

THE URIEZZO GORGES

The stretch of the Antigorio Valley lying between hills and escarpments in Premia, Baceno, and Crodo municipalities, reveals itself as an expanse of land of extraordinary interest and spectacular beauty under both the geological and morphological point of view: indeed, in less than 3km, the ground which the Toce River flows over drops down about 160mt, deeply carving out the rock slab of Premia, the last morphological craggy “step” of the Antigorio Valley (another distinctive step, the one the Toce Falls originates from, lies upstream).

This short stretch of valley shows majestic and complex, although extremely clear, marks of the impressive shaping and erosive impact glaciers and creeks have had throughout the years, that cannot be found elsewhere on the Alps with the same evidence.

The erosive action has gone so far as to go through the garnet mica schists the “step” of Premia is made of, digging out the underlying whitish and microcrystalline stone (granitoid gneiss) that creates colour contrast with the above brown-greyish mica schists.

This stone (easy to be detected around Maiesso settlement) represents the deepest tectonic unit known so far in the entire Alpine edifice, the so called “Zero Element”. All over the Alps chain, it emerges only, in a dome shape, where the Devero Valley merges with the Antigorio Valley, in Verampio area. As for that, it is also called the “Verampio Dome”.

The most outstanding effect of the erosive action has got the shape of the so called “Uriezzo Gorges”, deep grooves carved into the rocks by those impetuous falls, progressively retreating, that formed part of the ancient creek system running at the bottom of the glacier formerly lying on the Antigorio Valley. Later on, with the glaciers retreat, the local hydrographic network changed a lot: the most distinctive feature of the Uriezzo Gorges is that the creek that had been shaping them for ages is not currently running over the narrow grooves, therefore it is possible to get an easy walk inside them.

Three gorges can be visited: the Southern Gorge (the most spectacular, about 200mt wide, 20-30mt deep), the North-Eastern Gorge (about 100mt long and 10mt deep, extremely narrow at certain points) and the Western Gorge (less unique, comprising two parts, with different paths). A fourth gorge, named Vallaccia, lies a little underneath the Baveno church, but it is hardly accessible as it ends with a steep drop over the Dovero Creek. All the gorges are characterised by series of sub-circular holes, separated by narrow curvy tunnels.

All the walls are carved with recesses, volutes, and grooves created by the swirling and powerful movement of the waterfalls; at some points they are so tight that don't let see the sky.

The stone they were carved into are garnet mica schists, rich in wrinkled lenticels of whitish quartz that, being harder than the surrounding rocks, often emerge in relief (selective erosion). The rocky bottom cannot be seen, unfortunately, as it is covered by alluvial material and a layer of debris.

Also along the deep throat of the Toce Valley several points of extraordinary interest can be visited, like the Arvera Gorge, in correspondence with the bridge of the road heading to Crego, and the Balmasurda Gorge, a bit downstream, where a metal bridge, with a grill walkway, gives the chance of an experience ideal for thrill-seekers.

For a visit at the gorges, a leaflet with the recommended itineraries is available at the local tourist offices. Spring (April-May) or autumn is the best time to experience the gorges. Winter has to be avoided because of the danger of falling ice.