

## TRIP 21: NIVOLET

Another two-header, six weeks after my trip to Macugnaga and Valmalenco but this time I'll write them up as two separate trips. Nivolet is further west in the Italian Alps and is easily accessible from Turin, although it's better to go before the free bus from Ceresole Reale stops running early in September. I chose Nivolet as a result of the Meyes trail (see Trail 177, Valle d'Aosta). I had seen up the Nivolet Valley from that trail and liked what I saw: high mountains clustered around a high mountain pass. From reading Gillian Price's 'Walking in Italy's Gran Paradiso', Walk 24, I learnt that there were two rifugi there and that there is a seductive trail around Lakes Rossett and Leita. On further inspection of my map, I could see four other trails which could be done from either rifugio. Another advantage is that Nivolet is in a national park (Parco Nazionale Gran Paradiso) which gives a certain amount of protection to flora and fauna. And then there's the Navetta bus which in July and August runs from Ceresole Reale to Savoia three times a day and back again on week-days and much more often on Sundays and holidays. The trip was in late August, 2018.

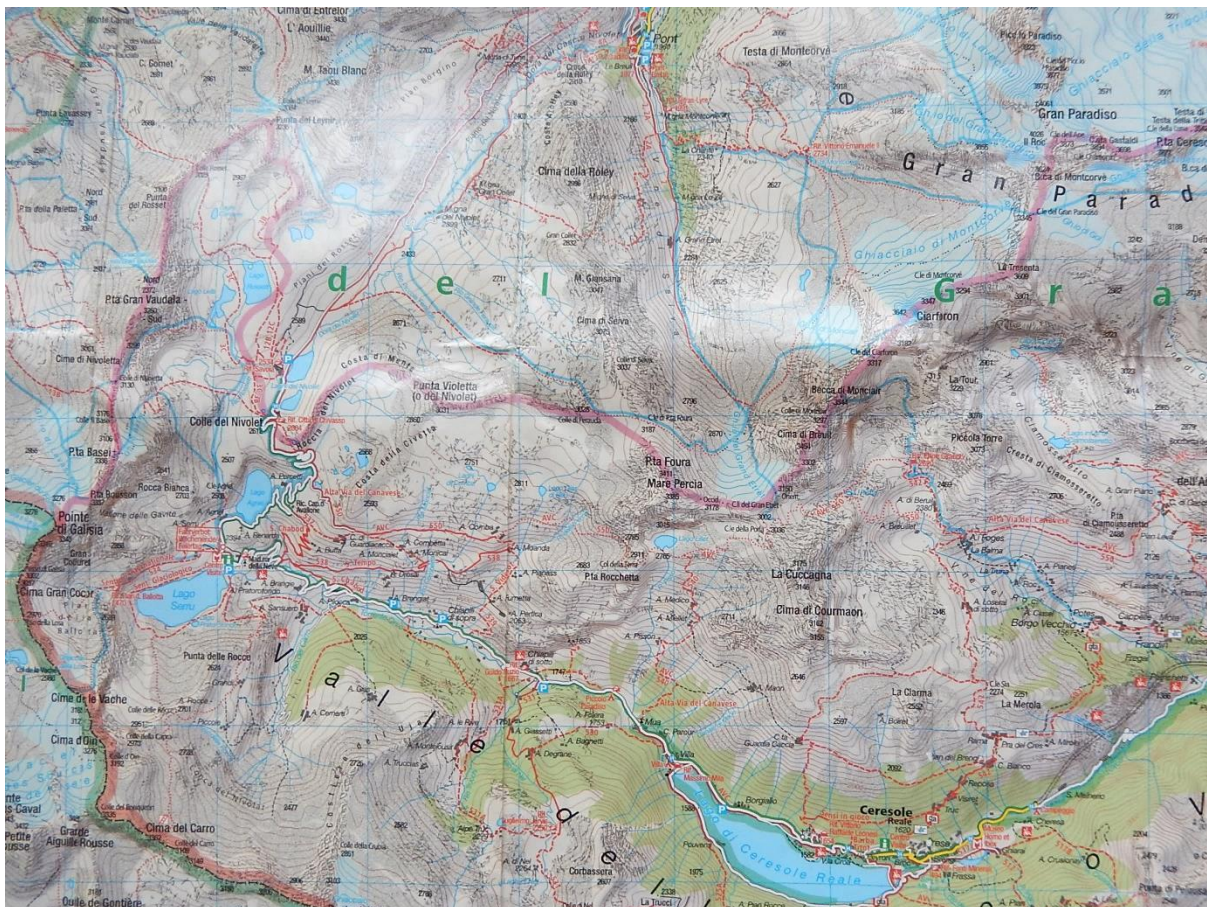


Photo 5675: Nivolet area; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de); Nivolet is left centre between the string of lakes.



## 218: Behind Rifugio Savoia

I chose this rifugio, rather than Rifugio Citta di Chivasso, because I wanted a private room and because it has more facilities, in particular a separate bar, serving food, beer and coffees. It's also slightly better placed for all but one of the trails to be described. It's situated at 2534m by the larger of the two Nivolet Lakes but the views aren't as good as those from Citta di Chivasso, which is higher up at 2604m near the Colle del Nivolet (Photo 4563).



Photo 4563: taken from near Rif Citta di Chivasso – Rif Savoia is seen to the left of the lake

Because these rifugi are so high up, be prepared for some mild symptoms of altitude sickness when you first arrive from sea level – in my case, a headache, dehydration and feeling a bit cold however many layers I was wearing. This passed after about 24 hours but I can't recommend doing a strenuous trail on your first day. I spent the day reading 'Appletree Yard', catching up on sleep (I had to rise at 1a.m. to catch a 6.45 flight) and taking a stroll behind the rifugio.

A strange thing happened while I was resting. Someone came loudly down a metal staircase just outside my room, which normally would have annoyed me – instead, I was 'surprised by joy'. Was this another symptom of altitude sickness or me being happy at the start of another mountain trip – or neither of these, just an unexpected and inexplicable bonus of being alive?

My stroll was something I usually do on arriving at a new place – I feel compelled to ‘find out where I am’ by exploring my immediate surroundings, particularly those I cannot see: perhaps a primitive survival instinct or just mere curiosity?

I intended to stroll to the top of the ridge behind Rifugio Savoia on the Lake Rossett path but the law of unintended consequences took over and I ended up doing a 2k, 2hr trail in a circle behind the rifugio. Despite its brevity, it was so marvellous that it qualifies as a trail for this website, at least (Photos 4627, 4628).

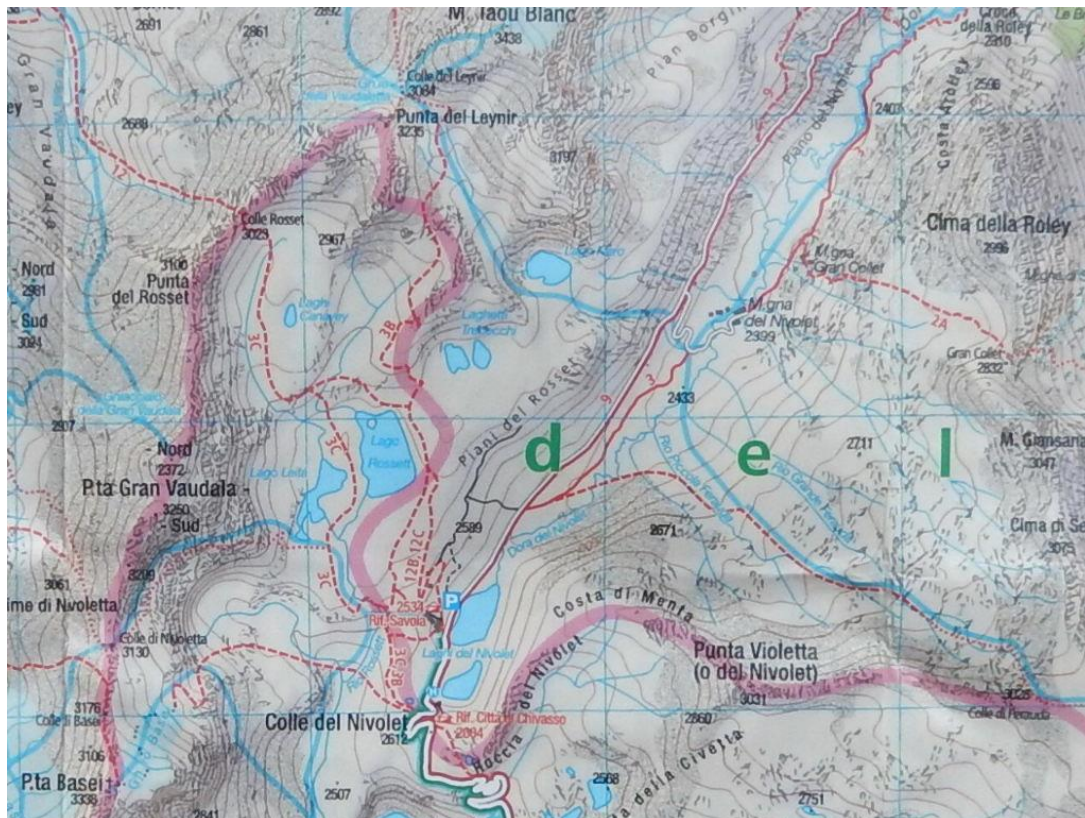


Photo 4627: general view of area around Savoia; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)

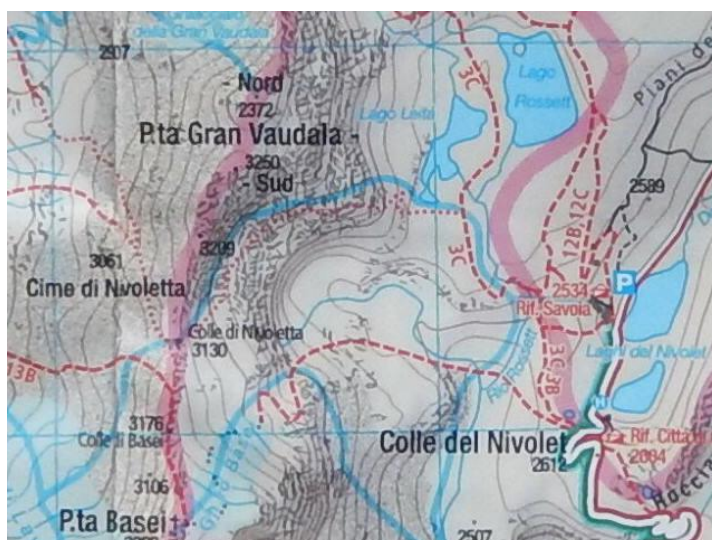


Photo 4628: more detail



I start off with two shots from my room window to ‘set the scene’ (Photos 4565, 4568).



Photo 4565: the Roccia del Nivolet



Photo 4568: looking down the valley

The path goes north from Savoia, a ‘motorway’ on the most popular route in the area (Photo 4575). I was expecting the Alpine flowers to be in decline by mid-August but, as usual, you’ll see lots of flower pics sprinkled around my trail descriptions (Photos 4576, 4578).



Photo 4575: over Savoia to Rif Citta di Chivasso (brown blob by the Colle del Nivolet)





There's a farm at the second hairpin bend and, instead of calling it a day, I was drawn ahead away from Lake Rossett by curiosity and some enticing scenery (Photo 4636).



Photo 4636: the terrain of the trail, taken from the Rossett trail the next day

At a fork in the path, turn right with a yellow flash on a rock. This brings you after five minutes to a spot:

“Between a Yellow Arrow and a Marmot Hole Overlooking a Ravine and a Waterfall”

Apart from the ravine and the waterfall, you get views of many of the surrounding mountains, in particular, Punta Gran Vaudala and Cime di Nivoletta behind the waterfall, Punta Basei across the ravine, the mountains on the French border south of the Valle dell'Orco (hereafter called ‘the Orco Mountains’), the Roccia del Nivolet above Savoia, La Grivola in the distance down Valsavarenche and Monte Taou Blanc to the north. Most attractive to me was the view down the valley to the south, formed by the Rio Rossett and the stream coming from the glacier below Punta Basei, a twisting skein of rivulets (Photo 4582). This spot manages to be rugged and vaguely pastoral at the same time.



Photo 4582: Rio Rossett



Follow the path towards Colle del Nivolet, marked by a triangular rock (Photo 4589). About here, I realised I was onto something good and went spot-hunting in earnest. First I clambered up the hillock behind the hikers in Photo 4589, to be greeted by a fleeing marmot .



Photo 4589: hikers to the left

I followed the marmot to the furthest hillock to find my next spot:

“By Orange Rock on Furthest Hillock from Triangular Rock”

This takes in the whole of the area around Savoia and you can inspect the terrain of all the possible trails in order from left to right: the Basei Glacier, Lakes Rossett and Leita, the Nivolet Valley and Gran Collet, the Ferauda Valley (behind Costa di Menta) and Alpe Comba (over the Colle del Nivolet but seen on the way up from Ceresole Reale). Two views stood out for me: Colle del Nivolet and Rifugio Citta di Chivasso with Levanna Occidentale behind (Photo 4600) and the view down the Nivolet valley with the trail up to Gran Collet to the right (Photo 4606).



Photo 4600: Colle del Nivolet





Photo 4606: close-up of Nivolet Valley

Retrace your steps to the path so as not to miss any of it: it's a delightful path down towards the Roccia del Nivolet (Photo 4609).



Photo 4609: delightful path towards the Roccia del Nivolet

But then I was distracted again by a possible spot to the right:

“First Hillock to the East of the Waterfall”

From here you get better views to the west and north: west into the huge amphitheatre below the Colle di Nivoletta from which the Basei Glacier stream cascades (Photo 4611); north up the slope to Lake Rossett with Punta di Leynir and Taou Blanc conspicuous behind (Photo 4616); the other views are versions of what I have already mentioned.





Photo 4611: Basei Amphitheatre



Photo 4616: up towards Lake Rossett

Again, return to the path and continue downwards to a green swathe where there's a fork – the main path goes right to Colle del Nivolet but you want the left one past a yellow-arrowed rock (Photo 4618). This curves prettily round the hillside towards the lower of the two Nivolet lakes (Photo 4619) and down a flowery valley (Photo 4621). It emerges above the buildings and car-park of Savoia (Photo 4624).



