

NORTHERN Italy's one of Europe's best creeking destinations. With bedrock rapids, a predictable (though brief) season and plenty of gradient, more and more creek boaters are making the long haul over from Britain to paddle in Piemonte.



PIEMONTE WHITE WATER

A PESDA MINI GUIDE



Pesda
Press

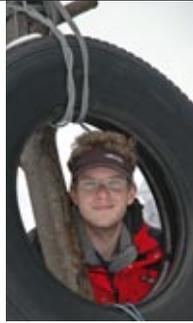




Piemonte's rivers tend to be steep and committing. If your group aren't used to tackling grade 5, often in remote gorges, Piemonte isn't for you. You'd be better advised to head out to Slovenia, France or Austria during the summer – it's warmer and there's a wider range of paddling. If you're still determined to come to Italy, I'd strongly recommend an instructional course with Gene17.

The author Peter Cornes (right) first visited Italy four years ago. This is his collection of river notes, including rivers he's paddled and those still on his wish list

nb.
gene17kayaking.com



(cover) - Sermenzina, May 2004, Photos: Pete Wood
(right) - Campertogno, viewed from the scenic and popular campsite. Photo: Paul Steel



Italian White Water Piemonte

For the experienced, Piemonte's a treat! To catch the snowmelt, find out when the Teva Mountain Games are running, normally April or May: a week on either side of the event tends to be good for water. If you're too early you'll need a snowboard, too late and you'll need a mountain bike!

When in Val Sesia, make sure you pick up a copy of the *Carte Fluviale*, a map of the region's white water that's available from tourist information offices or the campsite at Campertogno, called *Il Gatto e la Volpe*. This site offers preferential rates for kayakers, with a bar, restaurant and kayak school on site and shops and a cash machine in the village. Other top tips are *La Bottega*, a deli up a set of steps by the bridge in Piode (which also makes sandwiches if you ask) and the ice cream parlour in Scopetta. Other than that, bring an Italian phrasebook, some elbow pads and a creek boat - all set for some of the world's best whitewater!

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- ▣ **LEVEL GAUGE** - a rough idea of the optimal water levels required in the region, for quick comparison.
- ▣ **FULL FACER** - a run of a rocky or precarious nature, best to come equipped with full-on gear.
- ▣ **GORGE** - the run commits you to gorge sections that may make escape difficult or impossible.
- ▣ **DAGGER** - seldom run with rapids subject to periodic change - proceed with due caution.

Sit: list

Some audacious runs for the true explorer. We've no idea what's on them though!

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Strona | Forzo (Soana trib) |
| Canobino | Savenca (Chiusella trib) |
| San Giovanni | Ayasse (Valle d'Aosta) |
| Stura di Ala | Orco (Nr Val Soana) |
| Gorzente | Gallenca (Nr Val Soana) |
| Stura di Valgrande | Malone (Nr Val Soana) |
| | Piova (Chiusella trib) |

01 Upper Sesia (Boccorio - Campertogno) ★

Grade **4+(5)**Length **5km**

Drive upstream from Mollia and put on just upstream of Boccorio. There are a few rapids on the section down to Mollia which change a lot with each year's floods. The 400 m long Mollia rapids (5 - low to medium water) are obvious on the drive up and need inspection - they're difficult to protect. From here down to the campsite and kayak school at Campertogno the river offers few surprises, but watch out for construction works, including a heavily sumped island access road.

02 Sesia (Campertogno to Scopetta) ★

Grade **4-(5)**Length **12km**

This section of the Sesia offers a relaxing alternative to the other, steeper runs of the area. The only hazards (other than cold glacial water being splashed in your face by grade 3 wave trains) are the falls below the road bridge at Quare and the fall in Piode (recently altered by bulldozer, this rapid can offer a perfect clean boof ledge at the right levels - watch out for debris). As you approach Scopello get ready for a low gorge with a steep rapid under the bridge in town.

03 Sesia Gorge ★

Grade **4(5)**Length **2km**

This section is a good low water alternative. To find the put-on, drive downstream from Scopetta until you see a clearing on your right with a logging hut and the end of an aerial log wire. You can walk from here down to the Roman bridge or, if you like, put on just upstream for a warm-up. As you enter the gorge, be very careful: a clear horizon line marks the portage. Below here there's some squirrely water as the gorge opens out before Balmuccia. From here down to Morca there's nothing that exceeds grade 3.

