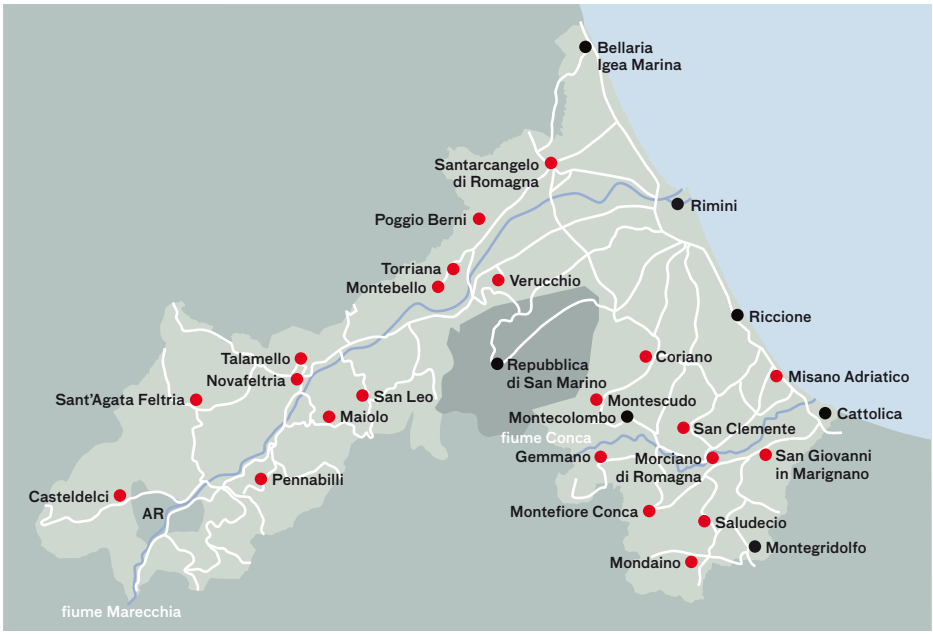
RIVIERA DI RIMINI

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPES IN THE TERRITORY OF RIMINI

travel notes

Places to visit and itineraries



- **Casteldelci**
  Mounts La Faggiola / Loggio / Le Macchiette
- **Coriano**
  Conca Fauna Oasis
  Protected Landscape of the Conca Torrent
  Marano Park
- **Gemmano**
  Onferno Caves and Oriented Nature Reserve
- **Maiolo**
  Diffused Bread Museum
- **Misano Adriatico**
  Ornithological Observatory of the Conca Fauna Oasis
- **Mondaino**
  Arboretum Environmental Education Centre
  Paleontology Section of the Museums of Mondaino
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  Mounts Faggeto / Maggiore / Auro
- **Montescudo**
  Marano Park
  Ethnographic Museum of Valliano
  Albereto Wood
- **Morciano di Romagna**
  Conca Natural and Urban Park
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- **Novafeltria**
  Sulphur Mining History Museum of Perticara
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  Tonino Guerra's Places of the Soul
- **Poggio Berni**
  Cava Park and Marecchia River fossil deposits
  Sapignoli Mill Museum
- **San Clemente**
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- **Saludecio**
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- **San Giovanni in Marignano**
  Conca Fauna Oasis
  Golf course
- **Sant'Agata Feltria**
  Mounts Benedetto / Ercole / San Silvestro
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- **Santarcangelo di Romagna**
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  Fauna Oasis of Torriana and Montebello
  Marecchia Valley Naturalistic Observatory
- **Verucchio**
  Ca' Brigida Oasis
  Golf course

Riviera di Rimini
Travel Notes

Provincia di Rimini
Assessorato al Turismo

Natural
Environment and landscapes
in the territory of Rimini

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Assessorato al Turismo
Manager Symon Buda

Texts
Rita Giannini

Editorial Office
Marino Campana

Press and Communication Office
Cora Balestrieri

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Relè - Tassinari/Vetta (Leonardo Sonnoli)
co-ordination
Michela Fabbri

Cover photo
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PH Paritani

Page layout
Litoincisa87, Rimini
(Licia Romani)

Translation
Stefania Gazzola,
Link-Up, Rimini

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INTRODUCTION

The province of Rimini is a treasure trove waiting to be discovered and won't disappoint. Many know Rimini thanks to its wonderful sea and beaches, but not everyone knows what lies behind the Riviera and that is worth visiting for its nature alone, the aspect we will focus on, without mentioning its history, monuments and art.