Photo 4618: yellow arrow & green swathe



Photo 4619: Lower Nivolet Lake



Photo 4624

Photo 4621





Not bad for a gentle stroll to the top of a rise just to spy out the lie of the land: so good, in fact, that I'm putting it into my pantheon of heavenly hikes (see under 'Odds & Sods') – a trail doesn't have to be long and arduous to qualify. This trail is a gem and the perfect introduction to what Nivolet has to offer.

## 219: Lakes Rossett and Leita

This is the trail that enticed me to Nivolet (see introduction to this trip) and it did not disappoint, living up to its billing as one of the best trails around.

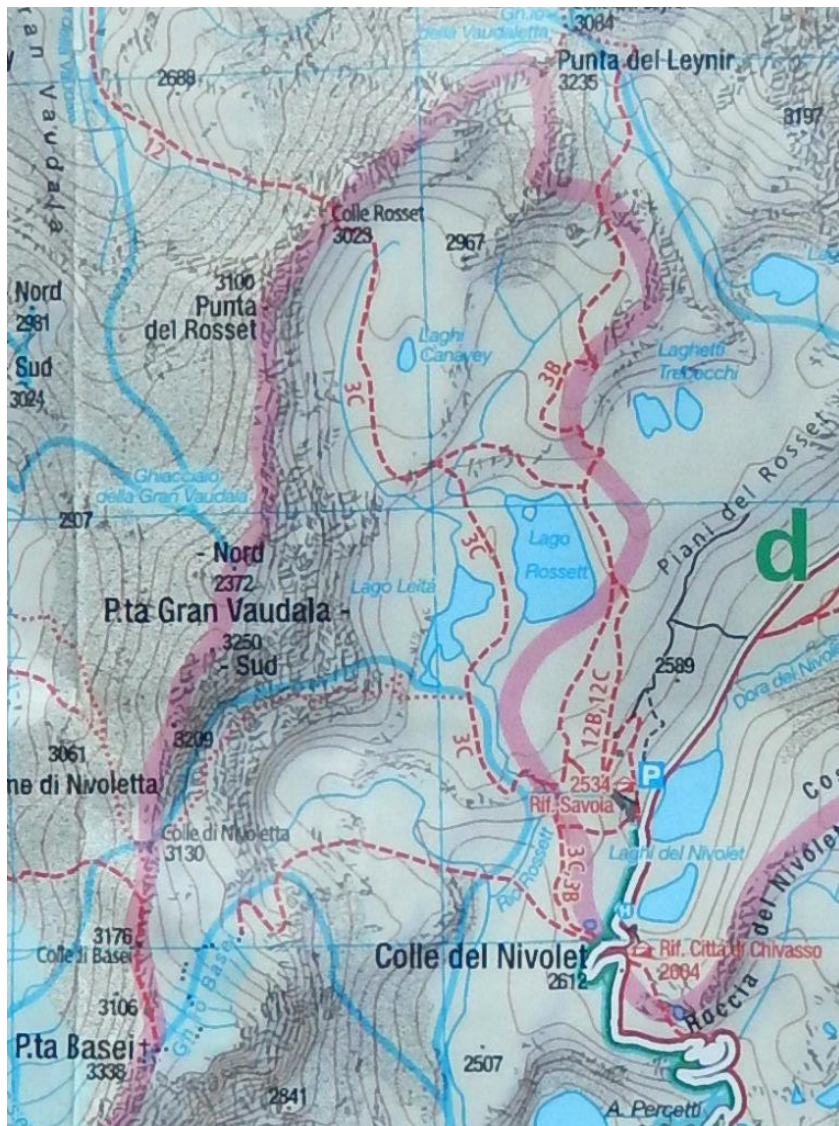


Photo 4516: copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)

I set off early to avoid some of the Saturday crowds and have the trail to myself for a while. Three quarters of an hour's plodding brought me to Lake Rossett beneath Cime di Nivoletta and Punta Gran Vaudala (Photo 4638). Further along the views of the lake got better as it caught the reflections of first Punta Basei and then Cime di Nivoletta (Photo 4639).





Photo 4638: first sight of Lake Rossett



Photo 4634: a natural 'rock garden'



Photo 4639: Punta Basei reflected with the Orco Mountains on the left

The path skirts above the eastern shore of Lake Rossett (Photo 4640), overlooked by Punta del Leynir and Monte Taou Blanc (Photo 4642).



Photo 4640: north-east corner of Lake Rossett



Photo 4642: from same spot as 4640



As you round the corner of the lake, you come to a rocky platform from where there's a dramatic view over the lake (Photo 4646) with sheer drops on both sides.



Photo 4646: Punta Basei again, with the Orco Mountains

The path from here is not obvious: the main path goes up towards Punta del Leynir but look for a faint path to the left of that path and follow it round above the northern shore of Lake Rossett (Photo 4652), accompanied by star gentian, buttercup and forget-me-not.



Photo 4652: the way forward



Photo 4651: large thistles

Fifteen minutes or so bring you to another:

“Rocky Promontory at the Head of Lake Rossett”

More stupendous views: down the lake to the Orco Mountains; east, over a ridge to Gran Paradiso and the mountains falling away to Punta Violetta (Photo 4655); across rolling slopes to Colle Rosset and across the lake to Punta Gran Vaudala and Punta Basei (Photo 4659); the island in the north-west corner of the lake reminded me of Dutchman's Cap between Mull and Coll on the west coast of Scotland (Photo 4660).





Photo 4655: Gran Paradiso etc. into the sun



Photo 4659: NW corner with island



Photo 4660: close-up of island with stepping stones



Photo 4662: a bit of frost evident

The next bluff probably has the best view of Lakes Rossett and Leita (Photo 4664) but is not a spot for me because the other views are slightly wanting.



Photo 4664: both lakes with the Roccia del Nivolet and the Orco Mountains

So plod along to the next bluff:

“Pointed Bluff above the Ridge between Lakes Rossett and Leita”

This vantage point tops the lot - it's bare and rocky but at least there's a seat of sorts and the views are literally 'top of the range': this is the highest point on this trail at about 2,800m and the views are to match. I can't resist showing you several of them (what I do at a chosen spot is to take 360 degree photos, usually 6 or 7, and choose the best to show you) (Photos 4667, 4669 & 4671).



Photo 4667: to the Orco Mountains



Photo 4669: up a valley to Punta del Leynir



Photo 4671: from the left: Punta Basei, Punta Gran Vaudala, and upcoming choice point (bottom right)

Descend slightly to rejoin the grassy path into the Leynir Valley. As you reach a pool, you have a choice (Photo 4672): cross the stream on stepping stones as per the map and go over yet another ridge to join the path coming down from Colle Rosset, or go round the right side



of a rocky hillock and descend steeply to the inflow of Lake Leita. I chose the latter, down past a gully on the right (Photo 4673) and onto a rocky platform above the lakes (Photos 4674, 4676).



Photo 4672: left or right (over the stream)?



Photo 4673: down past the gully



Photo 4674: pointed bluff (last spot) to the left with Gran Paradiso etc behind      Photo 4676: Lago Leita – both photos taken from the rocky platform

I thought this might be a dead-end but if you look to your right, there's a steep ridge down beside the gully to a possible crossing of the stream (Photo 4677).



Photo 4677: steep ridge beside the gully



I inched my way down gingerly in OAP fashion to arrive at an orange-lichened rock at the end. From here, there are two feasible ways down to and across the stream (Photos 4678, 4679).



Photo 4678: the upper way down



Photo 4679: the lower – and easier – descent

Obviously I chose the easier one, photoing harebells on the way down (Photo 4681) – afraid my photos don't depict the routes very well. I was really chuffed with myself for managing this descent, although to others it would seem simple (Photo 4683). In fact, it was the highlight of the trail, proving that for me a sense of achievement still trumps outstanding views every time.



Photo 4683: the ridge from the platform to the orange-lichened rock with Lake Rossett behind



Photo 4681: harebells on the descent

On the far side of the stream, I was greeted by a pretty little valley (Photo 4684) and a profusion of purple and orange flowers (Photo 4687) on the way to join the path coming down from Colle Rosset (Photo 4689).

Photo 4687







Photo 4689: path from Colle Rosset

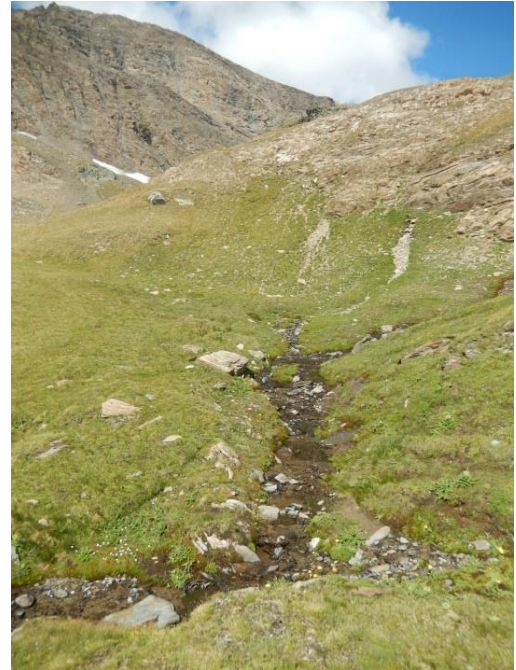


Photo 4684: little valley

On the way down to Lago Leita, watch out for a:

“Hillock to the Right of the Path at a Hairpin Bend”

This is another fabulous vantage point: looking up the valley towards Colle Rosset, over the scree tumbling down from Punta Gran Vaudala to the shore of Lake Leita (Photo 4695), over the squiggly inflow to Lake Leita (Photo 4691), across Lake Rossett to Gran Paradiso and Punta Violetta (Photo 4692) and along the slope you have just descended to Taou Blanc.



Photo 4691: inflow to Lake Leita





Photo 4692: Gran Paradiso & Punta Violetta with the path between the lakes



Photo 4695: scree from Punta Gran Vaudala

From here the path goes between the lakes towards an isthmus of about 100m. Of the two, I definitely prefer Lake Leita and make no apologies for inflicting upon you so many photos of it: its shape and shores are so much more attractive than Lake Rossett's. When you reach the isthmus, there's a choice of paths: left goes to the shore of Lake Rossett and is the trail on the map; right goes round the eastern shore of Lake Leita. I tried to have it both ways by going to Lake Rossett, taking a photo (4700), and then doubling back to Lake Leita (Photo 4702).



Photo 4700: Lake Rossett & Punta del Leynir



Photo 4702: the boggy isthmus

I followed the shore all the way round to its southern end and here are the photos, including the inevitable spot on the way (Photos 4705, 4706).



Photo 4706: bog cotton

Photo 4705: still life with banana skin





“Rock Seat by a Row of Bog Cotton Lining the Shore of Lake Leita”

This spot is near a small rock table and a small pile of stones by a tiny pool amidst the bog cotton. You look along the shore one way to Punta del Leynir and Taou Blanc (Photo 4717), the other way to Punta Basei and its glacier (Photo 4721), across the lake to the scree of Punta Gran Vaudala and down into the pool beneath the pile of stones (Photo 4719). I really loved this spot for it was the first proper sit-down rest I had had since my descent from the high point of the trail – and in such tranquil, restful surroundings.



Photo 4717: over to Punta del Leynir and Taou Blanc



Photo 4721: over to Punta Basei and its glacier



Further along you get the Roccia del Nivolet over the outflow of the lake (Photo 4723), the outflow itself (Photo 4726) and another spot (will they never end?):

Photo 4719: the pile of stones and pool



Photo 4723: Roccia del Nivolet



Photo 4726: outflow and Punta Violetta

Before coming to the spot, I noticed a sudden change in the flora: ubiquitous harebells gave way to ubiquitous ‘daisies’ (Photo 4724).

“Almost at the End of Lake Leita”

This is at a little bay facing north with a ruff of bog cotton along the shore (Photo 4728); behind is the rest of the lake with Punta Basei looming above (Photo 4732); all around you, except for the main body of Lake Leita, are rocky slopes – between a rock and a soft place, you might say.



Photo 4724: are they daisies?



Photo 4728: one more lake shot



Photo 4732: Punta Basei and rocks



I completed my pilgrimage around the eastern shore which yielded a couple more photos (4735, 4737) before returning to the outflow. Go with the flow (where have I heard that before?) down to the yellow-flashed path from Lake Rossett and turn right to descend past two little lakes not shown on the map (Photos 4739, 4740 & 4741).



Photo 4735: getting really arty now



Photo 4737: from the very end of the lake



Photo 4738: flowers by the outflow



Photo 4739: past the first lake after Leita



Photo 4741: the second lake past Leita

Photo 4740: a 'wild camp' (the orange blob is a tent)





Having passed the junction for the Colle di Nivoletta path and the second lake, you turn left onto territory familiar from Trail 218 (Photo 4742).



Photo 4742: coming down to the plateau of Trail 218 + Punta Violetta & Roccia del Nivolet

You cross the waterfall (Photo 4745) and pass flowery slopes on your left, with a stark view of Punta Violetta ahead (Photo 4748).