04 Vogna ★

Grade **5**Length **2km**

contributor:
Stuart Miller

This is a steep and committing gorge without the smooth granite that makes many of the area's runs so appealing. Access the top of the run by walking down a path from San Antonio to find a large fall at the top. If you only want to paddle the steeper second half, you can get to the river down a very steep path from a hamlet about 500m up from the bottom of the road. It's all continuous pushy bouldery rapids. There's one large, difficult portage that would be made much easier with static ropes, though it has been done without at low water levels.

05 Upper Sermenza (Rimasco to Fervento)

Grade **5+**Length **2km**

If everything else in the area's too high, this section's worth a look, though Hydro-electric extraction makes it potentially very hazardous as levels can rise very quickly and without notice. The best start's about 500m down from the upper road bridge where there are some easy boof drops you can see from the road: below here it gets more serious. Plan to take out above the HEP barrage you saw on the drive up as between here and the middle Sermenza's a huge waterfall.

Middle Sermenza (Piaggiogna to Boccioleto) ★★ 06

Bedrock and boulder rapids of medium-volume, which get very difficult if the water is high. Not marked very well on the *Carte Fluviale*, the put-on's a narrow tarmac track down to the riverside that snakes down from the road near Piaggiogna. The river warms up in a gorge section with several steep drops, including a skateboard slide move, an 8-10 foot fall and some fantastically scenic sheer gorge walls. After the gorge, it opens out a bit and offers a couple of more jagged rapids before constricting again below a footbridge and entering the pushiest drop on the section. Obvious from the river, it's best inspected from river left or portaged on river right through the boulders. A couple more drops and things flatten out down to Boccioleto.

Grade **5**Length **2km****Lower Sermenza (Bioccioleto to Balmuccia) ★★ 07**

Not as steep as some, but this run does hold a bit of volume, some fantastic bedrock and some very munchy stoppers in higher flows. Check the level at the rapid upstream of the take-out bridge: it's low water if you see a shallow cascade with eddies, it's medium if there are no eddies and if there's no white water and the gorge walls are nearly covered, it's time to have second thoughts! Put-on at Bioccioleto to warm up before the first fall - an eight foot clean drop. Below here it enters a long gorge with some surprisingly grabby stoppers. The river opens out again before narrowing into the bottom gorge. Only five metres deep, 300m long and running right next to the road, but it's completely inaccessible as it runs down into Balmuccia. Scout this on your way up because, if the level's high, some of the drops are unscoutable, unportageable and have a lot of towback! The entry rapid sets the tone: a small group, the right level and a decent pair of shoes are the best way.

Grade **4(5-)**Length **4km****Egua ★★★ 08**

One of the classic steep bedrock creeks that make Val Sesia's famous. Host of the team event in the Teva race, where teams of three race this entire section as fast as possible Drive upstream until the road crosses to river left. This is the normal put-on. Park up here and check out the outrageous gutter that ends in a waterfall. If you don't like the look of this, you won't really enjoy the river below. You need enough water for it to be paddable, but too much can make for a long day out. The end of this section's marked by three bigger drops, culminating in a ramping fall under a footbridge after about 2km. It's possible to take out at the lake further down in Rimasco: the river changes from bedrock to more bouldery rapids but it maintains difficulty, if not quality.

Grade **5**Length **2km****Sermenzina ★★★ 09**

The Sermenzina also flows into the lake at Rimasco. It takes a bit more water and is a good way to follow a quick Egua run on a sunny afternoon. The normal put-on is a small concrete bridge over the river immediately downstream of a double amphitheatre drop. It's a right turn as you drive upstream, just before San Guiseppe. This affords the best of the rapids while cutting out some of the choss. It's similar to the

Grade **5**Length **3km**

Egua, with some fantastic bedrock rapids and falls. Some of these will need inspection, especially a fantastic double drop which you catch a glimpse of on the drive up. The river is subject to landslides so be aware and watch out for trees. Take out below a fall immediately upstream of the road bridge where you cross from river right to left on the drive up the valley, or carry on down to the lake if you want to paddle a longer

10 Nonnia

Grade **5-**
Length **1km**



An alternative put-on for the Sermenzina. There's a footpath up this stream on river left from the village of San Guiseppe with an obvious fall under the bridge in the village and various others of different sizes upstream. Choose your access carefully, portages may be prudent. To continue down to the Sermenzina you'll have to negotiate some canalised nastiness and portage a large and obviously unrunnable fall.