Anyone visiting the area - either on foot, on horseback or by bicycle - will be pleasantly surprised and charmed by the beauty of its landscapes, its delightful profiles, its infinite horizons and its wealth of blossoms and varieties of trees and fauna, for the joy of those who love bird-watching in particular.

The area has two main valleys, flanked by smaller ones that are no less interesting.

One of the former is the valley created by the Marecchia River. It is magnificent, with wood-covered mountain ridges and rocky crags that are ideal for climbing. The river has beaches, wide expanses of cobblestones, scrubland that reaches down to the water's edge and waves to delight canoeists. Mountains, where it is possible to practice free climbing or hang-gliding, dominate the horizon in the background and downy oaks, Turkey oaks, chestnut trees and holm oaks abound. In the first millennium there was less woodland here, with the hills covered with torrents that flowed into the Marecchia River that had such a wide riverbed and numerous islets the Romans called it *Maricula* or small sea.

We can have some idea thanks to the backdrops painted by great artists like Piero della Francesca and Leonardo da Vinci, who came through here on their way to courts that commissioned their work.

The other main valley was created by the Conca River. It is a wide and attractive valley whose gently-rolling slopes are covered in geometrically laid out vineyards, with hidden branches that lead visitors towards fields and wood-covered hills. Here too there are ancient chestnut groves that still bear abundant and delicious produce in late autumn.

The small Ventena Valley offers glimpses of striking beauty, whilst the Marano Valley has lakes that are open for fishing and an explosion of lush greenery, with scrubland and thickets that boast important biotypes, the remains of ancient woodlands.

Look carefully and all around the valley are hundred-year-old monumental trees, from which it is possible to draw great energy, as well as lush spontaneous flora and blossoms as beautiful as they are rare. The air is filled with the fragrance of orchids, broom, dog roses and infinite other species.

Every hilly or mountain area has something to attract visitors - from the laziest to the most reckless - providing they invest at least a little in getting to know it and that's exactly what we hope to stimulate with this guide.

CHAPTER I
NATURAL LANDSCAPES

The natural environment of the province of Rimini may surprise many as it is not very well known; those who do discover it however, are seduced by its charm. This environment has largely been shaped by the hand of man who has lived here for centuries, working the land and receiving grapes, olives, wheat, forage and vegetables in return. It also retains much woodland and spontaneous vegetation, reserving great surprises in terms of fauna too. A sea of green flanking the other sea or rather, overlooking it from its hilltops and mountains.

In this chapter, we will discover its secrets and beauty, following the main water basins that have carved out delightful valleys.

We will then dwell on the characteristics of the rivers themselves and the mountains they spring from or are close to.

1. The Valleys

There are two main valleys through which the Marecchia and Conca Rivers flow; one in the north of the province, the other in the south. Both riverbeds are flanked by handy cycle paths, the first of which begins in Rimini and continues beyond Novafeltria and the second that links San Giovanni in Marignano and Montefiore Conca. Both are worth following to discover the more secluded ravines, invisible from the road.

Near the Conca there is another small valley crossed by the Marano Torrent that creates a beautiful river park in the municipality of Coriano. Finally, between Gemmano and Montefiore Conca lies the beautiful, lush Ventena Valley.

The Marecchia Valley

Towards the upper and middle valley the gaze spans gently-rolling clay hills, but suddenly comes up against sandstone outcrops rising from the sides of the torrent. These were not always here, but were formed by what is known as the *gravitational flow of the Marecchia* that brought them here, drifting like rafts, from the Tyrrhenian Sea off Tuscany and part of what is now Liguria. Here they found stability, on land once lapped by the sea. Some of the most famous rocky crags are Mount Titano and those on which San Leo, Torriana, Montebello, Verucchio and many other towns stand.