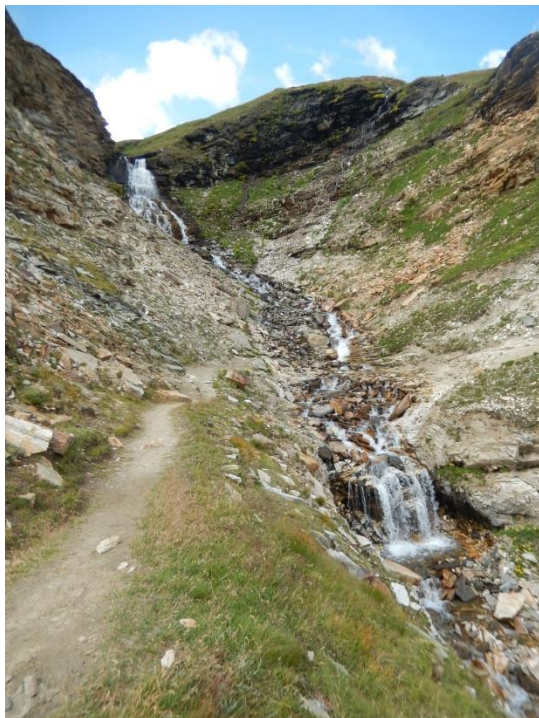


Photo 4745: waterfall

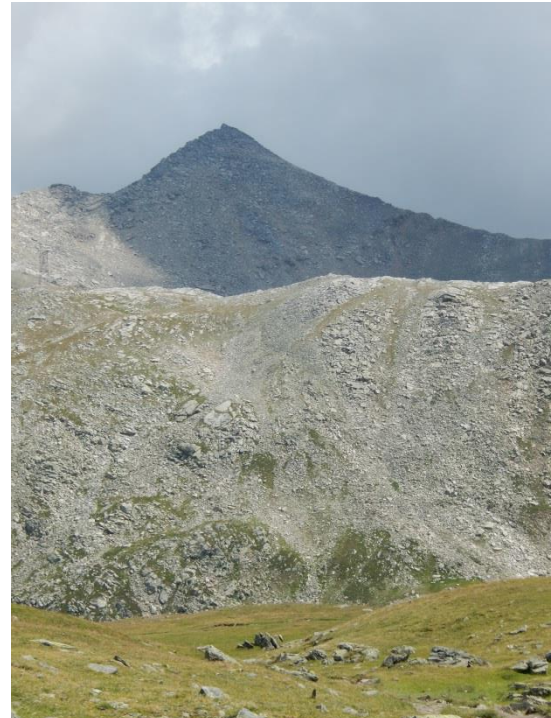


Photo 4748: Punta Violetta

You can now take the short-cut to Rifugio Savoia from Trail 218 – at least, I think it's a short-cut and if it's not, it's a much prettier path anyway. On the way, I caught these two



crickets mating (Photo 4757), a suitably celebratory climax to a truly orgasmic trail (well, for the sake of continuing the metaphor). Orgasm or not, this trail goes shooting into my pantheon of heavenly hikes with a pronounced ejaculation.



Photo 4757: two crickets mating in the bushes



## 220: Piano del Nivolet and Gran Collet

This trail was unfinished business from my previous trip to Valsavarenche (see Trails 177, 178, Valle d'Aosta). After my trials on the Meyes trail, I had not felt up to tackling the Gran Collet pass from the Vallone di Selva side. Now I could give it a go from the Piano del Nivolet side, the easier approach according to my map (Photos 5690, 5965).

Taking my usual early start, I trundled down the Nivolet Valley, avoiding the road as much as possible. After the signboard, fork left to pass the pylon on a path trodden by many feet.





Photo 5690: area around Gran Collet; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)



Photo 5965: detail of Gran Collet trail; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)



This is not yet the Piano del Nivolet, according to the map, but there were many worthwhile photos:



Photo 4796: early start – that's La Grivola in the distance – surely the most shapely mountain in the area – close-up Photo 4799

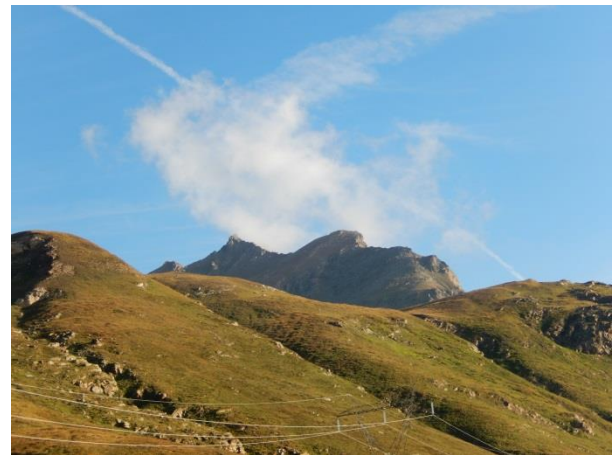


Photo 4800: these were the fattest marmots I had ever seen – fattening up for winter

Photo 4801: a different view of Taou Blanc



Photo 4804: not ranunculus



The Piano del Nivolet is famous for its display of ranunculus flowers: not knowing what these looked like, I assumed that the most prolific flower (the one in Photo 4804) was it but later found out that it was not – the actual ranunculi were no longer evident in the plain but were still blooming higher up.

Then the path becomes a track, although there's no sign of the track shown on the map coming down from the road, and you can see more clearly the route up to Gran Collet. After an hour and a bit, you reach a greener place where streams mingle. Just beyond the second bridge on the trail, you find:

“Rock Seat on the Hillock to the Left at Montagna del Nivolet”

From here you can view the whole panoply of the Nivolet Valley: the mingling streams and the upper valley with Punta Basei prominent (Photo 4945), the lower valley (Photo 4808), the slope of Cima della Roley and the way up to Gran Collet between it and Monte Giansana, the Ferauda Valley, Monte Taou Blanc with a stream falling down from Lake Nero, and the Coste del Aouille, rounded on the Meyes trail (Trail 177, Valle d'Aosta) (Photo 4815).



Photo 4945: streams and upper valley (taken later in the day)



Photo 4808: lower Nivolet Valley



Photo 4815: Coste del Aouille



Photo 4816: Montagna del Nivolet



However, what caught my attention most was the abandoned settlement of Montagna del Nivolet, idyllically situated beneath and amongst a jumble of huge cracked rocks right at the point where a cascading stream settles down (Photo 4816). Birds were twittering, marmots were screeching and all was right with the world.

Now you have to find the start of the Gran Collet trail. It's not too difficult but you may start to wonder where Montagna Gran Collet is (the start of the trail). You'll find it by turning to your right by a pile of stones about 50m past the fourth bridge (not counting the one upstream from a rocky crossing). This is a short-cut to obviate going down to a yellow signpost and up again. Some of the buildings look as if they may still be in use as barns. Just past the first building you'll find the path going up the left hillside.

The path is steep at first with many hairpin bends but eases off after the initial trudge. The main view, if you turn around, is across to Pian Borgino, the shelf below the slopes of an arc of mountains (Photo 4820).



Photo 4820: Piano del Nivolet & Pian Borgino

At the top of the steep slope, you begin to have wider horizons (Photos 4823, 4824).



Photo 4823: over to the Ferauda Valley

Photo 4824: 3 pointed peaks (M. Giansana centre)



About here, you should notice a little lake to your right: I couldn't resist the diversion over flattish ground with an obvious photo opportunity (Photo 4836). Here I noticed:

“A Little Peak past the Little Lake”

It's a five-minute side-track but five minutes well spent: the peak provides a grandstand view of the whole area (anti-clockwise) from Punta Basei to Ferauda to four pointy peaks to Gran Collet to Cima della Roley to La Grivola to Pian Borgino to Taou Blanc and finally to the terrain of the Rossetti and Leita trail with the upper Nivolet Valley below (Photo 4826). The view in these directions is far better than that from Gran Collet. This is one of my favourite ever spots and would easily go into my pantheon of spiffing spots if I had one.



Photo 4836: Taou Blanc reflected



Photo 4826: the little lake, the little peak & the terrain of the Lakes Rossetti and Leita trail



As so often, the other hikers were making a bee-line for the highest point on the trail, with the exception of an older couple who took one look at the slope up to Gran Collet and headed straight back down. What is this compulsion to go as high as possible on the trail, as quickly as possible, when the best bits are often lower down? At the risk of sounding pompous but nailing my colours to the mast (I used to be a social psychology/sociology lecturer), I'd say it is a result of our masculine, time- and achievement-obsessed culture where worth (including self-worth) is judged by how high, how far and how fast you can go. How else can you explain our veneration of stupid speed and endurance records? A truly feminist society (not what passes for feminist in present Western societies) would respect different values: variety, contemplation, taking one's time, smelling the flowers, not-knowing and reverence for nature (to name a few). Dare I hope for a move in this direction during my lifetime? Somehow I think not, judging by our current heroes and heroines and the arguments for and against Brexit based mainly on economic, materialistic and 'efficiency' grounds.

Sermon over (I wanted to become a priest for a short while when I was 10); back to the trail...

So now you start to cross the piano (flattish space, not necessarily as big as a plain) beneath Gran Collet. You pass several elegant but unnecessary stone pillars reassuring you that you're on the right path (Photos 4838, 4839 & 4841).



Photo 4838: Gran Collet ahead



Photo 4839: one pillar closer



Photo 4841: and again





After the third of these, check out a patch of bog-cotton to your left for a great photo-opp (Photo 4844).



Photo 4844: Gran Collet over a pool with bog-cotton

Then you confront the slope up to Gran Collet (Photo 4846). You can either follow the signed route to the left amongst rocks or brave the fairly firm scree slope on the right, which I'm guessing is mainly used by sure-footed hikers coming down. I estimated 20 minutes for me to reach the top but I did it in 15, which was mildly pleasing and thus contradictory to my sermon above. The trail from Savoia had taken me 4 hours against a leaflet par of 2¼ hours, which was also pleasing (I'm still caught up with not being too slow on my trails).



Photo 4846: the choice of routes

Gran Collet is a bleak spot at the best of times – god knows what it would be like at the worst (Photo 4856) – but the views to the east are as they are cracked up to be:



## “Gran Collet”

Despite being so well-frequented, this has to be one of my spots. I have seen Gran Paradiso from every angle but this is the closest you'll get to its majesty without climbing it. It's 6k away but it seems like 2k at the most. To me, it seemed the same distance as the other mountains across the Vallone di Selva which are all considerably closer. Unfortunately, it was the only one of the visible range to be in cloud (Photo 4857). The rest of the range was clear and spectacular across the deep gulch of the Vallone di Selva (Photo 4848), which looked very different from when I was in it (Trail 178, Valle d'Aosta) – I couldn't even see the valley floor. You also get to see four glaciers, ending with a bit of the Grand Etret Glacier at the end of the valley, glimpsed from below on Trail 178. Stunning doesn't do justice to this view, made all the more astounding by the steep drop in front of you, seen in Photo 4848 but detailed in Photo 4854 (which I can't label for you). As I said at the previous spot, the other views are not so great, comprising the rock-strewn slopes of Monte Giansana, Punta Gran Vaudala, Monte Taou Blanc and Cima della Roley (Photo 4853), with the piano spread out below. I was just glad I'd come up the way I did and hadn't attempted the steep climb from the Vallone di Selva on my previous trip, which looked especially difficult in the last 1k.



Photo 4856: top of Gran Collet



Photo 4857: close-up of Gran Paradiso



Photo 4848: L to R – Becca di Montcorve, Ciarforon, Becca di Monclair, Cima di Breuil







Photo 4853: the ridge of Cima della Roley

Two flowers popped up even on this stony ground (Photos 4858, 4859).



Photo 4858: this one was right on the top



Photo 4859: this was very near the top

The descent to the piano is easy enough but it took me longer, as usual, (20 minutes) (Photo 4861) for several reasons: after reaching the top, I feel that my work is done and ease off; I have to protect my weaker left knee from jarring on the way down; and I find balance more difficult coming down, requiring much use of my one walking pole.



Photo 4861: the way down



Photo 4940: best butterfly of the trip



Just before reaching the grassy plain below, I saw this butterfly in action at nearly 2,800m (Photo 4940). From Gran Collet, I had spied out a larger pool behind the bog-cotton in Photo 4844, which I had missed on the way up. So I headed straight for it and was rewarded with another top spot:

“By the Bog-cotton at the Pool to the Right of the Trail Going Down”

Here’s a soft treasure amidst the bleak, stark, rough surrounds of the slopes of Cima Della Roley. There’s no better way to show you its delights than lots of photos – my descriptive powers are just not up to the job (Photos 4872, 4875, 4882, 4889, 4892, 4896).

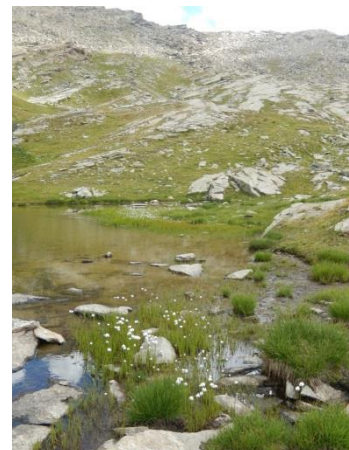






Photo 4896: the pool in situ, showing its harsh surroundings – the ridge of Cima della Roley

The piano continues for a while (20 minutes, my time), with views to the left and back (Photo 4905). Tempting as it was to try a cross-country short-cut to the Nivolet valley (Photo 4906), I remembered seeing a deep ravine, the terrain was unknown with no obvious path and I'd have to cross the Nivolet River with no bridge, so I played it safe and retraced my steps to Montagna Gran Collet.



Photo 4905: that's Becca di Monclair peeking over Gran Collet    Photo 4906: route not taken

As usual, I distracted myself from the slog with lots of flower photos and a few others (Photos 4907 – 4927). There's a handy, rather wobbly, bench by the barn at the bottom of the path where you can rest before starting the uphill trail back to Savoia – if you want to go the other way down to Pont, be warned, it'll take you longer because the path from Croce della Roley is very steep and twisty. Almost all the other hikers I met at about 3pm were coming down the valley from Savoia, no doubt taking advantage of the Navetta bus from Ceresole Reale, having some lunch and then making their way to overnight at Pont.





This, I believe, is the ranunculus



The steep part of the path down



Montagna del Nivolet

from the path – wouldn't you just love to live here (minus the hard work, of course)?



I have to admire these hardy plants growing in the grimmest of circumstances





This is the ravine I was worried about crossing, had I taken the short-cut

My return took me a mere 1 hour, 20 minutes for the 4k (quick for me) with only three photos, believe it or not (Photos 4934, 4937 & 4947). The whole trail had taken me 6 hours,



Photo 4934: the Nivolet River



Photo 4937: Rifugio Savoia with cattle



45 minutes for 11k, against a leaflet par of 4 hours, 30 minutes so I was pretty chuffed with that (but maybe I should count the 2 hours for rests and breaks at spots). Regrettably, given my pontifications in the Introduction to this website, I'm still comparing myself to what I used to be able to do when I was your 'average hiker'.

And now, the burning question (for me, if not for you): does Gran Collet go into my pantheon of heavenly hikes? No, despite four very different and wonderful spots, because the rest of the trail between these spots was distinctly ordinary with only slowly changing views providing little distraction from the longueurs of the trail. But don't let that stop you doing it as the spots really are worth the relative tedium of the trail.

