



THE DOLOMITES

“I have prepared a completely white world for you on the Earth, come back down there with me and you’ll see that you will never be homesick again.”

Fiabe e leggende dei Monti Pallidi, edited by Marta Fischer

Mountains that are majestic beyond every definition: more than a series of summits, the Dolomites are a line of patrol boats on an ocean with its waves breaking here in the remote past. Anyone who goes through the woods and across the meadows which lead to the Dolomite summits is a deep-sea diver without water walking on what millions of years ago was the bottom of a tropical sea, filled with multi-coloured fish and undulating corals, phosphorescent anemones and effervescent columns of bubbles. The Pale Mountains are a “fossil archipelago” and it does not take much to recognise, in the buds of daphnes, campions and buttercups and the thousand other flowers that dance in the wind, shoals of brightly coloured fish; and, in the waterfalls that break against the rocks, the columns of bubbles that millions of years ago rose up.

The rock that forms these mountains is different from all the others: white during the day, so that it is said that it was clad in “moonlight” as a gesture of love; pink at sunset, as though that sensual passion were still alive; and shiny after the rain, as though wet with tears. Roads in the bottom of the valleys and mountain paths are the routes that join precious lakes, ledges and crests, hamlets and villages; and, as in every archipelago that is worth its name, languages, dialects and cultures. To the west, there are painted churches with slender bell towers and a myriad of medieval and Renaissance castles, each one different from the other; to the east there are towers of rock and nature wins the competition with man. Mapping out the navigation between these old arms of sea, like harbours where to stop for supplies, there are fine cities of art, welcoming restaurants and beer houses, and brightly-lit fires in the homes, equally distributed among Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.



NATURAL HERITAGE
UNESCO DOSSIER: 1237
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: SEVILLE, SPAIN
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: 2009



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The Dolomites originated in the Triassic era (some 250 million years ago) from the accumulation of shells, corals and seaweed where warm and shallow seas were found. Today they include some of the most beautiful mountain landscapes of all, with vertical walls, sharp crags and a high density of narrow, deep and long valleys.



“It is noon in the tranquil clearing. Every so often the forest murmurs, and you can see all the lofty peaks very clearly. Today they are white, and luminous clouds cast shadows here and there: the three peaks of San Nicola, the Croda dei Marden, the King’s Sceptre, then farther right, moving from west to east on the same ridge, il Palazzo, the Polveriera and, at the end, the outline of the Pagossa. Towering above them all and streaked with snow stand the Cima Alta and the Lastoni di Mezzo, which look like four very thin bell towers.”

These are real descriptions, places and names that Dino Buzzati slips into *Barnabo of the mountains*, because the Dolomites, the Val Canali and the Pale di San Martino were an ideal backdrop for the Belluno-born writer. In the places and in the events of his novels, the “fantastic” is but a veil, like a light curtain in front of a window which separates reality from invention.

And “fantastic” is also the adjective, in all its meanings, that will mostly come to mind to those who begin their journey from the **1 Pale di San Martino** and the Plateau of the Rosetta – places which inspired *The desert of the Tartars* –, unthinkable sharp teeth of rock aimed at biting the sky – and who have decided to review the greatest sights of the central part of the Dolomite archipelago. Going back up the Agordino towards the north and entering the Cadore in Selva, turn first west and you reach **2 Mount Pelmo**, “caregon (the high chair) of the

Almighty”, as they say here, interpreting the shape of the mountain which is nothing but a tropical atoll open on one side, which therefore forms a back and two arms around a “basin” which is the seat. Then return to the difficult road of the Giau Pass, which heading north winds through the **3 Lastoni di Formin**, silencing blades of rock, an immobile wall but which seems to pop out of the ground with the force of a space rocket launched into the zenith, and the **Becco di Mezzodi**, which is really a beak, a triangle of dolomite rock which scratches the sky, on one

side, and the **4 Five Towers** on the other: a place name which is more than didactic for the blocks of rock that rise like skyscrapers from the green or snow-covered meadows; except that now, due to the recent collapses that not infrequently affect this living region in movement, only four towers are left. In a countdown to the end of the journey, we arrive at the **5 Three Peaks of Lavaredo**, monuments preceded by their fame which however alone is not enough to quell the fantastic wonder at being in front of them.



MOUNTAINS WITH A MAGNETIC APPEAL

“The Villnöss Valley is similar to the famous Grodner valley but the majority of holiday makers don’t know that. There are few historical objects of interest and scarcely any ski lifts. It is a peaceful Dolomite valley of harmonious beauty, sunny, wedged in between high wooded ridges and steep mountains. Often it seems to me as if these delicate limestone cliffs have absorbed all melancholy, harshness, isolation from the place itself.”

