

# The Map - Basic trail - Light Blue Route



## Basic trail: light blue route

### Heading east, along the left and right banks of the Arno, through gardens and parks

San Niccolò Bridge - the Gardens of Lungarno del Tempio, Cristoforo Colombo and Lungarno Aldo Moro - Varlungo Bridge- Albereta Park - Lungarno Francesco Ferrucci - San Niccolò Bridge

This scenic nature trail heads to the east, along the left and right banks of the Arno, over **the San Niccolò Bridge** and the **Varlungo Bridge**. It then heads along the right bank of the Arno through the **Gardens of Lungarno del Tempio, Cristoforo Colombo and Aldo Moro**, and over to the left bank, through the **Albereta Park**.



#### San Niccolò Bridge

Formerly named after S Ferdinando, this bridge was originally made from iron between 1836 and 1837 next to the S. Niccolò weir, which used to supply the old mills that have now disappeared. It was damaged when the Arno flooded in 1844, then rebuilt in 1853 and once again altered in 1890. It was destroyed by the retreating German army in 1944 and was rebuilt again out of reinforced concrete.



#### Varlungo Bridge

Built between 1979 and 1981, this was the first bridge upstream from Florence. Up until then, a barge known as "la nave" (the ship) was used to provide crossings between the two banks with a small dock further upstream. This dock was also used by the "renaioli" boats (sand diggers) which used to dredge the river to recover the sand needed for the construction industry.

This trail begins by the Gardens of Lungarno del Tempio.

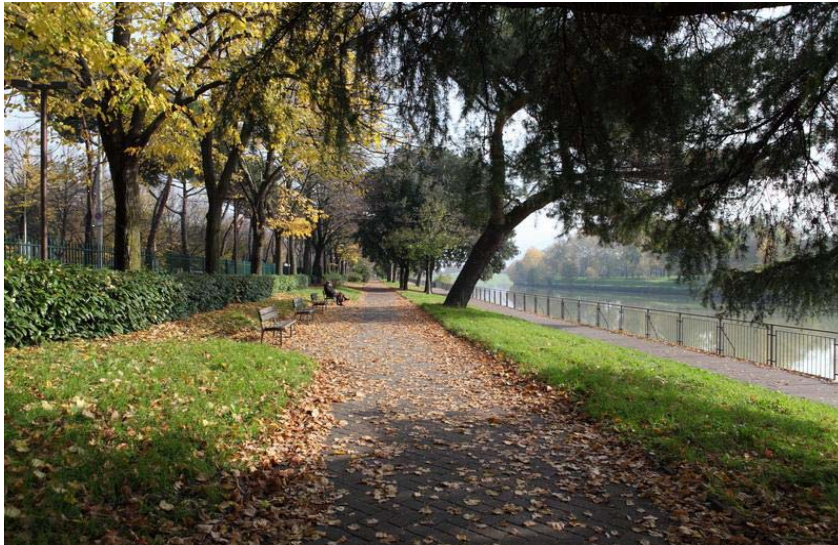


### **Lungarno del Tempio**

These gardens get their name from the ancient Spedale dei Cavalieri Templari (Knights Templar Hospital, which no longer exists) located at the Prato della Giustizia (the 'Field of Justice' now known as Piazza Piave), a large area outside the walls where prisoners were executed. The condemned prisoners were taken from the Bargello and Stinche prisons (today the site of the Verdi Theatre), through the Via de' Malcontenti (the popular name of Via della Giustizia), to meet their sad fate by the "Battuti Neri" (members of the confraternity founded in 1343) who assisted prisoners sentenced to death by carrying the Cross for this melancholy procession, which is now kept in the fifteenth-century Church of Santa Maria alla Croce del Tempio found in Via San Giuseppe.

Except during the temporary abolition of the death penalty in 1786, this sad practice continued until the unification of Italy.

Footpaths and cycle lanes run all throughout the Lungarno Gardens. There are plenty of benches and kids' games as these Gardens stretch out alongside the Lungarno Cristoforo Colombo and Lungarno Aldo Moro Gardens.



### **The Gardens of Lungarno Colombo and Lungarno Aldo Moro**

Together with the Gardens of Lungarno del Tempio, these Gardens are real testimony to the "linear river garden", which gave birth to the idea of a huge united river park. They were created after WWII, when the local council was very busy working on the issue of green areas, especially with the work of the former Councillor, Piero Bargellini. The long green belt between the Lungarno Gardens and the river was established and partially reshaped with earth brought in to even out the surface. Two asphalt paths were marked out and 150 specimens from over 30 botanical varieties were planted. Iron railings were placed around the area to form a scenic terrace over the river.