11 Gronda ★★★

Grade **5-**
Length **1km**



Another classic granite creek run. This is the section used for the individual races in the Teva Mountain Games and you'll probably recognise it from various photos. Drive up the Sorba valley until you reach the road head and an obvious river confluence in the village of Rassa. From here, the Gronda's the river left fork and the Sorba's on the right. To paddle the Gronda, all you need to do is walk up the river bank until you fancy putting on! The race course is about 500m long though the river's just as good further up (if a little bit less clean). From the confluence, make sure you carry on downstream for 200m to the three photogenic slides you saw on the Sorba on the drive up.

12 Upper Sorba ★

Grade **5+**
Length **1-2km**



A section of steep slides and falls that was made famous by Corran Addison's overblown hyperbole in *End Game*. A step up from the other runs in the valley and a blast for a group of paddlers who are happy on the more difficult runs and have some rope access experience. Drive up along the Sorba from Rassa, use the car park and walk up the river to get an idea of what you're in for. The put-on's where the river flattens off. It's not as clean as some of the neighbouring runs but it's worth it just for sheer outrageous steepness. Take-out as and when you've had enough and can get out of the gorge - it's steep all the way down to the Gronda. A good option for a really long day out!

13 Lower Sorba ★

Grade **4/5**
Length **3km**



This section is a fairly steep, continuous boulder run that puts-on at the bottom of the Sorba slides. Paddle it for as long as you can see it from the road - take out above a bridge over the river: after this, the whole river drops into a bedrock waterfall canyon. The river below this point's been paddled in parts, but only at very low water and by those with very big kahunas - it's not really an option when the rest of the rivers in the area are going. If you want a peek, you can walk down past a saw mill on the road up and look at Saw Mill Cataract (first paddled by Shaun Baker) from river left.

Lower Mastallone (Bocciolaro to Varallo) ★ ★ 14

Though you can start as high up as Grassura for a warm up, the classic Mastallone starts at Ponte Selva with continuous grade 4 boulder rapids. It carries on in this vein for a while before dropping into a totally committing 500m long grade 4 bedrock gorge, which you can easily inspect on the drive up. There's a feisty constriction (often portaged) just above the gorge, plus a must-run down in there. The river steepens up as you come into Varallo, with a difficult drop at the take-out by a small HEP station on the right.

Grade	4
Length	6km



contributor:
Tom Parker

Upper Sessera ★ 15

An epic drive to this remote upper valley makes for a fantastic, but remote, stretch of river. To get to the top, you'll need a proper map of the area. You end up driving around tiny mountain towns, industrial complexes and precipitous passes, trying to find Trivero and then Panecone. The put-in's at a Hydro Electric plant bridge, but there's tight grade 5 action up to the dam if there's enough water. Below the bridge is a committing canyon of mainly boulder rapids with some bedrock drops, down to the end of the canyon in Pray. Below here the river flows down to meet the Sesia with a variety of sections at different grades, but watch out for the dams.

Grade	4+
Length	5km



contributor:
Simon Westgarth

Soana ★ ★ 16

A longer boulder run in a deep gorge, which carries a bit more water. There are two possible put-ons. The top put-on is just below Bosco, where the river rejoins the road upstream of the gorge - next to a road bridge and a concrete channel. From here down it's grade 5 with some pushy staircase rapids, lots of recent construction debris and a number of portages. A long, pushy and seldom paddled rapid (*Land of the Giants*) marks the lower put-on, which you can find on the drive up by parking at an odd concrete structure spanning the road overhead. Down to Pont Canavese it's boulder rapids and eddychopping with a few bigger drops. Halfway through is a short canyon with a micro-eddy on the right above a river wide natural weir. Inspect this and, if you like, portage on the right into a big pool above an unexpected hydro dam! It's fun all the way to town, where you can take-out at the second road bridge.

Grade	5
Length	10km

**Chiusella ★ ★ ★ 17**

Incredible granite drops, made famous by *Mothership Connection*. Put-on below a fantastic Roman bridge in the forgotten village of Val Chiusella, up the valley as far as you can drive. You need enough water to get down the chossy grade 3 that you can see from here - more and the river quickly gets too high. You soon reach the bedrock section with various falls and slides, which continue down to the road bridge you drove over on the way up - a handy take-out if you've had enough. The longer lower section's well worth carrying on down, though a bit more bouldery, to the take-out in Traversella.

Grade	5
Length	7km