The Crystal Horizon: Everest: the first solo ascent, Reinhold Messner

Reinhold Messner cultivated his passion for climbing among those elegant ramparts of limestone. Born in a village at the foot of the Odle, the mountains with the sharp profiles that frame the Val di Funes, Messner became one of the greatest climbers of all times. As well as being sublimely beautiful mountains, the Dolomites have been the undisputed heroes of the history of mountaineering: great climbers like Tita Piaz, Emilio Comici, Riccardo Cassin, Cesare Maestri, Maurizio Zanolla (Manolo) and Heinz Mariacher have reinterpreted climbing on their vertical walls, opening up new routes and facing increasingly greater difficulties.



“The first time I climbed into this wild corner, curious from where the sun went to set, I brushed against the foot of a wall that was too smooth and still too small to see. I was stunned by the fantastic world that surrounded me, I had immense mountains in my eyes and still many dreams in my rucksack; I did not realise that it even existed. From up there, looking at the horizon, I was even able to catch a glimpse of the sea, which sparkled as flat as a pond; around it, the mountains, the pinnacles and the clouds were lost beyond imagination.”

This is the incipit of *Eravamo immortali* by Maurizio Zanolla, “Manolo”, the climber who wrote great pages of the history of climbing on these walls.

Continue discovering the Dolomites starting from **1 Trento**, a city whose beauty is never known enough. After visiting the centre and the MUSE, the science museum, take the road which goes up to the **2 Lake Toblino**, dominated by the castle of the same name, then continue crossing the Giudicarie Valleys to reach Val Rendena: on your way you will pass through **3 Sant’Antonio di Mavignola**, **4 Pinzolo** and **5 Madonna di Campiglio**, all excellent bases to go skiing, visit the churches painted by the Bascheni family or take some of the most beautiful paths and iron ways in the world at high altitude, admiring almost unreal landscapes and strolling around the rocks in the company of marmots and chamois.

From here, go down to the South Tyrol Wine Road: waiting for you are **6 Caldaro**, with the warm waters of its lake, and the expanses of vineyards that recall the slopes of **7 Termeno** and of **8 Egna**. After having tasted the very perfumed wines that come from this area, set off again on foot to go up the Fiemme Valley: embraced by the jagged profiles of the Latemar on one side and by the Lagorai and the Pale di San Martino on the other, this valley will accompany you to the picturesque villages of the Fassa Valley, dominated by the impressive mountains of the Catenaccio. After a stop at **9 Cavalese**, **10 Moena** and **11 Canazei**, and above all after having walked along the paths to discover the refuges in the Dolomites, go up to the **12 Sella Pass**, where you

will find yourself face to face with the great Dolomite walls, while the profile of the Marmolada stands out on the horizon. Once the view has satisfied you, the Gardena Valley awaits you: **13 Selva di Val Gardena**, **14 Santa Cristina** and **15 Ortisei** are the three pearls in a valley of iconic beauty, dotted with splendid farmhouses and overlooked by the Sassolungo. Before concluding the itinerary, stop again at **16 Castelrotto** and go up to the **17 Alpe di Siusi** to admire the airy and green views of one of the most fascinating plateaux in Europe. At the end of the journey, make a stop in **18 Bolzano**, a city with a lively Mitteleuropean atmosphere, where the museums to visit include the museum of Ötzi the Iceman, and the Messner Mountain Museum in Castelfirmiano.



THE GARDEN OF THE ROSES OF KING LAURINO AND THE ENROSADIRA

“In the distance, beyond the freight trains on dead-end tracks [...], illuminated by the moon, the mountain peaks, called Catinaccio in Italian and the Rosengarten in German. More than simply two different names, it’s really about two different ways of living in nature. As a loudspeaker announces arriving and departing trains, the distant, pale presence of the Dolomitan pinnacles seems to occupy, as well as another space, another time. Seen from the station, they look magical and unreachable.”

Eva Sleeps, Francesca Melandri

To explain the phenomenon of the *enrosadira*, which is when the Dolomite rocks turn pink at dawn and at dusk, when the air is particularly clear, legend has it that there was a huge rose garden (hence the name of Rosengarten) governed by King Laurino, the sovereign of a people of dwarves who dug into the bowels of the mountain in search of crystals, silver and gold. The legend explains romantically and fantastically a phenomenon which is actually due to the characteristics of dolomite rock. The rock contains dolomite, a compound of calcium carbonate and magnesium which has a particular reflectivity: when the rays of the sun, as it sets or rises, hit it, they refract, giving it the characteristic pink colour.