## 221: Basei

Punta Basei looms over Rifugio Savoia like an over-protective parent, alternately benign and threatening. Beneath its peak, there's a glacier out of which flows a stream that has no name on my map so I'm going to christen it 'Torrente Basei' (sounds more exotic than 'Basei Stream'). It throws itself down a steep slope into a bowl beneath the frowning cliffs of the Cime di Nivoletta and the southern peak of Punta Gran Vaudala. Below this bowl, there's a piano (that's a small plain in Italian, not a musical instrument) through which the Torrente Basei meanders, entering the piano over a cascade and leaving it over a waterfall. Around the piano there are steep hillsides, even at the eastern side where the torrente exits to join the Rio Rossett and make a more sedate way down to Lake Agnel. I'm calling the whole shooting match beneath Punta Basei 'the amphitheatre' and the bit just below the Cime di Nivoletta the 'bowl' so you know what I'm talking about (Photo 5120).

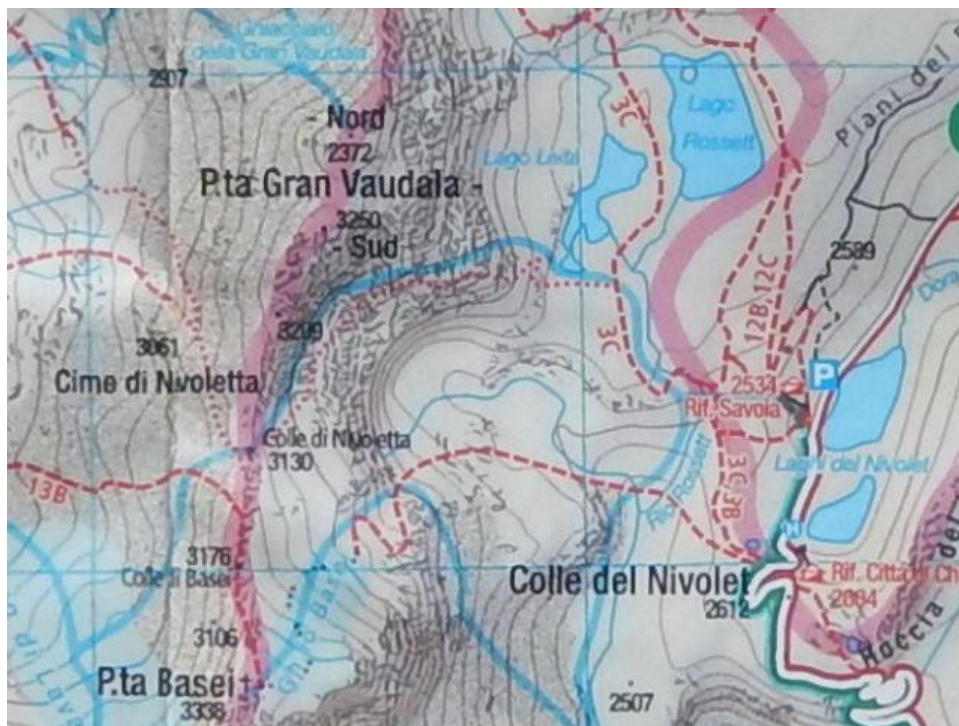


Photo 5120: 'the amphitheatre'; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)



My usual early start brought me to the top of the rise behind Rifugio Savoia with the sun shining directly onto Punta Basei (Photo 4964). From here you can see over the Rio Rossett Valley to the amphitheatre and the waterfall coming out of it (Photo 4965).



Photo 4964: Punta Basei & Orco Mountains



Photo 4965: amphitheatre & waterfall

15 – 20 minutes, depending how good you are at steep descents, bring you to the valley floor (Photo 4966). On the way, you may have joined the path marked on the map from Colle del Nivolet. Cross to the Torrente Basei where I found that the wooden bridge had been taken away from its rightful position for the winter and not replaced (Photo 4968).



Photo 4966: valley floor of Rio Rossett

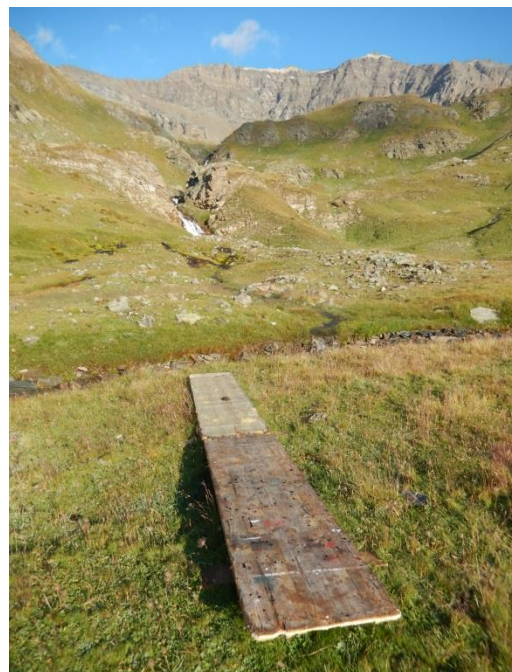


Photo 4968: useless wooden bridge

The bridge was too heavy for me to lift so I sought a crossing point nearer the waterfall since the map shows the trail going up the left side of the torrente. I didn't like any of the potential crossing points with my feeble legs so went up the right side of the waterfall, hoping to cross higher up. I wasn't the first to do this, evidenced by the boot-holes up the slope. From here you get a view over the valley floor towards the other great Orco Mountains (Photo 4970).





Photo 4970: more of the Orco Mountains



Photo 4971: my crossing point in retrospect

Once up the slope, follow boot-scrapes down to a pool where the torrente is shallowest and you can cross, only getting your boots a little wet (Photo 4971). Then you have to climb a very steep slope to find a non-existent path. However, if you persist and keep your eyes peeled, you'll find a vague path materialising – but only after giving your ankles a severe work-out on steep traverses. There's welcome rock-seat about halfway up from where you can admire another waterfall and the opposite slope leading up towards the path down from Lake Leita (Photo 4972).



Photo 4972: second waterfall



However, you're not done yet: keep following the boot-scrapes until you finally reach the top of the rise – it took me ½ an hour from the torrente crossing:

“Top of the Rise beside Torrent Basei”

Birds, at least twenty, had been wheeling around above my head as I climbed and I fantasized that they were anticipating some easy pickings when I finally collapsed but they disappeared



when I sat down at this spot. This is where you get your first real sight of the goodies ahead: Punta Basei makes its first solid appearance, although still a fine sliver up above (Photo 4979); you have already seen the striped cliffs of the bowl but now you also glimpse the piano that forms the rest of the amphitheatre (Photo 4981); a bonus is the view over the rise behind Savoia to, in order from the left, Gran Paradiso, Ciarforon, Punta Violetta, Punta foura, Mare Percia and the Roccia del Nivolet but my photo is too hazy to show. You may also notice a path heading towards the Lake Leita path which cries out for further investigation.



Photo 4979: sliver of Basei Glacier



Photo 4981: glimpse of the piano

After this spot, I decided I just wanted to wander around the sunny uplands to my heart's content – there were paths of sorts but I ignored them, there being no guiding flashes or cairns. My original intention had been to follow the path on the map up to the face of the Basei Glacier since it was marked as being of only average difficulty. However, I more or less abandoned that idea in favour of exploring the amphitheatre, while keeping my eye out for the path to the glacier.

So I wandered around in an upward direction to see what I could see. There were lots of forget-me-nots and a pink flower I hadn't noticed before (Photo 5110) and then gentians appeared – my favourite Alpine flower (Photo 4984).





I was also chasing an elusive orange and black butterfly which flew off whenever I set up for a photo. After these vague wanderings and abortive butterfly-chasing, I found myself at a spot on a ridge at about 2,700m overlooking a stony valley with the glacier just visible on the far side about 200m higher up. I could see no path ahead – the only possibility would be across the head of the valley and up a scree slope (Photo 4987) so I said a distinct ‘No’ to that and continued my wanderings down towards the piano.



Photo 4987: stony valley – not the way ahead for me

On the way down, Gran Paradiso briefly shrugged off its mantle of cloud to allow a few decent photos of this shy mountain (Photos 4992, 4994).



Photo 4992: Gran Paradiso & Punta Violetta



Photo 4994: G.P. with Gran Collet in front

Approaching the stream coming down this stony valley, I saw a possible way up to the glacier (Photo 4997) and there was a faint path coming from the direction of my last spot. However, I wasn't tempted and continued my descent to the piano which was steep and stony in places (Photo 5004). Once there, it's a simple matter to circumvent a mud-flat to a ridge:





Photo 4997: possible way up



Photo 5004: way down to piano



#### “Ridge between the Mud-flat and the Rest of the Piano”

There's a nice rock to sit on from where you can survey where you have come from (Photo 5006) and where you may be going (Photos 5008, 5010). It was here that I first appreciated the magnificence of the whole amphitheatre and was glad that I was going to use my limited energy reserves to explore it, rather than to attempt to kiss the face of the glacier. It was also here that I first noticed a zig-zag path going up a large-ish hillock at the entrance to the amphitheatre, by the outflow of the Torrente Basei (Photo 5011). Obviously there had to be a path to reach the top of the zig-zags from the other side, which might link up with the path from Lake Leita.





Photo 5006: the stony valley



Photo 5008: the piano

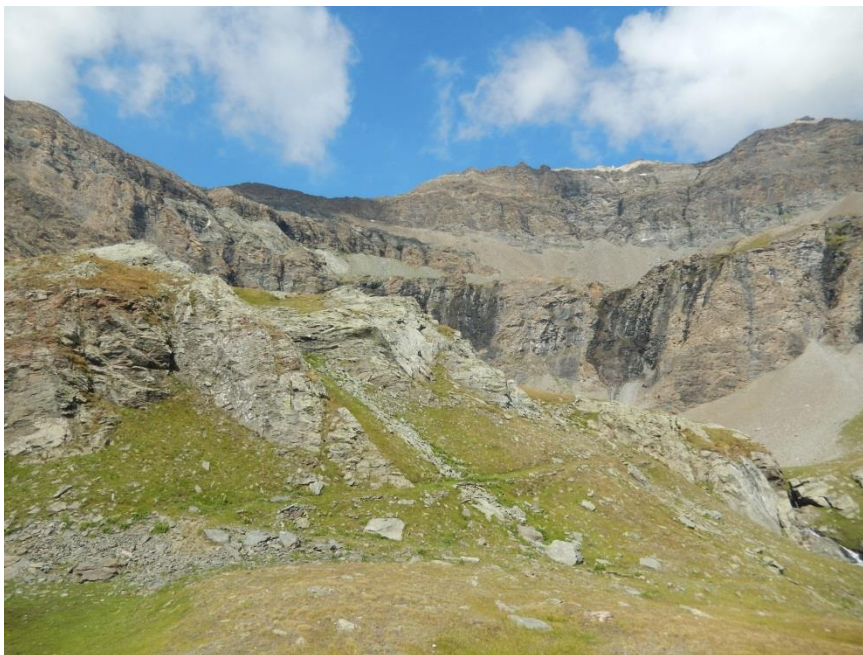


Photo 5010: the way to the bowl – path goes across the slope ahead

For the time being, the strongest pull was to follow the path to the left of the cascade up into the bowl: after a gentle hairpin bend, the path comes to a steep, tricky slope, defaced by many boots. It only lasts for about 20m then you are on flatter ground.





Leave the path and make your way over to a:

“Big Rock on the Bluff to the Left of and above the Cascade from the Bowl to the Piano”

From this perch, you can see just about everything the amphitheatre has to offer – plus you are standing somewhat precariously above a sheer drop to the cascade; the piano is spread out beneath you (Photo 5019); the bowl is clearly seen, apart from its left-hand edge (Photo 5023); there’s a good view of Punta Basei, its glacier and the streams issuing therefrom; and you can see back up the far side of the stony valley with the mud-flat at the bottom. While admiring all this, I spied a flock of sheep sprawling over the top of the zig-zag hillock with a human figure in their midst (Photo 5018) – so how did they get there?



Photo 5019: the piano with Punta Violetta



Photo 5023: the bowl

Back to the path, which now yielded a total surprise: it had clearly been ‘engineered’, with some revetting (stone reinforcement) in places. So maybe this was the path up to the glacier? I followed it round a few gentle hairpins until I had a view of the bit of the bowl not seen from my spot (Photo 5029). Then I thought, “Enough”, and didn’t bother to find out where the path led but turned round and headed back to the piano.

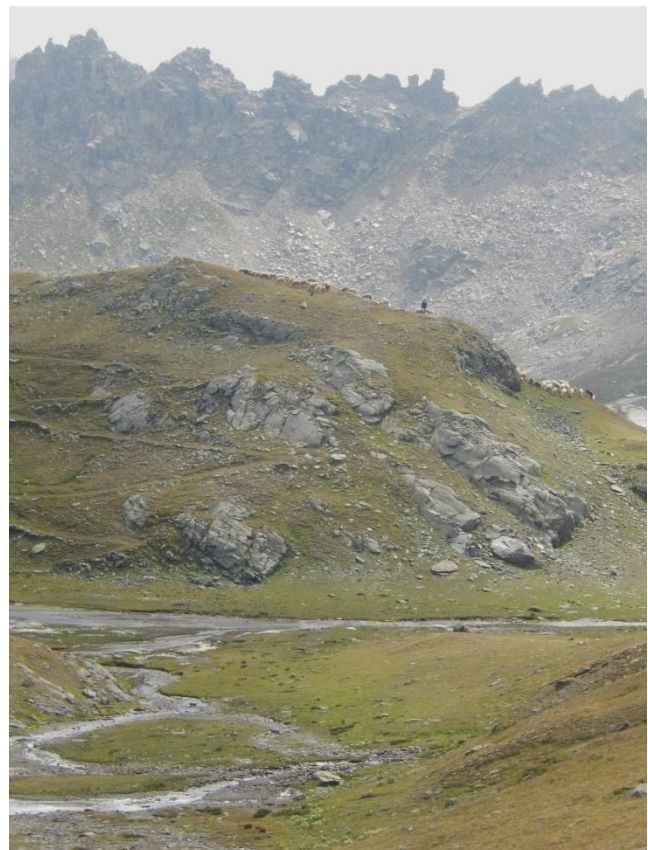


Photo 5018: sheep & shepherd





Photo 5029: Punta Basei, its glacier and the streams issuing from it

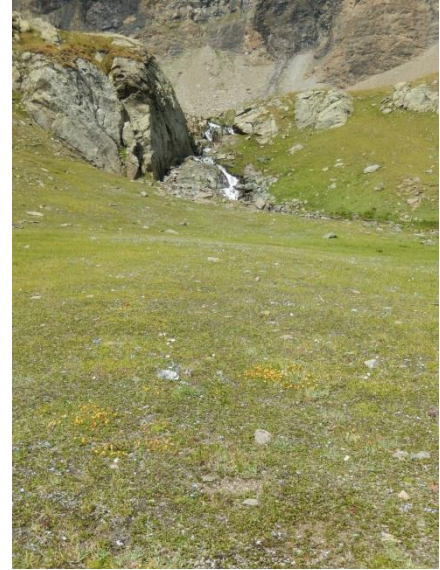


Photo 5032

Once at the piano, turn left for views of the cascade (Photo 5032), the twisting streams, bog-cotton and some yellow flower that seems to flourish only right next to flowing water (Photo 5039). I also indulged in a couple of 'arty' photos of bogginess (Photos 5112, 5046).