Following our trail along the river, we pass by the old **Villa della Casaccia** (now used as tourist accommodation), which was one of the few historical aristocratic buildings in the area.

In fact, until the mid-nineteenth century, this area along the right bank was mainly used for farming (the “Gardens of Bellariva”). These cultivated fields were interspersed with the small humble homes of craftsmen, vegetable growers, sharecroppers, labourers and *renaioli* (sand diggers). There were also a few brick factories dotted around the area. The urbanisation of the area occurred from the 1950s onwards and unfortunately not much remains of the “Gardens of Bellariva (or Piagentina)”.



Giuseppe Abbati, *Arno near Casaccia*, Milan, private collection

### **Villa La Casaccia**

A fifteenth-century building that was extended and renovated, this Villa once belonged to the Alighieri family. In the fifteenth century it was passed on to a company of painters led by Giuliano di Jacopo, who turned it into an art studio. It was subsequently rented by the Tommasi, a family of painters from Livorno, who gathered and welcomed famous and lesser-known “Macchiaiolo” painters, notably including Giovanni Fattori, Silvestro Lega and Vittorio Corcos. Many important writers also visited the Villa, such as Giosuè Carducci, Enrico Panzacchi and Anna Franchi. Villa La Casaccia thus became the “Circle of Bellariva”, an important place for artistic and cultural meetings and exchanges. Many paintings produced during this busy period focused on the Arno at Bellariva.



Silvestro Lega, *Vegetable garden in Piagentina*, 1864, private collection

The Macchiaiolo painter, Silvestro Lega, accurately portrays life in this part of the city before it underwent the important urbanisation. You can see the cultivated fields and the Dome of the Cathedral in the background.

As we continue through the green scenery, passing Villa La Casaccia (formerly known as Villa Bellariva), we find the huge building of the **Tenda Theatre** (Obihall, Lungarno Aldo Moro 3). Getting back onto our paved route we will see the charming bronze statue “**Pluie**” (Rain) by Michel Folon at the centre of the roundabout and on the other side RAI’s Regional Headquarters.



### **Tenda Theatre**

This tensile structure was designed in 1978 to host music concerts and other events (in 1979, De Andrè recorded a live album here together with PFM). In 2002, it was renovated and upgraded to meet growing demands. Nowadays, it is known as the Obihall Theatre (formerly Saschall). In 2004, the road next to it was dedicated to the great Genoese singer-songwriter.



### **Pluie (“Rain Man”)**

This sculpture was donated by Michel Folon to the city of Florence to mark the European Social Forum which was held here in 2002. A jet of water shoots out of the handle, creating the shape of an umbrella.



### **RAI's Regional Headquarters**

The impressive RAI building (with two facilities, one for offices and the other for productions) is the work of the architect, Italo Gamberini and his partners (1962-65). Its design was inspired by early Italian rationalism and we can see the influences of Mies Van Der Rohe and

the brutalism movement. It was opened in 1968.



Villa Bellesi is an interesting example of sixteenth-century architecture featured on this walk.

But let's continue along the river, strolling down Via de André.

Along this trail, we find an old industrial red-brick building with huge windows: this is the old tram depot.



#### **The former tram depot**

This building is an interesting example of industrial archaeology. It was built in 1890 by the Belgian Company "Les tramways florentins", which the Municipality of Florence had appointed to construct and manage the Florentine railway network. However, the deeds were transferred over to the Municipality of Florence in 1935 when the Belgian company ceased trading due to serious financial difficulties. The building was originally used as a tram depot and workshop, as well as the Varlungo central/substation. It has recently been purchased by a private company which plans to use it for various commercial activities, although its exterior features are listed and must be preserved.

As we move on, we follow a path along the river called Via di Varlungo. With very little traffic and a separate footpath, it offers a view over a small row of little nineteenth and twentieth century villas, just beyond which there is a barrier blocking any cars from continuing and marking a section exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists known as Via della Funga.