The gravitational flow of the Marecchia

In the Montefeltro area experts talk about the *gravitational flow of the Marecchia Valley.* This refers to the fact the land that makes up the "flow" was formed in the area of Liguria, hence it is

above
The Marecchia River near Novafeltria

below
A view of Mount Simoncello

allochthonous land, from where it slowly slid eastwards to overlap the original land, known as autochthonous, in the area of Umbria, the Marche and Romagna. In the upper basin of the Marecchia, the "flow" settled between the Tortonian and lower Pliocene periods, during an eventful and turbulent tectonic phase that over the years conditioned the evolution of this sector of the Apennines, forming a vast depression into which the "flow" itself poured.
The territory referred to as the "flow" consists primarily in clay and plastic marly clay soil that is highly deformable and incorporates mainly limestone blocks that are more rigid and compact and vary in size from just a few metres to entire reliefs like Mount Carpegna, the rocky spur of San Leo and Mount Titano, on which San Marino stands. Like floats on a huge conveyor belt these are slowly and relentlessly migrating towards the Adriatic.
The flow can be divided into two sequences; the Liguride complex and the Neogene sequence.
The first consists in an undifferentiated complex represented by flaky clay and the Pietraforte-Alberese series in which it is possible to distinguish the *Pietraforte Formation,* the *Sillano Formation,* the *Mount Morello Formation,* the *Sandstones of Mount Senario* and the *Limnic Marls.*
The second complex, deposited during the migration of the flow towards the east, consists in amongst others the *San Marino Formation,* the *Mount Fumaiolo Formation,* the *Argille di Montebello,* the *Acquaviva Formation* and the *Argille dei Gessi.*
From a geological point of view, the entire area of the *Sasso Simone and Simoncello Interregional Park* is a vast blanket of chaotic heterogeneous soil resulting from the "flow of the Marecchia Valley". The erosive processes of water, wind and snow, acting on the blanket in a selective manner, have eaten into much of the softer marl and clay materials, revealing outcrops of blocks of harder rock. This led to the formation of the "Sassi" or boulders; two characteristic tabular reliefs known as *mesas*. Sasso di Simone (1,204 metres) and Simoncello (1,221 metres) consist in organogenic limestone, the sign of a shallow early Miocene sea. The two *mesas* are about 300 metres apart although, as the considerable accumulation of detritus between them would suggest, were probably once united.

above
The Marecchia River near Gattara

below, on the left
The hills of Gemmano

below, on the right
The walls of Montefiore Conca Castle

There are many places of great geological-environmental interest here, not least the waterways and roads that shape the upper and middle valley.

The upper valley boasts the unspoilt mountain greenery of the municipal territory of Casteldelci with Mount della Faggiola, Mount Loggio, the Senatello River, the rocky spurs of Le Macchiette near Balze and the interregional *Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park*: 4,847 hectares straddling the provinces of Rimini and Pesaro and Urbino. The park has its own *Natural History Museum* in Pennabilli, which is also a visitors' centre. On Sasso Simone, the Medici, lords of Florence, built the *City of the Sun*, a fortification the likes of which had never before been constructed at this altitude. Only ruins remain along the access road and drawings that give a good idea of what it was like. The is an area of great beauty and harmony, the soul of this land that has given us wonderful and unique discoveries even recently, like the fossil of an aquatic skull; a huge predator, a carnivorous vertebrate and prehistoric marine reptile that lived 70 to 90 million years ago.

In the middle valley are the undisputedly fascinating chalk veins called *Vene del Gesso* in Torriana with the nearby *Fauna Oasis of Torriana and Montebello,* home to the *Marecchia Valley Naturalistic Observatory*. Opposite it is the *Ca' Brigida Oasis* in Verucchio with its *Environmental Education Centre* run by the WWF.