Photo 5039: bog-cotton, yellow flower & cliffs



Photo 5112: well, I like it



Photo 5046: still life with moss and rocks



Now I headed for the bottom of the zig-zag path but first had to cross the Torrente Basei. This took me round the hillock in the middle of the piano (and, no, I didn't go up it to look for a spot) to the point opposite the zig-zags. There was no apparent way across without getting my boots wet or taking them off, neither of which appealed. So I went further downstream and manufactured a zig-zag of my own, jumping (gently) from shingle to shingle without getting my boots more than an inch wet. Once I got onto dry land, I thought "Where's the spot?" I reckoned the spot really needed to be at stream level so I retraced my jumps back to:

"The Middle of the Junction of the Torrente Basei and the Stream from the Stony Valley"

This turned out to be my top spot of the trail, although obviously there was no seat. So taken was I with it that I'm going to show you most of the photos I took from it: they just encapsulate for me what was so great about this trail (Photos 5048 – 5055).



Photo 5051: downstream to the exit cascade





Photo 5053: the zig-zag path

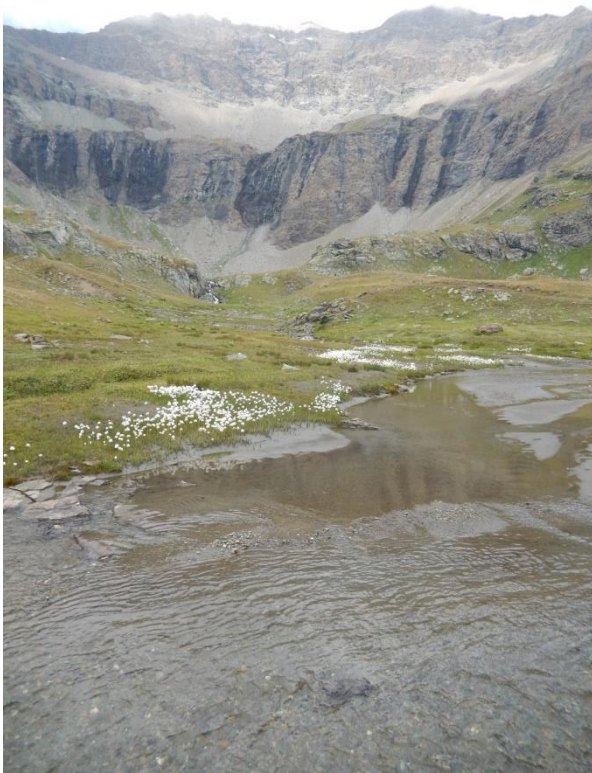


Photo 5055: this one gets the whole thing

Then it was back to the bottom of the zig-zags, which looked as if they had also been 'engineered'. Half a dozen zigs and zags provided the opportunity for some more close-ups of flora and fauna (are butterflies fauna?) (Photos 5057, 5058, 5109 & 5068).



Photo 5068: got it at last, sunning itself

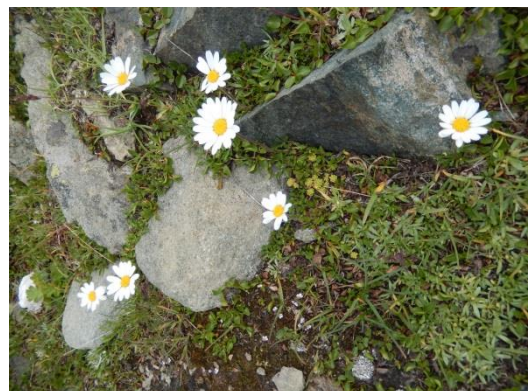






Photo 5109: this little beauty was only 1cm across (small but perfectly formed)

The top of the zig-zags is in fact a pass between the amphitheatre and the territory of the Rio Rossett so, not surprisingly, it's my last spot of the trail:

“Pass from the Amphitheatre at the Top of the Zig-zags”

Perched up high, you can see most of the piano and the bowl (Photos 5069, 5074) and the whole of the amphitheatre except the stony valley. To the other side, you get the view down to the start of the trail and the one of the start of the path back towards the Lake Leita trail (Photo 5075), which, by now, I was pretty sure would connect up but the proof was in the treading....



Photo 5069: the piano and the bowl



Photo 5074: close-up of the Torrente Basei





Photo 5075: start of the path back to the Lake Leita trail

First, there's a view of the route up past the first waterfall (Photo 5076) followed by a mildly daunting prospect of the way down and across to the Lake Leita trail (Photo 5078). As per usual, it's not as difficult as it looks but it is pretty narrow and little-used (Photo 5093).



Photo 5076: first part of the trail

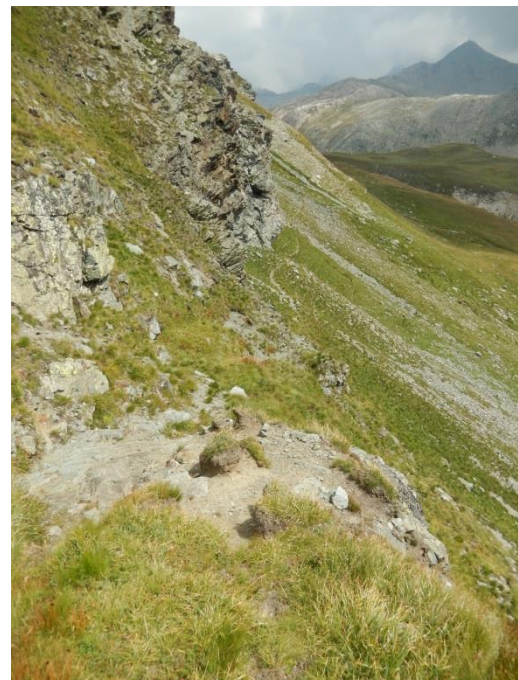


Photo 5078: path across to the Lake Leita trail

This whole area turned out to be butterfly-heaven. I must have seen 4 or 5 different species in the course of the next 15 minutes and here's some of them, with a few other bits and pieces thrown in for good measure. I've also taken a shot of the start of the path from the Lake Leita trail junction, in case you want to visit Basei this way – if you do, it's much shorter but you'd miss out on the adventure of my route.





Photo 5093: the path looking back with the start of the trail in the background

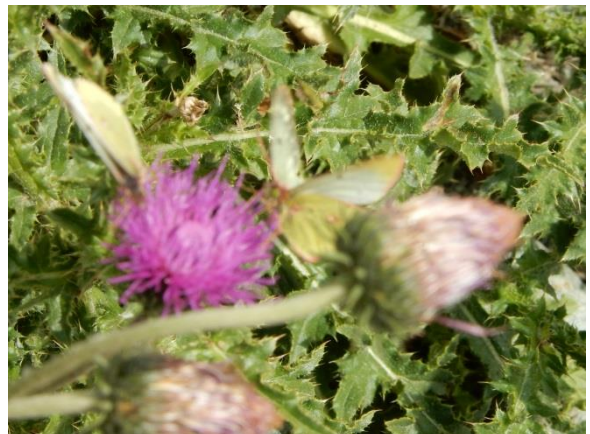






Photo 5092: the same flower as in Photo 5039



Photo 5097: Lake Leita trail to right, Basei trail to left, just after the Rio Rossett waterfall

Now for a trail vignette called ‘Arrogance of the Group Leader’: I was standing in the middle of the path, making notes, as I had been doing all day, when someone barked in my ear so loudly that I jumped out of my skin. I turned round to confront a young man, full of his own importance, leading a group of hikers down the Lake Leita trail, and shouted back at him, “You don’t do that”. He replied that I shouldn’t be standing in the middle of the path, to which I countered, “How about a gentle ‘Excuse me’?” A few more verbals were exchanged during which I almost hit him (not a good idea). The group then trooped off with me saying, “What kind of group leader have you got?” but all I received were blank stares. As the group moved off round the other side of the waterfall, I shouted, “You are a sadist!” and felt much better.



Of course, he was right – I should have stood to one side – but remember, I hadn't met anyone on the path all day. His bark in my ear was either meant as a joke or to show off to his group. In either case, there's definitely a sadistic streak to his action. Such people should not be allowed out of their kennels, let alone be in charge of a group of hikers.

You can return to Rifugio Savoia via the pretty route from Trail 218 or via the 'motorway' route to Lake Rossett: the latter is definitely longer, easier and less pretty but takes about the same time (10 minutes).

I had expected a short but tough trail up to the Basei Glacier and that's what I got for the first couple of hours but then I was glad I gave up on the glacier and enjoyed the next five hours wandering and exploring in the way this website is supposed to be about, flitting from spot to spot, as my whim prompted. Not only that but I didn't meet a soul all day until the 'group leader experience', not counting the shepherd, his dogs and his flock who were all several hundred metres away. I could tell by the bootfall on the paths that few people come this way so it was truly a 'trail-less-trodden'. For all these reasons, I'm putting it into my pantheon of heavenly hikes: it was my joint favourite Nivolet hike (with the Rossett and Leita trail).

## 222: In Front of Rifugio Savoia

On my rest days in between trails, I tend to do very little as my body has to recharge. However, recently I've started to do two things: one is to start writing up the previous day's trail for this website, the other is to take a short stroll. So far on this trip, I've had four rest days: on the first I did the 'Behind Rifugio Savoia' trail; on the second, I went to the far end of the lower Nivolet lake; on the third, I went in between the two Nivolet lakes; and on the fourth, I went between the lakes again and visited the upper lake. I'm going to merge the last three of these into one imaginary trail around the two lakes in front of Rifugio Savoia.



Photo 5987: Nivolet Lakes; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)



This is my shortest ever trail (about 2k) and it shouldn't really qualify as a trail (see my Introduction to the website) as it is all within ½k of a well-patronised car-park. In my defence, hardly anyone was on the trail, despite its proximity to the car-park, as most people were off to higher and more taxing trails.

Skip, slide or stumble down the bank in front of Rifugio Savoia to the shore of the lower lake (Photo 4567) and stroll along its shore to the far end where, 200m beyond, you'll find a:

“Large Rock on the Hillock at the Far End of Lower Lake Nivolet”

By the rock you can survey what surrounds the lakes: quite a spread. Perhaps the most eye-catching view is down the Nivolet Valley to the distinctive and elegant mountain at its end : La Grivola It's actually about 13k away but seems much nearer (Photo 4759). Second to catch my eye was the distant view of Gran Paradiso, a mere 10k away, but somehow seeming more distant, perhaps because you can see less of it (Photo 4758). The third eye-catcher was the view up the lake to Punta Basei and across the Valle d'Orco to the mountains around Grande Aiguille Rousse (Photo 4763). Otherwise, you have Monte Taou Blanc rising above the Piani del Rosset and the Roccia del Nivolet terminating the ridge to the left of the lakes.



Photo 4567: the lower Lake Nivolet

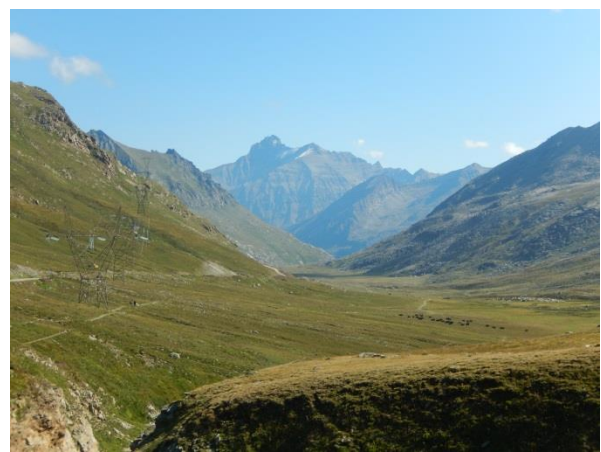


Photo 4759: La Grivola



Photo 4758: Gran Paradiso



Photo 4763: Gr. Aiguille Rousse & P.Basei



A close-up of the Aiguille Rousse reveals the Savoia complex to the right of the lower lake and the Rifugio Citta di Chivasso on the slope above the upper lake (Photo 4764).



Photo 4764: showing Rif Citta di Chivasso (brown roof) & the Rif Savoia complex

You could try to go round the lower lake but I wouldn't bother – it looks stony, damp and miserable. Instead, retrace your steps to Savoia and go past it to a notice-board beyond the lake where you'll see a path leading down and round the slope at the head of the lake (Photo 5164). This sweet little path takes you behind a rocky hillock, first to a view of the upper lake (Photo 5123) and then to a mess of rocks between the two lakes:



Photo 5164: path round the head of the lower lake



Photo 5123: the upper lake

#### “On a Flat Rock between the Nivolet Lakes”

There's lots of rocks to choose from – mine had a view of most of the mountains, as well as the car-park, the length of the lower lake and umpteen yellow flowers between the rocks. Here are the best of the photos (5124, 5125 & 5127).





Photo 5124: lower lake & Taou Blanc



Photo 5125: Savoia & Punta Gran Vaudala



Photo 5127: flat rocks, yellow flowers & Roccia del Nivolet

There appears to be no fluid connection between the lakes but that could change after heavy rain. From here, you could toddle down to the shoreline and return that way to Savoia for a change of terrain (Photo 5131). To my surprise, I didn't even want to go up the hillock – it was a rest day, after all – and besides, I have to prove to you that I'm not totally hillock-obsessed for my spots.