The Varlungo Bridge

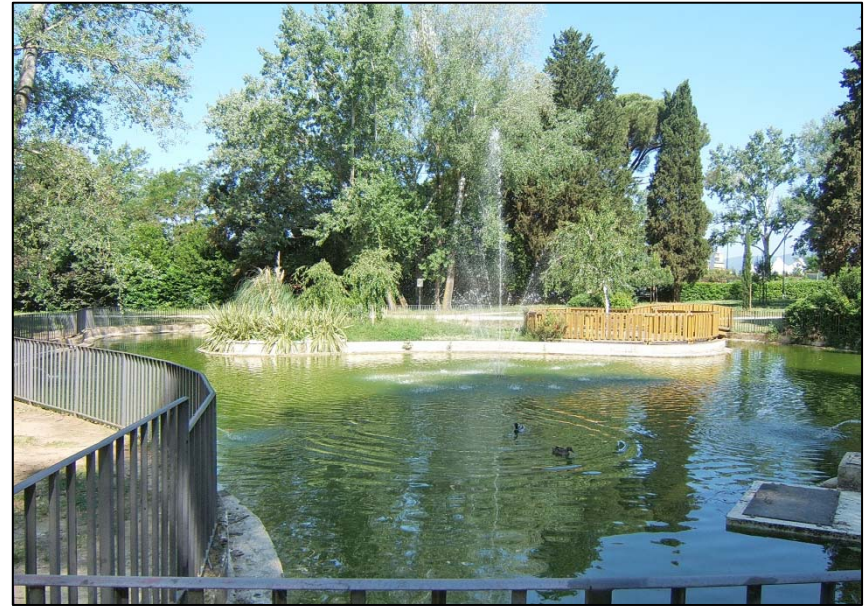


Via della Funga

Once we reach the foot of the Varlungo Bridge, we take the flight of stairs that leads down to the footpath on the lowest level, which is the path on the bridge specifically for local traffic (the two-way road above is dedicated to fast-moving traffic towards South Florence, Bagno a Ripoli, Grassina and therefore towards the motorway toll booths). A flight of stairs at the end of the bridge takes us to the right to the far corner of Albereta Park.