Conca Valley

This is a wide valley whose river, the Conca, which springs from Mount **Carpegna** the highest in the Apennines of Rimini, sometimes disappears from view, hidden by lush mountain chains dotted with towers and fortresses. These are the foothills of the Apennines that overlook the sea that once lapped them millions of years ago. They are covered in wheat and forage fields and vineyards and olive groves renowned for their quality produce. Here too, by walking upstream through chestnut woods and the woods of Montefiore Conca and Gemmano, visitors will come across areas of unspoilt beauty. Along the torrents there are wide corridors of spontaneous vegetation, with endless varieties of trees and flowers such as alders and various species of orchid. Near Gemmano, the area also offers us a rare and spectacular natural jewel that is

above
Entrance to Onferno Caves

below
Fossils in the Paleontology Section of the Museums of Mondaino

particularly interesting in terms of its geology and fauna. *Onferno Caves* are part of a protected 123-hectare *Oriented Nature Reserve* of undoubted importance. The caves are part of a karstic complex that covers over 750 metres, created by a waterway that carved its way through the chalky rocks. It is home to one of the largest and most varied bat colonies in Italy. Finally, Mondaino boasts the beautiful *Mala Valley* and *Arboretum*; a 9-hectare botanical garden featuring 6,000 arboreal species that is also an *environmental education centre.* Close by is the charming *Ventena Valley* that lies between Gemmano and Montefiore Conca.

Ventena Valley

This small valley was created by the Rio Ventena and begins life in the Pesaro area. It is scarcely populated with some tiny villages, like Valle Fuini di Ripamassana, almost uninhabited. These were once outlying villages of the former municipality of Castelnuovo that no longer exists. Now completely uninhabited, its old town, houses and churches are in ruins. The second stretch of the Ventena Valley is in the province of Rimini, where it separates the territory of Gemmano from that of Montefiore Conca. The valley is narrow and shaded with the torrent meandering and winding its way between hilly slopes covered in woodland and fields. It flows through a wide corridor of spontaneous vegetation, with alders and various species of orchids, surrounded by charming hills and fascinating gorges. Despite changes caused by the climate and the introduction of exogenous plant species, these areas have largely kept their original appearance. The entire natural context is extraordinarily well-preserved and can be considered a key example of integration between rural areas and a wild environment. It is a solitary and unspoilt place and its layers of rock, which date back 10 million years, hide numerous fossils, a vast selection of which are in Mondaino Museum. The hygrophilous vegetation that lines the torrent is extremely dense with age-old *white and black poplars*, *aspens, willows* and *alders*. On the steep and rugged slopes facing the sun, where there are small areas with calanques, oaks woods abound and flowers proliferate in the undergrowth; these include not only orchids, but also cyclamens, periwinkles, cowslips and naked ladies. There's also an abundance of fauna with some of the rarest and most interesting species.

Marano Valley

The third river in the province forms a valley that is small, yet of considerable environmental interest. In fact, its scrub woodland represents one of the most important biotypes in the entire Rimini area; it is the remains of a single ancient woody curtain that once covered the entire zone, interrupted only by rocky outcrops and the bed of the torrent. With English oaks, white poplars and various species of willow, this is a splendid woodland area close to the *Fiumicello* waterway bordering with the Republic of San Marino. Initially the valley is steep as the river flows over layers of chalk, limestone and sandstone dating from various historical eras. Many of these slopes have been eroded and boast karstic phenomena such as grottoes, dolines, sinkholes and cracks, as well as calanques that are in dynamic evolution; this is particularly true along the road to Montegiardino. Dotted here and there are erratic limestone and sandstone masses, remains of huge transport movements that occurred in distant geological eras. In the middle section, the valley landscape assumes a certain vivacity with a continuously-changing profile, due also to the effects of flooding. Descending towards the plain, deposits of material become more extensive and form terraces that replace the scrubland typical of the upper part of the torrent, becoming agricultural areas that are cultivated thanks to the fertility of the soil.