My cobbled-together trail goes along the shoreline for a bit then back round the hillock to proceed along the west shore of the upper lake. It was mid-morning for me and the sun was just coming over the Roccia del Nivolet, sparkling the waters (Photo 5133). The path is easy at first and takes you straight to a:





Photo 5131: rocky return route to Rif Savoia

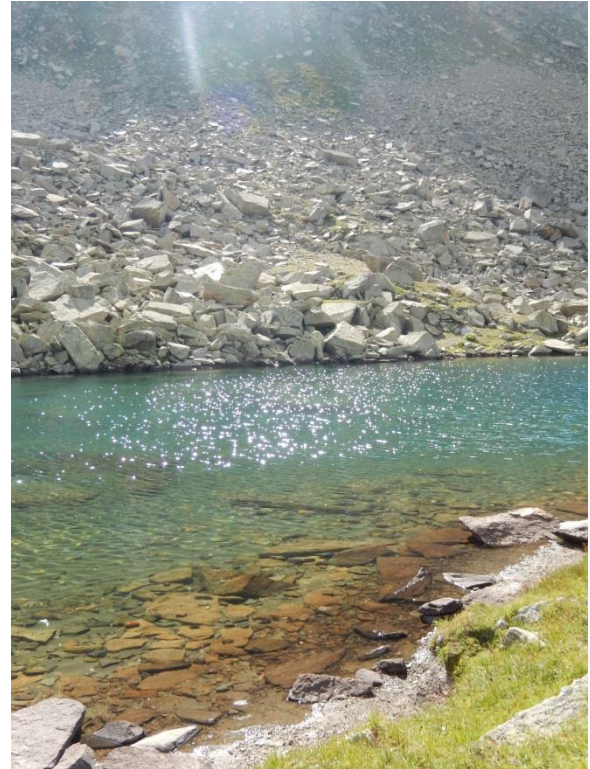


Photo 5133: sun on the upper lake

#### “Ledge on the Corner of the North-West Side of the Upper Lake before a Huge Boulder”

If you stand on the edge of the grassy ledge, you can see virtually the whole lake, including rocks beneath the clear blue/green water (Photo 5137). Punta Basei peeks round the huge boulder with Rif Chivasso on the opposite slope (Photo 5134); the Roccia del Nivolet do their saw-tooth thing above a 45-degree scree-slope with the largest rocks by the shoreline (Photo 5135) and this continues round to the foot of the lake; above you, another hillock rises with some hefty rocks. This would be a great place to sunbathe as the morning sun creeps along the Roccia (Photo 5143). The silence was profound, apart from the occasional airplane, swish of a cyclist, purr of a car or farting of a motor-cycle (the road is perhaps 200m the other side of the hillock) and a breeze sighing across my face.

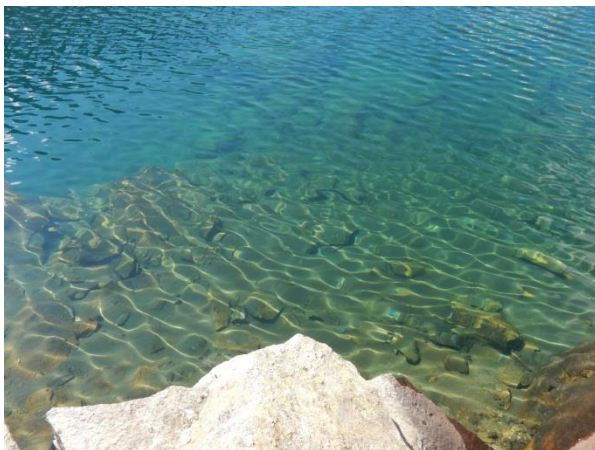


Photo 5137: beneath the surface



Photo 5134: Punta Basei & the upper lake





Photo 5135: scree slope beneath Roccia del Nivolet

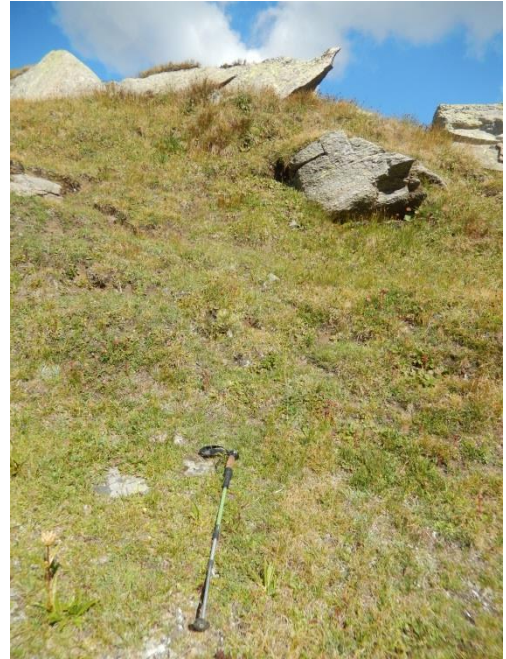


Photo 5143: my pole catching the rays

After this, the slope gets steeper: the higher you go, the easier it becomes. Beyond the hillock, there's a path down to the shore, easily missed, where vivid green-ness and little yellow flowers abound and a perfectly-placed rock-seat appears (Photo 5145).

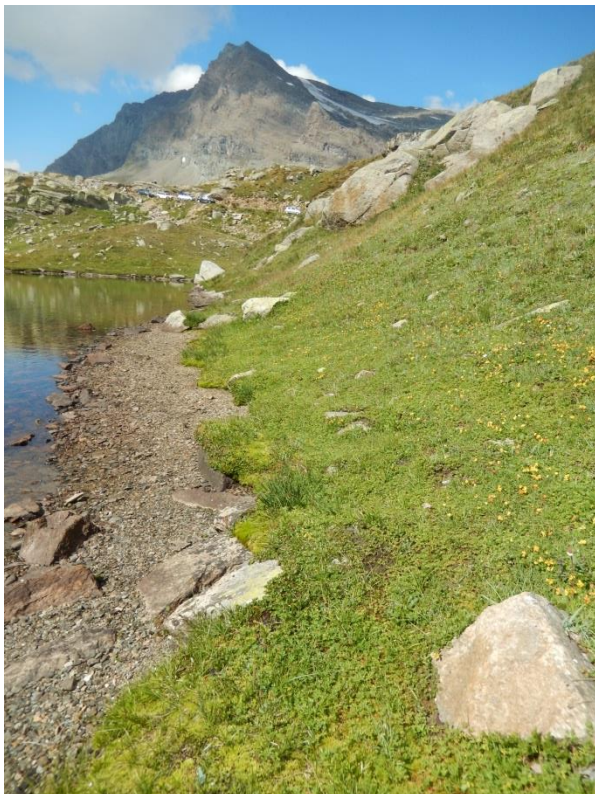


Photo 5145: rock-seat 20m ahead, road in middle distance & Punta Basei on top Photo 5146

You follow the path and shoreline round the south side of the lake with terrific views across it (Photos 5146, 5148) and some gentians to keep me extra-happy (Photo 5150).





Photo 5148



Photo 5150: showing that gentians can stand up tall in the right circumstances

Then there's a surprise, at least for me: an island materialises, which previously had merged with the shore. On this southern shore, I'd had to negotiate a few rocks but at the corner huge rocks and boulders said 'NO' to further progress (Photos 5156, 5160) and I turned round.



Photo 5156: boulders saying 'NO'



Photo 5160: shoreline saying 'NO'

I went up the slope to get a better shot of the island, unmerged with the shore (Photo 5159).



Photo 5159: the island



Photo 5161: marmot hole technique



Then it was a gentle stroll back to Savoia, passing a marmot hole by the path, displaying what appears to be their favourite construction technique – a downward-sloping tunnel beneath a sheltering rock (Photo 5161).

The 1k stroll between the lakes and round the upper lake took me 2 hours of pottering and proves to me that you don't have to hike miles to enjoy staggering beauty (I, too, was staggering after my Basei trail the day before) and profound silence, plus spots to match many of those I discovered higher up and further away from Savoia.

## 223: Ferauda

This was my last choice of trails to tread from Rifugio Savoia because it seemed kind of forbidding, especially after seeing the terrain from the Gran Collet trail. This premonition turned out to be correct: Ferauda is a ferocious trail to someone of my limited mobility – and not just because of the alliteration.

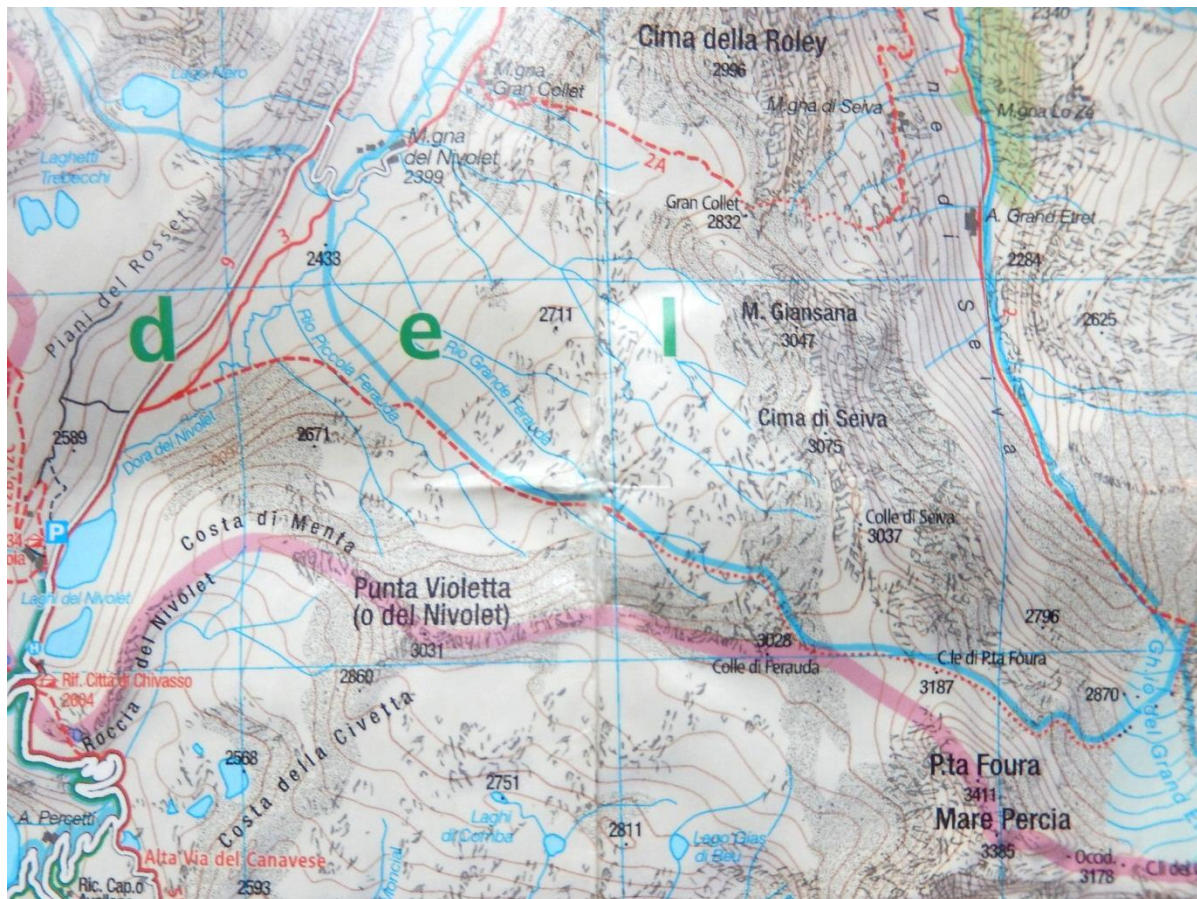


Photo 5663: Colle di Ferauda to right of Punta Violetta; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)

An early start saw the sky clearing over the Ferauda Valley (Photo 5165). Pass the lower lake and turn right at the first notice-board, which mentions three other trails but not Ferauda. Why? The manageress of Savoia had pulled a face when I told her I was going to Ferauda –



why? Keep to the main path (the right fork just comes back to the main path) and turn right just before the stony crossing of the first stream on the faintest of paths. I crossed at the junction of two streams and found another faint path. Two more crossings brought me to three paths up a small ridge (all this detail has a point); 20m later there was a small pile of stones (hooray!) but then nothing (ohh!). Eventually, I came to a jumble of rocks and an electric fence when a herd of deer (or were they chamois?) came trotting, then galloping, down the hillside ahead (Photos 5265, 5266 & 5267), occasionally stopping to stare at me.



Photo 5165: sky clearing over Ferauda



Cross or go round the fence then traverse the hillside at a gradient to suit yourself and cross the next stream, still looking for a path. I thought I'd found one on the far side of a conspicuous rock-slab (Photo 5177) and made a small pile of stones (henceforward called a 'cairn') on a rock. I went up by the rock-slab for 50m then crossed the little valley to the left and continued upwards, veering right and crossing a second stream in a deep gully. I was heading up to the left of Punta Violetta, now seen for the first time. Then you come to a third stream in a much deeper gully. You can either cross it after a steep, forbidding descent or continue up its right bank (Photo 5179). You can see various possible crossing points as you look down the gully but I could see no need to cross as evidenced by a large cairn about 100m higher up (Photo 5183).





