced strongholds of Cafelòn and Cafelòto, and the ascent to Colazzo. The trail (still vaguely identifiable on the green slope on the other side of the valley from here) was clearly visible to the Italian observers and marksmen stationed on the eastern slopes of Civeron (at 590 meters - Col delle Merde), so only at night or in fog could the groups of Serbian and Russian prisoners, cruelly used as beasts of burden, dare to traverse it with their heavy loads on their shoulders. The steep and wooded slope descending to the east into the valley is still crowned by the remains of a continuous trench that constituted the last, indispensable, imperial line of resistance before the logistical area of the "Prai de Ziveròn."

In the flat grassy basin that opens to the south, until the spring of 1916, the troops of the Italian artillery units guarding Civeron were stationed: a siege battery with four 120mm bronze pieces, a field battery with a 75mm cannon, and a mountain battery with a 65mm cannon. The officers, on the other hand, lodged in the existing Malga Roatto building until mid-May 1916, depicted in the accompanying photo, which was targeted by the Austrian field guns on May 23 and 24, 1916.



You are at the junction that, in 1916-17, marked the starting point of the military trails of the Coalba Valley (eastward towards Mesole), Beselenga (westward towards Olle), and Fagareato (southeastward towards Cafelòn).

At the onset of the Strafexpedition, the impressive progression of the Austrian attack, launched from the Vezzena plain on May 20, 1916, had already brought the imperial troops to the summit ridges of the Cima Dodici mountain by May 24: a detachment led by Lieutenant Enrich had advanced beyond Ortigara and Punta Molina. From there, every Italian movement between Civeron and the Coalba Valley was easily observable, with the machine guns quickly positioned by Enrich on Colazzo making the movement of the royal troops arduous. On the afternoon of May 25, a robust column of mountain troops descended from above along the Fagarè or Val Caldiera trail, attacking on the left flank and overwhelming the Italian troops who, on the western edge of the Civeròn meadows, faced the main Austrian assault from the direction of Val di Sella and Olle. The mountain artillery battery with 65mm cannons managed a precipitous nighttime retreat to Ospedaletto between May 25 and 26, while only two of the four 75mm field guns managed to withdraw, as the other two, deprived of their breechblocks, had to be abandoned by the gunners to the enemy after the horse teams tasked with recovery overturned them in a last desperate attempt to haul them away. The four heavy bronze 120mm cannons, immobilized on antiquated carriages, were simply left to their fate.

By dawn on May 26, 1916, the Coalba Valley and Mount Civeron were back in Austrian hands, and a few hundred Italian infantry and artillerymen descended sorrowfully towards Olle and Borgo, towards a harsh and lengthy captivity within the dual monarchy's internal regions.

A year and a half later, as the front line shifted eastward well beyond the old Italian-Austrian border at Primolano, and with the entire Valsugana back under imperial control, Civeron also lost its military importance. Yet, the imposing defensive preparations made by both sides still made it desirable, both as a source of fortification materials to be recycled to other parts of the front and for the recovery of metallic materials for the increasingly gasping war industry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. New and powerful cable systems were installed on both the Coalba Valley side and the Olle side, complementing the existing cable cars to facilitate the transport down to the valley of everything that could be useful for the war effort. In 1918, even the deep mining galleries penetrating the heart of Civeron in the lower Coalba Valley were reactivated to resume a modest coal production destined to fuel the final convulsions of the Habsburg military machine.

You are near the Austrian command post of the so-called "Unterabschnitt Civeron" (Civeron sub-sector).

The beech forest that separates the meadows of Malga Roatto (to the east) from those of the Austro-Hungarian cemetery (to the west) from the summer of 1916 until the fall of 1917 hosted (and camouflaged) a permanent settlement of Austro-Hungarian barracks where the battalion command, the officers' mess, and the accommodation of the military chaplain of the unit were located.

The marching battalions of the 59th (from Salzburg) and 14th (from Linz) regiments were the Austrian units that were most closely tied to their wartime saga to the battles of Civeron. The fortuitous recovery of the photo album and various relics, including the field altar used by the chaplain for masses on the mountain, of the military chaplain of the X/59th I.R., Feldkurat Alois Felderer, allowed the appearance of the place in the autumn/winter of 1916/17 to be known. These precious relics are still preserved at the Permanent Exhibition of the Great War in Valsugana and the Lagorai at Borgo Valsugana.

The capture and interrogation of prisoners captured in the area, as early as the autumn of 1916, allowed the Italian commands to become aware of the significant logistical settlement and assigned the artillery of Lefre and Ospedaletto (in the Mesole region) the task of targeting it. However, according to Father Felderer, the buildings were damaged only in two occurrences by the Italian cannons, with no human casualties except for one injured individual. The surrounding meadows, on the other hand, still bore the marks of the craters caused by the imprecise shots of the royal artillery even in the post-war period.

You are on the western edge of the "Prai de Civeron," at the endpoint of the old Austrian military mule track (partially erased by new roads today) that, starting from the destroyed village of Olle, allowed pack animals to supply the entire garrison of Civeron with weapons, provisions, ammunition, fortification materials, and construction materials. It was the main artery that, from the rear areas of Valsugana, enabled the Austrian troops to transform the mountain into an impregnable stronghold controlling the entire valley basin between Borgo and Ospedaletto.

Thanks to the favorable situation of the western slope of the relief, completely sheltered from the observation and direct fire of Italian troops, a significant part of the basic logistics for supporting the fortified camp network linking the plateau edge with the Valsugana valley flourished near the endpoint of the mule track. Here, wide concrete tanks were built for water collection, as well as kitchens, a powder magazine in a cavern, a first aid station, and numerous barracks where various support services and activities took place, along with spacious dormitories for reinforcement troops.

It was only in May 1916 that this area was directly and heavily involved in the war operations: the Italian lines, after abandoning the Val di Sella, had retreated to the edge of the meadows, where today the deciduous forest begins on the steep western slope in front of the Vanèzi. Some traces of the entrenchment, in the form of a shallow but legible linear depression running north-south (starting right next to the road), can still be found on the ground. There, on May 25, the frontal attack of Austrian columns from Olle and from the Vanèzi hill was contained by the infantry of the Venezia Brigade (83rd infantry regiment) until evening, when a third column of imperial forces, descending with flanking maneuvers from the edge of the plateau (Val Caldiera Pass) to the beech forest of Fagarè, managed to breach the defense from the south. This triggered, for the royal troops, after the capture of the entire company defending the left side of the trenches, a frantic "every man for himself" that led to the Austrian conquest of the position with the capture of 4 120mm bronze cannons and two field steel cannons of 75mm that had not been removed in time. On the slope that ascends north of your current location towards the highest elevation of Mount Civeron, in the early 2000s, the skeleton of an Austrian soldier, likely one of those missing from the fighting of May 25-26, 1916 was discovered, along with much of the equipment.