

VENTINA GLACIER

Welcome to Chiareggio. From here, with a short detour, you can admire the Ventina Glacier, located at the head of the homonymous valley, in the terminal stretch of the upper Valmalenco. The detour takes about an hour's walk along a mule track that leads to the Gerli-Porro refuge of the CAI Milan, marking the start of the "Vittorio Sella" educational trail, a naturalistic-glaciological itinerary created by the Lombardy Glaciological Service.

The mountainous frame that houses the glacier is of great landscape value; among the peaks you can see Monte Disgrazia, which reaches an altitude of 3700 m. Its name does not reflect the charm and spectacular nature of the mountain, called at the beginning of the 19th century "Pizzo Beautiful". Among the glaciers of Lombardy, Ventina Glacier boasts one of the longest series of scientific measurements and observations: the first surveys aimed at quantifying the fluctuations of the glacier terminus date back to the end of the 1800s. Along the path you can find various signs indicating the measuring points.

From the refuge, you can observe a landscape of great interest, shaped by the erosion of glaciers and in more recent times by the action of streams and freeze-thaw cycles, especially:

- the "U-shaped" upper sector of the valley, an evident sign of the erosion of the glacier that occupied it;
- the imposing ridge of the lateral moraine on the hydrographic right, which with its size testifies to the thickness of the glacier that built it during the Little Ice Age (period of general glacier advance between 1550 and 1850);
- smoothed and rounded rocks ("roches moutonnées") shaped by the glacier during its advance and left uncovered with its regression, located in the central part of the valley incision;
- the plain in front of the glacier where the stream creates regular meanders and where vegetation including trees (mainly larches) is now well developed.

Ventina Glacier saw its maximum expansion towards the end of the Little Ice Age (mid 1800). In this period, the glacier occupied a large part of the valley and went up to an altitude of 2000 m, almost 400 meters lower than the current front, just upstream of Rifugio Ventina. At that time, in the area where we now find the glacier terminus, the glacier joined the tongue of the Virgin's Canalone Glacier, now also in clear retreat, with the terminus perched 400 m higher.

After the Little Ice Age, the Ventina Glacier began an almost continuous phase of regression which led it to retreat in total by about 1.5 km, significantly changing the landscape as can be observed from the Gerli-Porro Refuge. The recession was interrupted by short advances between 1915 and 1921 and especially between 1973 and 1989. Since then, the shrinkage resumed at an even faster rate, conforming to the trend of almost all mountain glaciers on Earth (in the last forty years Ventina Glacier has lost about a quarter of its surface, which is currently 1.7 km²). It is clear that the ongoing climate change can only accelerate its retreat and could lead to its almost complete disappearance at the end of this century.