Photo 5177: the rock-slab

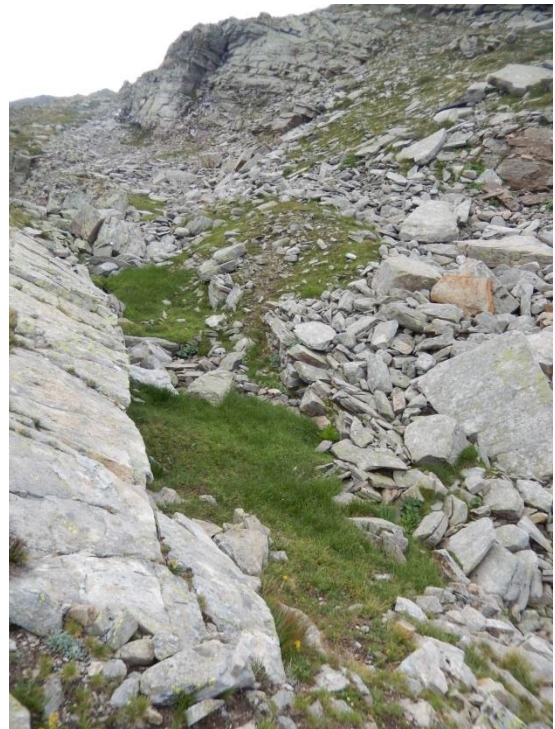


Photo 5179: others had gone this way so I did



Photo 5180: a brave flower found its niche



Photo 5181: hadn't seen this one before

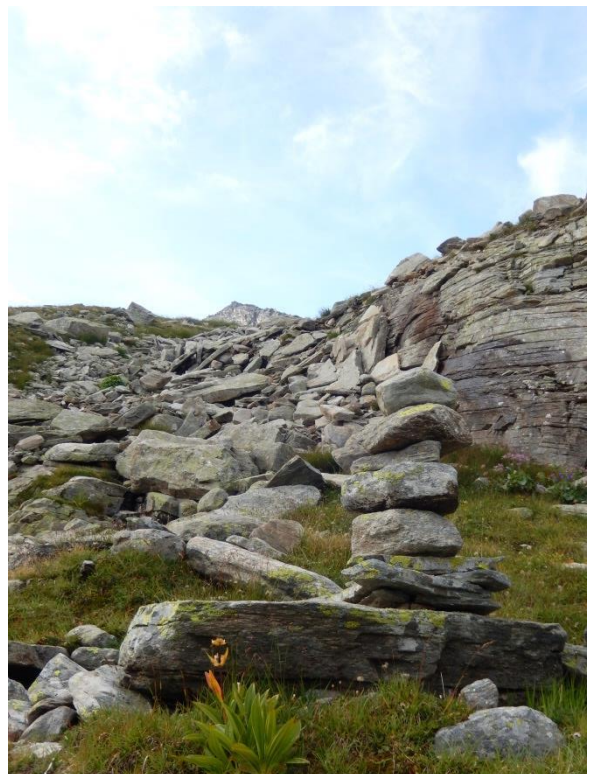


Photo 5183: a large cairn shows the way



Your reward for persevering on this taxing route is to reach the sunny uplands by a small cairn on a big rock (Photo 5184). The sun obligingly came out, I rebuilt the cairn and took a well-earned rest – I had already been on the trail for 2 hours and had covered about 2k. The point of all this detail – and that to come – is to help you if you come this way or to deter you into finding a better way, as I did on the way down. However, I do like a bit of adventure with no danger so this route is OK by me. Please note that a walking pole is useful on this early part of the trail to test beneath grass in hollows, to test the firmness of rocks and to help with balance as you cross rocks.

The map says to follow the Rio Piccola Ferauda for a while before crossing it but I took the first opportunity to cross it at a pretty place (Photo 5186). It would have been easier for me to have had a path to follow but I could find nothing except a few boot-scrapes and some of them looked more like deer/chamois scrapes. So I went up parallel to the Rio Piccola Ferauda as per the map on easy ground.



Photo 5184: small cairn on big rock



Photo 5186: pretty crossing point

After the next big rise, almost level with Punta Violetta on your right, you get your first full view of Punta Foura at the head of the valley. Colle di Ferauda @ 3028m is still 2k away and I wasn't expecting to reach it as the map says the last 1k is a 'narrow, steep path' (indicated by red dots). Soon, the rest of the mountains round the end of the valley appear – from Monte Giansana past Cima di Selva to Punta Foura. I made my way over to the left in the hope of finding a path and crossed a tributary of Rio Piccola Ferauda on safe stones. You're now at about 2,700m between Punta Violetta and Cima della Roley and the going is still easy.

You cross over to the Rio Grande Ferauda and follow its right bank for a while (Photo 5188) – a quintessential mountain stream – there's even another cairn to encourage you. This was the best part of the trail for me: gentle upward slopes, a few decorative pools, not too many awkward rocks and a butterfly circling me as I took the photos. To the left, you get a glimpse of Gran Paradiso and its glacier peeping over the Colle di Selva (Photo 5189).





Photo 5188: pretty bit of Rio Grande Ferauda



Photo 5189: Gran Paradiso & its glacier

Then the way up starts to look more difficult and you have to decide how far you want to go. I decided to go on, especially since cairns became more frequent (Photo 5191) and I could always turn back if things looked dire. The map says to cross the Rio Grande Ferauda and go up its far side, so I did and it was no more difficult at this stage than your average mountain path (except there was no path).



Photo 5191: the middle one is the cairn



Photo 5192: pool



Past a pool with a reassuring cairn on the far side (Photo 5192), you find that the cairns are becoming regular. By now, I had ‘summit fever’ as the going was manageable for me and I predicted I would arrive at Colle di Ferauda in one hour (Photo 5193).

Photo 5193: Colle di Punta Foura to the left, Colle di Ferauda to the right of Punta Foura (the pointed one in the middle)



The next event is a ‘flat valley floor’ which is easy to cross as the rocks are flat, too – but watch out for the next cairn (more on this on the way down). I saw a cairn to the left and went up with it over steeper, but nowhere narrow, ground, some of it over rock-slabs (Photo 5200).



Photo 5200: rock-slabs with cairn

About here, I realised the going felt tougher because I was approaching the more rarified air of 3000m, although the ground was still OK. I said ‘Thank you’ to the cairn-makers for guiding me, though sometimes the cairns were hard to spot against a background of rocks. I went astray a couple of times but found my way back to the cairns. Now it did get tough for me: the rocks became steeper and more broken up but I kept going, seeing Colle di Ferauda not that much higher up to my right.

The map shows the path bending to the right but at some juncture I realised the cairns were heading for Colle di Punta Foura. That was too far for me so I had to cut across country (actually across massive, awkward rocks) to reach Colle di Ferauda. Avoid any patches of snow like the plague – you could sink deep into a hole and break something. There’s a big cairn on the Colle to guide you, whichever way you come up. I arrived 1 hour 40 minutes after I had predicted 1 hour to the top:

“Colle di Ferauda”

After all that trouble, of course this has to be a spot but it’s the bleakest spot so far on this website. You are surrounded by rocks, patches of snow and rubble, with wide-ranging views of immense mountain-tops – and most of them look rather bleak. I won’t name them all but rather show you the photos instead (Photos 5201, 5202, 5204 & 5206). As well as the big cairn, there was also a stone shelter – but how do you get in it if you’re not a gymnast (Photo 5208)? I christened the area ‘Desolation Row’, plagiarising Bob Dylan.





Photo 5201: west to the 'Point of the Ridge'



Photo 5202: south-west over the Orco Valley



Photo 5204: Punta Foura and Mare Percia



Photo 5208: hard-to-enter shelter



Photo 5206: north down the ridge to Cima della Roley



I spent 35 minutes at the top, recovering, despite a considerable wind. Then I was determined to find an easier way down, playing it by eye, rather than by cairns.

Pick your way over to the first valley below the 'Point of the Ridge' from Photo 5201 above. There's no stream but the valley is above a patch of snow (in late August after a hot summer so it will always be there for the foreseeable future). Descend slowly and carefully on rubble towards little pools in the middle distance and past the patch of snow – it's much easier than the alternative but with no cairns. In fact, it's a doddle and here's a photo to help you find it on the way up (Photo 5210).



Photo 5210: my route passes this big rock



Photo 5211: awkward gully from the top

However, it's not all plain sailing, otherwise the cairns would have sent us this way. There's an awkward gully to negotiate (Photos 5211, 5212). It's here that the cairns re-appear (Photo 5213) but they lead up to the left, as far as I can tell.



Photo 5212: awkward gully from the bottom



Photo 5213: first cairn on the way down

From here the cairns are frequent but I didn't recognise any of them from coming up. The reason is that there's a parting of the ways at the 'flat valley floor' coming up (Photo 5217): right for Colle di Ferauda (Photo 5216), left for Colle di Punta Foura. On the way up, I made the mistake of going left where the cairns were a little more obvious.





Photo 5217: the ‘flat valley floor’

Photo 5216: the way up to Colle di Ferauda – can you see the cairns? (‘Point of the Ridge’ behind)



It’s worth noting that the rock-slabs are OK going up and coming down – most of them have pimples on them, which helps your grip. Of course, this would be different in rain or ice.

Now I felt I had ‘made it’ onto familiar territory but I wanted to go down a different way. So I veered to the right with the Rio Grande Ferauda rather than going over to the Rio Piccola Ferauda. First, however, I was in need of some softness after all that ‘Desolation Row’:

“Anywhere by a Pool coming down from Colle di Ferauda”

I chose a big one (Photo 5218) but even this was enclosed by rocks (Photo 5219). I found a spot out of the wind and had a late lunch. The spot had nice views of Punta Foura, Cima della Roley, Taou Blanc, Punta Gran Vaudala, Punta Basei and Punta Violetta, no longer much of a punta from this angle (Photo 5223).



Photo 5218: my pool is the second one



Photo 5219: big pool enclosed by rocks





Photo 5223: the ridge down to Punta Violetta with Punta Basei in the distance

More pools are below (Photo 5226) but I was heading to the right towards Taou Blanc – you may recognise this red rock on my ‘alternative’ route up or down (Photo 5228).



Photo 5226: more pools



Photo 5228: red rock on ‘alternative’ route

I noticed a large cairn to my right (Photo 5230) and made a bee-line for it, anticipating a better way down. From the cairn, I took a last shot of Punta Foura and Colle di Ferauda (Photo 5231). Now I thought I was coasting: ahead I saw the Rio Grande Ferauda with a herd of cattle grazing by it and decided to go down to the left of the stream, giving the cattle a wide berth.

Well, the cattle had other ideas: I don’t know if they were bored or felt that I was invading their territory but they came at me en masse from 50m away and tried to surround me. I wasn’t having any of that and kept them at pole’s length by shouting, growling, pulling aggressive faces and waving my pole at them as I sped away. However, they were much



faster than me and I spent a good ten minutes keeping them at bay. Quite scary, actually, as some of them had rather nasty horns (Photos 5232, 5234, 5236 & 5239).



Photo 5230: large cairn



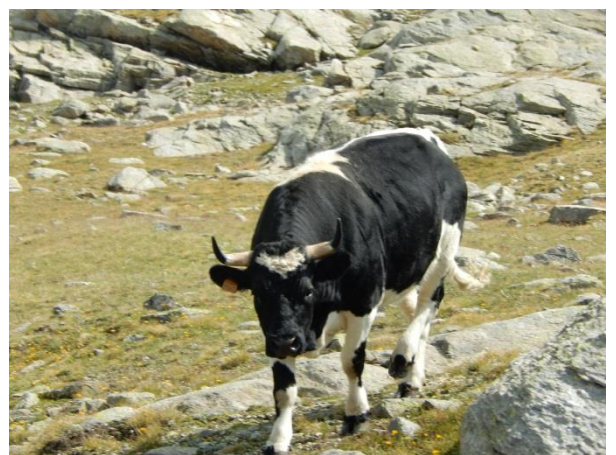
Photo 5231: last shot of Punta Foura and Colle di Ferauda



Photo 5232: first encounter



Photo 5234: trying to surround me





I kept shouting, “Do what you’re supposed to do – chew some grass!” and after 15 minutes or so, they did (Photo 5242) and I could take some other photos (5243, 5244) and take a rest.



Photo 5242: pastoral scene under Punta Violetta   Photo 5243: north to Grand Nomenon



Photo 5244: north down the Nivolet Valley to Valsavarenche, La Grivola & Grand Nomenon

Then it was just a matter of inching my way down the final slope into the Nivolet Valley (Photo 5245), inching because I was very tired and it was quite steep in places. On my way, I scored a couple of good close-ups (Photos 5263, 5264). My route was between the two Rio Feraudas (Photo 5258) and took me an hour from Photo 5245, that’s how slow I was, picking my way over tussocks and rocks, but it was much better than attempting the route I came up, in my state of exhaustion. I came into the Nivolet Valley about ½k lower down than I had left it and crossed over to the main path. My parting shot was to take a photo of the way I had gone up, showing the bottom of the deep gully I didn’t cross and the way up to the right of it (Photo 5260).





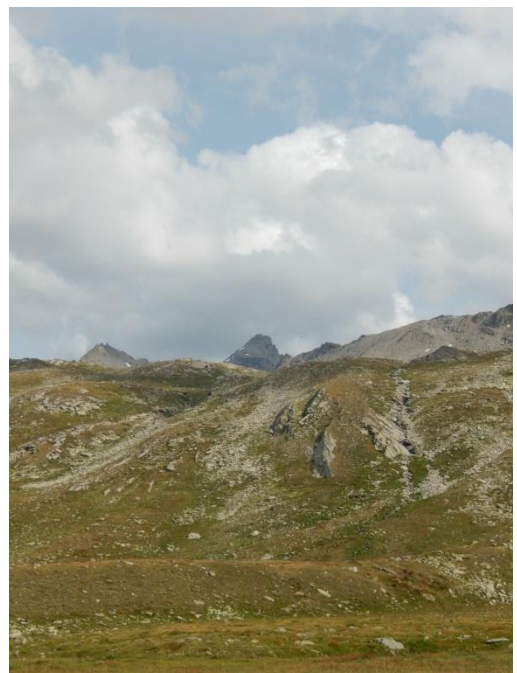
Photo 5245: route down from the top



Photo 5258: route down from the bottom



Photo 5260: various gullies on the way up





The whole trail took me 10 hours for the 12k but that doesn't indicate some of the difficulties I encountered: the pathless beginning, the rocky ascent past the deep gully, the misleading cairns, the rocky crossing from the Colle di Punta Foura route to the Colle di Ferauda and the herd ganging up on me. Was it worth it? Definitely yes: I still like achieving something I didn't think I could do, I went higher than I've ever been on foot before (3028m), although the scenery wasn't as spectacular as the Marinelli trail at 2813m (see Trail 216, Valmalenco), and I reckon I did some pretty astute route-finding. For me, these 'masculine' objectives are fine, as long as they're not the only things that float our boat, as I hope this website demonstrates. And definitely no, it doesn't go into my pantheon of heavenly hikes because most of the scenery was just too brutal and the going was too rough.