Albereta Park towards the Varlungo Bridge



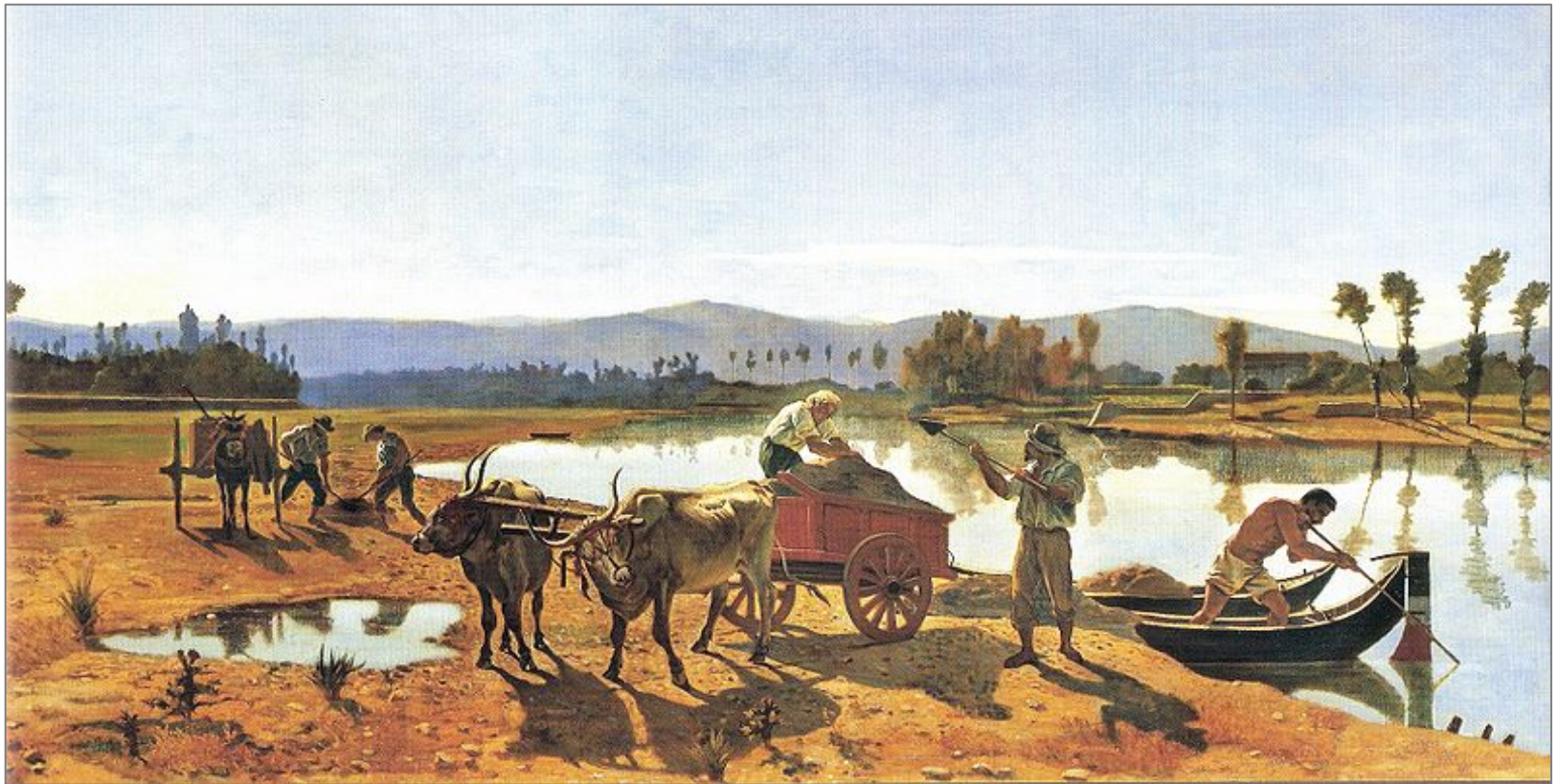
### **Albereta Park**

After Cascine Park and Argingrosso Park, Albereta is the largest public green area in Florence (it has been a park since 1953 and is often known as “Cascine’s little brother”). It is one of the most beautiful and striking parks in the city, running along the left bank of the Arno through Via Villamagna for about 1.5 km, including the Varlungo Bridge and the Giovanni da Verrazzano Bridge.

White poplars or “populus alba” grow in abundance over the park’s 13 hectares (during the nineteenth century the Municipality of Florence planted these trees here, as well as around the Isolotto and Cascine, and for years now they have been making money by selling the wood), as well as birches, acacias and other species that have gradually been introduced, some in recent years, but always according to an exact system: willows along the steep banks and rows of poplars along the path by the Arno.

This is also the site of the Anconella aqueduct, the city’s largest water treatment plant. The park is full of rest areas, games, benches, picnic tables, food stands, as well as free sports facilities and equipment (a skating rink, a skate park, a small climbing wall, a football pitch, etc). It offers peace and quiet away from the bustling roads and the silent beauty of the river, which is only broken by rowing boats passing by.





Stanislao Pointeau, "*I Renaioli d'Arno*", 1861, private collection

### **Work and life along the river**

For many Florentines, the river has not been a dividing line or a tear in the urban fabric, but rather a place of life, work and relaxation, often a friend but sometimes a relentless enemy.

All year round and in any weather, the *renaioli*, with their small oak wood boats (known as "navicelli"), used to dredge the river to extract the sand and then sieve it through iron wire meshes on the river bank, dividing it up into separate piles: both the coarse and fine sand was better quality than the quarried sand and consequently it was in high demand at construction sites for finishing the plaster on walls. The red "barrocci" carts used to pass by, pulled along by horses or oxen, which were used to transport materials. Many of the beautiful city palaces were built thanks to this humble work, along with the miners and stonemasons working in the Florentine stone quarries (Maiano, Trassinaia and Monteripaldi, to name but a few). The *renaioli* worked in this area for centuries, until mechanised dredges arrived on the Rovezzano gravel beds and by the Indiano Bridge, and finally they too were consigned to the history books.

However, the river also created work for the "*traghettatori*" (ferryman) who provided crossings between the two banks with their barges anchored to the embankments of the small docks. The last *traghettatore* continued to work until 1977, before the Varlungo Bridge was built, carrying people and materials from one bank to another in Nave a Rovezzano, upstream from the city over the narrowest point of the river.

The San Michele and Sant'Andrea **mills** also used to operate along the river, grinding wheat and tanning cloth (they can be found by following the connected route). Business was good and consequently these mills employed a large amount of workers. The river was also a source of life and work for the **washerwomen**. It was a busy profession, particularly when Florence was the capital of Italy, and especially at Rimaggio, in Bagno a Ripoli, which was once full of washerwomen and bleachers (the place names were never mere coincidences), not far from where we are now. The river was also a place of relaxation: it was **the sea of the city**. When the water was clean, people used to dive and swim in the Arno (they even used to train here, for example in the swimming tank at Rari Nantes, in Lungarno Ferrucci, before the swimming pool was built). However, this river has also been the enemy. It has broken its banks, **flooded** and destroyed the surrounding area. It was this way for centuries, until the 1966 flood, after which controls were gradually put in place to protect the entire basin, like the new Bilancino Lake in Mugello and the retention basins that have been built and are currently being constructed.