This area constitutes the beautiful *Marano River Park* that Coriano, the main town in the valley, has shown great awareness in creating. The park extends from Ospedaletto to the border with the Republic of San Marino and is popular for activities like walking, horse-riding and cycling. On the right slope of the valley, *Albereto Wood* in Montescudo is of particular importance given its environmental uniqueness. It is a relic wood that botanists believe is the last strip of an area characterized by a certain type of vegetation - English oaks, white poplars and ash - that once extended much further than it now does. Covering a total of 25 hectares, it is one of the most important biotypes in the Rimini area and boasts a variety of oaks with abundant blackberries, mushrooms, truffles, asparagus, base broom and wild madder in the undergrowth. In the small village of the same name stands splendid *Castrum Albareti* castle that offers breathtaking views spanning the horizon and taking in the entire

above
Albereto Castle in the municipality of Montescudo, with Mount Titano behind

below
The countryside near Mondaino

Riviera of Romagna, from beyond Milano Marittima to the promontory of Gabicce. It can also be reached thanks to several cycle and footpaths or on horseback; on one side, the paths connect the Malatesta fortress in the town of Montescudo and castles in neighbouring municipalities following the Conca River to Cattolica, whilst on the other, the Marano footpath crosses the municipality of Coriano as far as Riccione. Close to the state border with San Marino, Faetano Lake offers visitors the opportunity to take part in or watch angling competitions, as well as to enjoy a delightful day out surrounded by lush greenery.

Mala Valley

This charming valley in the municipality of Mondaino is part of a group of minor valleys in the province of Rimini. It is well worth mentioning as here, anthropic elements live in harmony with the more spontaneous and natural parts of the territory. The area is exceptionally beautiful thanks mainly to its landscape and offers interesting examples of rural villages, as well as what is charmingly referred to as the *Via dei Mulini* or the *Road of Mills*.

Large areas are covered in wood and scrubland boasting a rich variety of plant species typical of this hilly territory with plenty of tall trees, either isolated or grouped together. Unspoilt areas alternate with cultivated fields, creating a delightful pastoral scene. Various itineraries, along clearly marked cart tracks and paths, offer a great opportunity to enjoy the wonderful natural surroundings.

Uso Valley

The upper part of the Uso River flows through a delightful, narrow valley rich in history and tradition, with the valley floor descending gently towards the sea. For decades it was the natural route taken by sulphur as it left the mines of Perticara and passed through Montetiffi before reaching the plain. Today it is an ideal route for cyclists and excursionists to follow. Of a torrential nature and with little spring water, the Uso mainly collects rainwater descending the barren slopes of its narrow valley. Its real source is in the heart of the Mount Perticara massif. From here it descends, carving and weaving its way amid magnificent huge rocks

above
Mount Perticara and the village of Perticara

below
Remains of the Roman bridge in San Vito

that it continues to smooth and sculpt. This is the stretch of its riverbed directly below and behind the village of Montetiffi where famous terracotta baking trays, mentioned by local poet and writer Giovanni Pascoli, are still produced. A magnificent Romanesque bridge crosses it and beside it are the ruins of an ancient mill. It is well worth visiting, mainly for the environmental and architectural complex created over the millennia; the cut stone, single-arch bridge built around the 11th century, the rocks eroded by the water and the unspoilt natural surroundings. Montetiffi stands 400 metres high above the course of the river, like the last sentinel of a glorious past that has left many important and interesting remains. Descending along the provincial road, fields of alfalfa and wheat continuously alternate on the slopes of the valley, but there are also many uncultivated fields and calanques, interspersed with remains of woodland, rocky formations and a wilder part too. The narrow, winding road is wedged between hills covered in scarce vegetation and coppices, with the riverbed almost always hidden from view as it flows through a bottleneck between tall rock faces. Just after the bridge is Pietra dell'Uso on whose rocky spur stands the mediaeval church of the Nativity of Mary, guarding the valley below. From here, the Uso becomes more regular and the valley takes on a traditional iconographic form, with mountains on either side. This continues until Santarcangelo, where there are still some stretches of wild beauty, and as far as the *Roman bridge* in San Vito bordering with Rimini. The ruins of the bridge - only one of the five original arches remains - are the signs of a glorious past as it marks the passage of the Old Emilia and Ancient Emilia ways that correspond to the original course of the Roman consular road the *Via Emilia.* Today it is known as *"e' puntàz"* in dialect or *"the old bridge"*. The valley ends in Bellaria Igea Marina, where the Uso flows into the sea.

