

## THE TWO TOWERS OF FRAELE

Observation point: from Scale pass.

Now you are passing through the *Scale* pass, which can be reached only by a tunnel, carved into the rocks in the last century, when Cancàno dam was built.

Aside the vertical trackless cliff that suddenly break the slope, the ruins of two squared towers stand, overlooking all the valley of Bormio: they were built at the end of the XIV century, perhaps by Barnabò Visconti, on a precedent fortification guarding the route of *Alemagna* - as to say, Germany - in order to prevent that Grisons could attack the valley of Bormio from here.

It is difficult now to imagine in what way a route could pass from here, over the vertical rocky wall that closes the access to *Scale* Pass. Perhaps wooden beams put into the rock, which held a sort of wooden gangplank, or a kind of stairs fastened to the slope, as the toponym "*scale*" seems to suggest... the matter of fact is that the *Alemagna* route did pass from here, and not from the *Foscagno* pass. This is infact the lowest way - 1941 m a.s.l. vs. 2291 m of Foscagno - for reaching Switzerland and then Germany, and, more important, it connects Bormio with Fraèle valley, as to say with the higher *Adda* basin.

From the quite indefinite saddle infact the lateral valley of *Scale* Lake goes slowly down towards a wide highland, extended for tens of kilometers to northwest, up to Fraèle Pass. Here, until the last century there was a village of herdsmen and of miners, with its own parish church and a lodging for travellers and merchants.

The area infact was rich of grazing lands and, towards Pra Grata mount, also of iron ores, enough rich for a period in which a poor ore near the settlement was economically better than a richer one, but with high transport costs. From Fraèle, the route continued towards the Monastero valley, so called from the ancient cloister, built in the tenth century, and still active today: now, it is classed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO, for the unic, amazing XIII century frescoes which cover all the apse and part of the internal walls of the church.

*Scale* pass manteined its strategic importance for all the XV century, when Grisons tried to conquer Valtellina passing from here: according to the legend, Bormio infantries struggled strenously against the enemy here, in a so bloody battle that the cliff under the towers was called "the deads' ravine"; despite this, in 1487 Grisons plundered Bormio and all the Valtellina, reaching to Sondrio.

Now, the world is changed, and the two solitary towers remain as a relic of a past time, during which mountains weren't a barrier, but acted as connection way, and routes through highlands and crests were the highway of both commerce and wars.