Lorenzo Gelati, "L'Arno a S. Niccolò con il bagno delle donne e i panni stesi al sole", Bardini Peyron Foundation



Giuseppe Zocchi, "L'Arno alla Pescaia verso S. Niccolò", Bardini Peyron Foundation



Angelo Tommasi, "Washerwoman along the Arno", 1881



The Florence flood, 04<sup>th</sup> November 1966, from Piazzale Michelangelo

---

Once we have strolled through the whole of Albereta Park, we exit out onto Piazza Ravenna (next to Giovanni da Verrazzano Bridge). We then continue along the **Lungarno Francesco Ferrucci** (these banks include the headquarters and facilities of two historic Florentine swimming and rowing clubs, which bear witness to the importance of the river as the “sea” of the city), once we have passed these facilities we reach **San Niccolò Bridge**, the starting point and finishing point of our walk.



Canoeing along the river



Sports facilities along the river



View from S. Niccolò Bridge towards the centre



S. Niccolò Bridge with Belvedere Fort in the background

---

## Technical Information

Trail distance:	6 km
Height difference:	10 m
Maximum gradient:	-
Average journey time:	Walking: 1h 30' - Running: 40'
Difficulty:	*

## Technical and sporting features

Road conditions and surface:	The trail is completely flat (except for the gradient variations on the bridges across the Arno). It mainly runs along footpaths and cycle lanes with normal road surfaces (trodden paths and asphalt in some sections). It is excellent for developing <b>resistance</b> and is also well-suited for developing <b>aerobic strength</b> .
Suitable for:	Walkers of all levels <b>Families with children</b> Runners of all levels
Type of training:	This type of trail allows you to train at your own level. It is excellent for developing <b>resistance</b> . It is also well-suited for repetition training for the development of <b>aerobic strength</b> .
Footwear:	Walking shoes and in particular running shoes

## Directions

Line services:	<i>With stops directly at or next to the start of the trail</i> Ataf line 31 stop Tempio (Grassina - Piazza Ravenna - S. Marco) Ataf line 32 stop Tempio (Antella - Piazza Ravenna - S. Marco) Ataf line 8 stop Pecori Giraldi (Careggi - Ferrucci - Bagno a Ripoli) Ataf line 23 B stop Zecca Vecchia (Firenze Nova - Ferrucci - Sorgane - Nave a Rovezzano) <i>With stops near to one of the points on the trail</i> Ataf line D stop Ferrucci (Station SMN - Ferrucci) Ataf line 41 stop Ferrucci (Galluzzo - Ferrucci) Ataf line 3 stop De Santis 04
----------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Note: Some of the garden sections have locked gates which are usually open between 08:30 am - 08:00 pm.

## Design, creation and coordination

### Project

Text, layout and coordination	Municipality of Florence - Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport: Carla Giannini
Route layout	Municipality of Florence - Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport : Paolo Mangini
Technical and sporting features	Training Consultant: Fulvio Massini
Photos	Municipality of Florence - Department for Culture, Tourism and Sport : Fabio Reggioli, Giulio Monasta Contributor: Giacomo Scarzanella
Photo credits	Paintings by Lorenzo Gelati and Giuseppe Zocchi, with the kind permission of the Bardini Peyron Foundation  Painting by Pointeau, private collection, taken from Wikipedia  Photo of the Florence flood, taken from Wikipedia
Thanks	Presidents of the Commissions for Sport in the districts of the Municipality of Florence  Ataf
<i>for the route layouts</i>	Bardazzi Andrea, Bardazzi Giulia, Bugetti Stefano, Verzieri Daniele and Gensini Marco

### Maps and Mobile Apps

Coordination and development	Municipality of Florence - Department for Information Systems: Gianluca Vannuccini, Leonardo Ricci, Enrico Castagnoli, Elena Marrassini, Stefano Gecchele and Annita Bandini Contributor: Giacomo Scarzanella  Linea Comune S.p.A.: Bianca Maria Beconi and Gabriele Andreozzi
Mobile app	Geoln S.r.l.