"LORD, THERE IS TOO MUCH PEACE ON THE EARTH THAT YOU CREATED, TOO MUCH SILENCE, TOO MUCH TRANQUILLITY, CLEAN WATERS, SUN AND RAIN WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED, CLEAN SEAS, THE ANIMALS GET ON WELL WITH THE BIRDS, THE FISH GET ON WELL WITH ONE ANOTHER, THE SEASONS CHANGE WITHOUT A MUMBLE, THE ANTS AND THE BEES LIVE HELPING

ONE ANOTHER.' [...] A FLASH WENT THROUGH THE EYES OF THE LORD AND, AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN FREED OF A TROUBLESOME THOUGHT, HE SNAPPED HIS FINGERS AND SHOUTED: '[...] LET'S MAKE MAN AND THEN WE'RE SETTLED. [...] A TWO-LEGGED ANIMAL THAT BELIEVES HE IS SO INTELLIGENT TO GIVE SOME MOVEMENT TO THIS VERY PEACEFUL WORLD."



The absolute hero of the book *Storie del bosco antico* by Mauro Corona, nature is also the hero of the Friuli Dolomites, with its force, its wild vitality and unique phenomena such as the

1 **Magredi**. To tell you the truth, we are not yet in the Dolomites, but the mountains are the backdrop to the unthinkable steppe created by the rivers Cellina and Meduna. This expanse of stones is a surreal but very real place, unequalled in Italy, where you can venture on foot or on horseback.

The Dolomites are there, to the north, and from their valleys there also arrives a silent call which comes from millions of years ago: it is that of the prints of the dinosaurs trapped in the rocks near

2 **Claut**, a village in the province of Udine at the entrance to the Upper Val Cellina. Parallel or almost, Val Cimoliana goes into the mountains, which from the village of Cimolais works its way between rocks and torrents in an alien-like landscape, until reaching the slopes of the 3 **Bell Tower of Val Montanaia**, yet another incredible strangeness of nature, a rocky pinnacle that rises from the scree on the bastions of Toro and Monfalconi, like a real bell-tower. If you do not feel like reaching the slopes by a somewhat difficult path, there is a panoramic road that lets you admire it from afar. Where is man in all this? Where is, to use Corona's words, that two-legged animal that believes he is so intelligent as to give some movement to this world? He is waiting to do just this; for example in 4 **Sauris**, a village where elves pop out from houses, which is worth visiting especially at Carnival time, when the wooden masks, representing the spirits of the mountain, hide in the woods in the evening to frighten, but also to entertain, those who are brave enough to go through them.



THE DOLOMITES in books

*Reading suggestions to travel
in the fossil archipelago.*

- **Barnabo of the Mountains**, Dino Buzzati (1933). Barnabo, the guardian of a store with explosives, makes an existential journey in the solitude of the glaciers and forests, as though in contact with an unreal dimension.
- **The desert of the Tartars**, Dino Buzzati (1940). In this novel more than in his others, Dino Buzzati develops the topic of waiting, making a young lieutenant called Drogo experience it in a fortress in the high mountain.
- **My life at the limit**, Reinhold Messner with Thomas Huetlin (1954). Autobiography of Reinhold Messner, the climbing legend born in the Funes Valley, at the foot of the Odle, in the heart of the Dolomites.
- **Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage**, Hermann Buhl (1954). The autobiography of the great Austrian mountaineer, Hermann Buhl, who often climbed in the Dolomites.

• **Crystal horizon. Everest: The first solo ascent**, Reinhold Messner (1983). The great mountaineer Messner relates his feats and his career, which he began on the mountains of home, the Odle, to then reach the roof of the world.

• **Eva Sleeps**, Francesca Melandri (2010). Set in Brunico, this novel goes over the years and events which occurred just after the First World War, when a piece of the Austrian Tyrol was assigned to Italy.

• **The Mountain**, Luca D'Andrea (2016). Jeremiah Salinger, a young TV writer from New York who has moved to the South Tyrol, happens to learn of a gory event that had taken place several years earlier: the massacre of three youngsters during an excursion to the Bletterbach gorge. Until then, nobody had been found guilty of the crime: Salinger starts to dig into the past, until he discovers the terrifying truth.

• **Eravamo immortali**, Manolo (2018). Nicknamed "Manolo" or "the Magician", Maurizio Zanolla tells the story of his life, his first climbs, the routes he opened up often freely and on his own, his family, his loves and the most important, intense and moving experiences of a life lived in a quest for balance.

Children's books:

• **Fiabe e leggende dei Monti Pallidi**, edited by Marta Fischer (1992). Stories from the oral and written tradition that form a heritage of popular culture common to almost the whole world of the Dolomites.

• **Storie del Bosco Antico**, Mauro Corona (2005). Short tales that tell stories of the animals and nature of the Dolomites, in a fantastical vein and an imaginary past.

• **I perché dell'Alto Adige**, Luisa Righi, Stefan Wallisch (2017). Everything that there is to be known about South Tyrol, from history to gastronomy, up to its traditions, told with irony. A lively book to find simple and precise answers to the most frequent questions.

• **Montagna si scrive stampatello**, Davide Longo (2023). Davide and his mother have had a difficult year, with Dad having found a "bimbo". So they decide to treat themselves to a present: they set off for five days of hiking in the Dolomites in their rundown Panda.