## 224: Alpe Comba

This was the last trail I trod from Rifugio Savoia because I wanted to do it on a Sunday when there would be lots of Navetta buses plying the hairpins from Lake Serru to Savoia, which would save me a 2k climb of 150m height at the end of the day (the Navetta bus runs many more journeys on Sundays because the road is supposed to be closed to other traffic but I saw no evidence of this). Alpe Comba is on the other, southern side of the ridge that stretches from the Roccia del Nivolet to Punta Foura and Mare Percia, and then bends north to Gran Paradiso and La Grivola and down towards Aosta. To reach it you have to go over the Colle del Nivolet, down to Lake Losere and then along the north side of the Valle dell' Orco.



Photo 5669: area around Alpe Comba; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)





Photo 5671: detail of Alpe Comba trail; copyright Kompass-Karten, 2016; [www.kompass.de](http://www.kompass.de)

Another early start saw me climbing the road to Colle del Nivolet, availing myself of a short-cut past Rifugio Città di Chivasso, which affords good views over the Nivolet Lakes and the territory of Trails 218, 219 & 221 (Photos 5286, 5274).

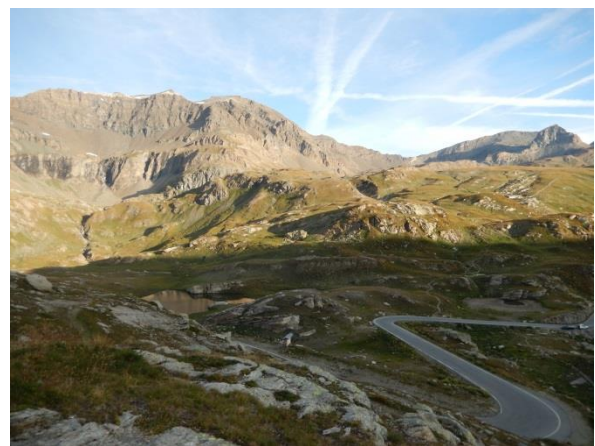
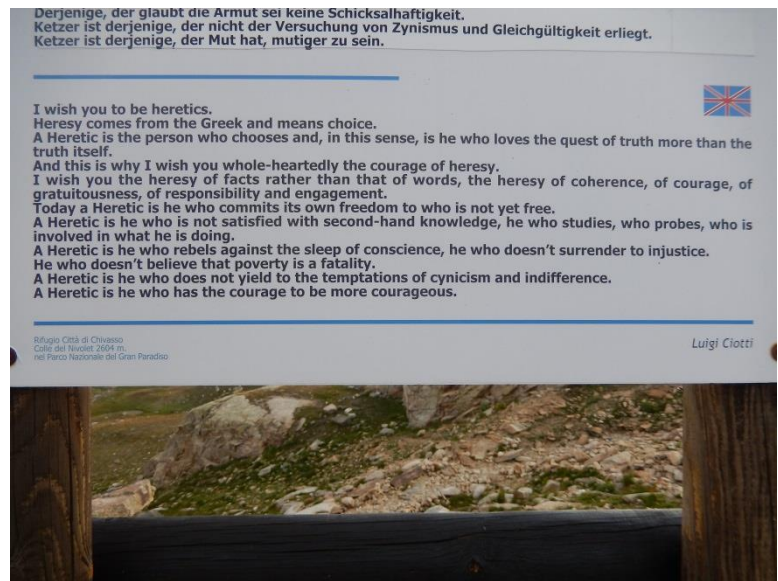


Photo 5286: Città di Chivasso and Nivolet Lakes      Photo 5274: area of Trails 218, 219 & 221

Città di Chivasso also sports a rather grand notice entitled 'The Courage of Heresy' whose sentiments I ascribe to, apart from the assumption that a heretic is male (Photo 5275). I reproduce the English version here (Photo 5277). I was surprised to find a philosophy lesson outside a rifugio (Photo 5278) but apparently the owner of this rifugio runs the place according to these ideas which also include a rather poetic statement on another board about the 'right' attitude towards the National Park – this time only in Italian and French.





Photos 5275, 5277: ‘The Courage of Heresy’; reproduced with permission

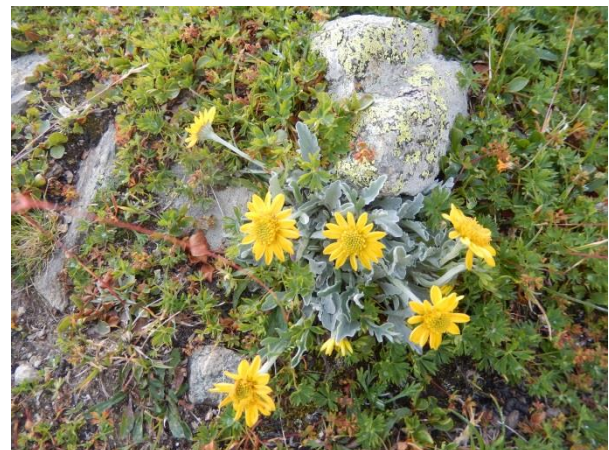


Photo 5278: Rifugio Citta di Chivasso

Photo 5285: a new flower for me



Photo 5284: a top display of harebells by the road at the top of the Colle del Nivolet



You could follow the road over the Colle del Nivolet and down to Lake Losere but there's a very much better way, which is to take the path at the back of Chivasso (Photo 5287), which was probably the original pre-road pass, and descend via a true mountain path to join the road above Losere.



Photo 5287: path over the Colle del Nivolet



Photo 5292: 'gateway' at the spot

A 'gateway' between two cairns marks the:

“Top of the Foot Pass between Chivasso and Losere”

Predictably, the views take in the mountain-tops all around – not much can be seen of the valleys. On the east side, there's a flat slab of rock, on the west a rocky hillock (Photo 5296). If you scoot over the slab of rock, you can look down on a little lake beneath the end of the Roccia del Nivolet with a better view of Punta Foura etc (Photo 5299).



Photo 5299: little lake, Punta Foura and hand to shade the sun



Photo 5296: Punta Basei

Continue on your merry way with fabulous views to right and left (Photos 5301, 5302). The path becomes briefly an admirable, revetted zig-zag descent with the two Losere Lakes coming into view (Photo 5305). Just off to the left, you can visit the little lake with precarious-looking stepping-stones to a rock-island and a ruined building by its side (Photo 5308).





Photo 5301: Lake Agnel with Lake Serru and Aiguille Rousse behind

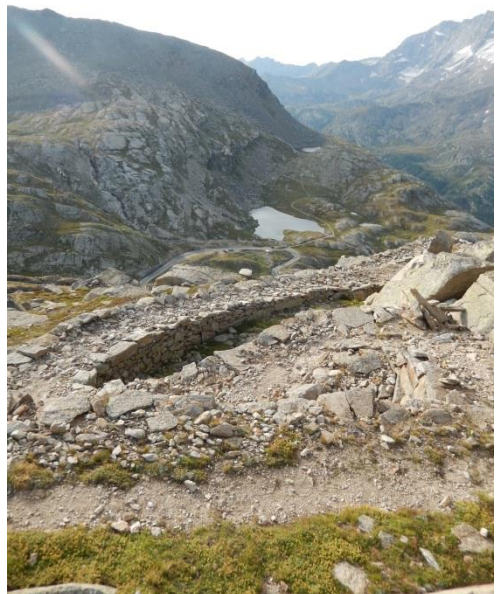


Photo 5301: the little lake with the end of the Roccia del Nivolet behind



Photo 5308: the little lake & ruined building

Photo 5305: revetted path with Losere Lakes





The hairpins continue both on the path and on the road with more terrific views (Photos 5310, 5312). The path comes out on the road six hairpin bends above Lake Losere but you can cut all of them, if you wish, on what is now the Alta Via del Canavese. I took these steep short-cuts slowly to preserve the limited shelf-life of my knees.



Photo 5310: Punta Violetta, Costa della Civetta & Punta Foura/Mare Percia



Photo 5312: hairpins above Lake Losere



Photo 5315: scabious by the roadside



Photo 5316: in the bend of a hairpin

After two hours of this delightful crossing, I arrived at the lower of the two Losere Lakes which is right by the road (Photo 5318).

Photo 5318: Navetta bus descending to Lake Losere – my last spot is on top of the bump to the left of the Roccia del Nivolet





It really is a lovely spot, with a car-park, notice-boards and picnic places galore (Photos 5317, 5322).



Photo 5317: the lower Lake Losere



Photo 5322: walking round the lake

It was 10am but there was ice on the path – the first adumbration of winter (Photo 5329). The upper lake is just over the crest in Photo 5322 (Photo 5330). Further along the path, you come to a space on the left where someone has stood up a slender rock in front of a large imposing rock (Photo 5331). I at once thought of a pagan ceremony – but that's just me.



Photo 5329: ice on the path



Photo 5331: a ritual site?



Photo 5330: upper Lake Losere from its foot



Suddenly, you are at the:

“Corner above Lake Serru and Lake Agnel at the First Sight of Lake Ceresole Reale”

Here you get the lot: another view of Lakes Serru and Agnel (Photo 5332), the mountains across the Valle dell’ Orco (Photo 5333), down the valley to Lake Ceresole Reale (Photo 5334), back to the Roccia with Taou Blanc and Punta Gran Vaudala behind (Photo 5335) and a pointed peak just above you – a wonderful, airy spot between the worlds of the valley and the mountain-tops.



Photo 5332: Lakes Serru and Agnel



Photo 5333: mountains on the French border



Photo 5334: down to Lake Ceresole Reale



Photo 5335: back up the path

Now begins the 2k traverse to Alpe Comba, basically flat with a few ups and downs (Photo 5343). Two Italians passed me and I said spontaneously, “Que bella” – is that Italian for “How beautiful”? After my trials on ‘Ferocious Ferauda’, this part of the trail was a leisurely saunter for me with lots of diversions en route. Here are the photos I took in order, with explanatory comments (Photos 5344 – 5358). The trail continues to Lake Lillet but I just took photos of it, in case you are interested – it definitely wasn’t for me.





Photo 5343: the trail ahead + two Italian hikers



Butterfly on thistle flower



The turn for Alpe Combetta



Waterfall, Punta Foura & Mare Percia



Hikers on the trail, looking back

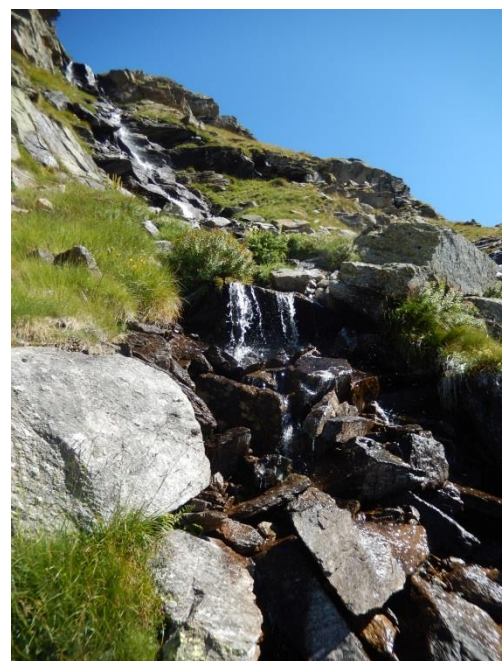




Probably the nicest assemblage of flowers and rocks of the whole trip



Nel Glacier beneath Aiguille Percee in background



Another cascade

Finally, after a steepish uphill stretch, you reach the turn-off for Chiapili di Sopra. This is where Alpe Comba should be and I expected at least a few ruined buildings but all there was was this old signpost next to a modern red and white flash (Photo 5359). There's a modern sign saying 'Lago Losere 0.35 hrs', which I assume means 35 minutes – I had taken 2 hours. The signs also point to Lake Lillet 1½ hrs away over the Colle della Terra. I went on from here, looking for Alpe Comba but found no buildings, ruined or otherwise, so stopped at the:



“Corner past the Mule Track Notice-board at Alpe Combe”

There are big views all around you, except immediately above: back to Lake Serru, Punta Basei and Pointe di Galisia; along the mountains on the far side of the Valle dell’ Orco with Lake Ceresole Reale just showing a sliver of its southern edge; on this side of the valley, you get the best view of the route to Lake Lillet, should you wish to take it (Photo 5363). I was hoping to see Colle di Ferauda from a different angle but no such luck – it’s hidden behind a ridge.



Photo 5359: old signpost



Photo 5363: the route to Lake Lillet goes along the slope to the lower bowl, round it and over the Colle della Terra at its right edge – good luck!

There was no question of my attempting the Lake Lillet trail, which, as you can see, is no doddle and is marked as such on the map. So I turned around and enjoyed some more leisurely sauntering on the way back, with several more photos to entertain myself – and possibly you (Photos 5367 – 5397)...



Mountain biker at the signpost





Terrace with seats



Bee on a different type of thistle



Don't know what the building with four windows is – the 'defensive positions' to the left of it suggest army training but there's nothing on the map (very hush-hush)



A looming rock



I can never get too much of harebells





As much of Lake Ceresole Reale as you can get



Upper Lake Losere from above



Lower Lake Losere from above

I arrived at the bus stop by the lower Lake Losere 1½ hrs after leaving the signpost at Alpe Comba – almost three times the suggested par – it's only 2k so I suppose 35 minutes is do-able for someone who is an agile goat over rough and stony paths. I thought 1½ hrs was pretty good going. The bus whisked me back to Savoia in 7 minutes.

The trail from Losere to Comba was what the map told me it would be – a high level, relatively flat balcony route above the valley, giving more dramatic views than were available from the bus coming up from Ceresole Reale. What I had not expected, and cannot recommend highly enough, is the glory of the foot-pass over the Colle del Nivolet from Chivasso to the road. I couldn't beat it for sheer drama and surprise – my favourite ½ k of the trip. Call in at Rifugio Chivasso if you have the time: it seemed like a really cosy and welcoming place to me.



That's it for Nivolet: a resounding success for me, considering I planned it all from the map – not one of the trails was a dud and they all had different characters. The pleasure was augmented by staying at Rifugio Savoia with my own room and friendly service at restaurant and bar. Staying in one place meant that I didn't have to lug a heavy pack from rifugio to rifugio but that's only possible if there are enough attractive trails to tread – something that is usually not available. For instance, I shall be moving between three rifugi with a full pack on my next trip – to the foothills of Monviso.

I shall bid you adieu with some moon-shots over the Roccia del Nivolet from my room:



The 'man in the moon' stares at the 'face in the rock'











