

The Castagnoli Circuit

This is a decent 'day walk' probably 4-4.5hrs walking time. Doing it the way described, you should be able to get a late lunch in Barbischio at Il Papavero, even in winter. Going the other way, hopefully there will be a pizzeria open in Castagnoli in the summer.

1. Leave the Borgo and walk uphill to the junction. Turn left, and after a hundred metres or so, cross road to turn right into the Spaltenna approach.
2. When you reach the hotel, keep well to the right (unless you want to explore the hotel and little church first, see Pieve di Spaltenna, p205 Chianti Heart of Tuscany), following the path that skirts the hotel premises. You can maybe see a rather overgrown 'helepad' on your left.
3. In the corner of the field, take the track that dips down to the left, and after perhaps having to hurdle a couple of wild boar 'trip wires' you come out into a vineyard.
4. Circumnavigate this to your right, till you come to a break in the hedging on the other side.
5. Ahead now you can see the buildings of San Pietro in Avenano (p206-7, Chianti Heart of Tuscany); the ruined church on the right and the 'palazzo' – now a farm house, on the left. You need to cross another vineyard to reach the 'palazzo'. There is a track around the upper side, but also through the centre.
6. Having reached the 'palazzo' on a well made track, you reach a junction. Carry straight on (relative to the 'palazzo')- that's South - towards the main Siena road.
7. The track slopes down to the edge of the vineyard, almost straight ahead is a rickety looking 'plank bridge' to cross the ditch to allow you down onto the main road.
8. Cross the main road and follow the road towards Rietine and Castagnoli and walk up to Furnace restaurant.
9. Take the 'white road' immediately after Furnace and walk up towards Castello Meletto.
10. Once in the castle estate, after the car park and before the wine shop, turn left and follow the track past the holiday cottages away from the castle.
11. You enter woodland having past a big property on your left. After a short distance the track turns sharp right and gently climbs towards a re-development project.
12. The track skirts the project (on your right) and continues up to meet the road once again. Cross the road, the track continues upwards towards Castagnoli, following loosely the line of the road that continues to be within a hundred metres or so on your right.
13. When you meet the road again, turn left into it, uphill, and follow it into Castagnoli village.
14. Walk through the village (a pretty 10min detour to your left if you want to wander around the old village and visit Il Celliere – arrive before 10.00am for an excellent breakfast)), going straight on at the junction.

Two to three hundred metres out of the village you see a house standing alone on the left. Immediately before the house is a clear 'white road' track to your left.

15. Take this track, dropping steeply back into the woods. Follow it down to the stream at the bottom.
16. Cross the stream, and the track bends sharply right. Almost immediately around this bend there is a smaller track off to your left. It passes through a hedge and may have a chain across to try and deter motorcyclists.
17. Take this track; as it comes out into the open it swings right and rises steeply towards houses up the hill. Past the houses there is a sharp left bend and a couple of hundred metres later you arrive at Casa al Vento.
18. In their yard turn right, and walk up the main track. You are now heading for Barbischio. It climbs through olives and vines towards another villa. Ignore a track going off to your left. After that you quickly come to a sharp right hand bend that steers the track around the villa.
19. Still rising gently you soon come to a major 'white road' junction with a local shrine. Follow the 'white road' to the left, quickly losing height. After a few minutes you will come to Barbischio cemetery on your right, then the hamlet itself. (For Il Papavero, go straight on to the ivy covered house with red shutters straight in front of you).
20. To head home, follow the tarmac road on your left as it drops steeply down through several hairpins to the stone bridge at the bottom.
21. The tarmac road now swings left. Follow it right through, entering Gaiole past Pacema kitchens and the playing fields.