2. The Rivers

Marecchia

As the poet says (1), it springs amid countless drops of water from a field on Mount della Zucca (1,263 metres) in the Tuscan mountain range of the Alpe della Luna, near the source of the Tiber, where the region of Emilia Romagna borders with Tuscany. A commemorative stone

above
The Marecchia River near Ponte S. Maria Maddalena

below
The Marecchia River with a view of the rocky spur of Saiano

marks the spot near Pratieghi, an outlying hamlet of Badia Tedalda in the province of Arezzo.

A delightful walk here helps visitors discover that this excellent water springs from a lush mountain. To be precise, it is a triple source that springs from an altitude of 918 metres in Forconaia on Mount Castagnolo, on the Mount Zucca ridge. Indeed, it is difficult to say exactly where the spring is, so much so that someone has described the sources of the Marecchia as "a more mysterious place than the source of the Nile", with due respect for their differing sizes. The first source descends from above, the second joins it from the left and the third from the right, a few metres lower down.

The river is about 90 kilometres long and winds its way almost entirely through the historic region of Romagna along the valley of the same name; the Marecchia Valley.

What the Romans called *Ariminus* first and then *Maricula* (or *small sea*) descends towards the Adriatic with a torrential force that, after decades, is once again strong and determined. In its thousand-year history its features have changed often and it now seems smaller and in certain stretches has even been distorted by excavations carried out over the years that failed to consider its need to be protected and enhanced. This is especially true in the part that crosses the town of Villa Verucchio, where it is possible to note gorges like in a grand canyon, caused by the erosion of the clay layer.

In terms of its water it should be said that the Marecchia remains a torrent with considerable variations in its flow rate depending on the season, with flash floods in autumn and dry beds in summer. In any case, one of its geological characteristics is that it has a considerable volume of water under the substratum of its flow bed. Furthermore, some mouths are far from the coast and pools of fresh water form here, a peculiarity the city of Rimini avails itself of for its water supply, even when the river is dry. Unsurprisingly, thanks to its alluvial fan, it is described as a veritable "freshwater factory".

Returning to its course, it is worth following the river, in particular when it begins to form a wide and enchanting riverbed. At Molino di Bascio in Pennabilli its conformation takes on the more traditional shape

above
The Marecchia River in Villa Verucchio with Torriana in the background

below
The Conca River near Morciano di Romagna

of torrents, with a pebbly river bottom and stretches characterized by the presence of huge massifs and small waterfalls. Classified as first category, the quality of the water is excellent and along with the unspoilt environment favours the proliferation of a large variety of insects and fish such as trout, goby and eels, above all *minnows*. Descending, the river laps the Montefeltro area of Romagna touching all the valley's municipalities that supply it with water thanks to torrents that are now small, but once had considerable flow. These tributaries include the Presale Torrent, which forms an attractive waterfall, the beautiful Senatello, which is full of water and the Storena, which bewitches with its stretches of tumbling rocks that look like a Zen garden (2). Others include Rio Mavone, the Mazzocco Torrent, Rio San Marino and the Ausa Torrent that springs from the slopes of Mount Titano where it is known as the Fosso della Flocca. It flows for a total of 17.2 kilometres and in the final stretch has been hydraulically modified and diverted into the Marecchia River. Its wide bed has wild banks and magnificent beaches lapped by the fresh, clean, gurgling water where it is possible to see "the childhood of the world" (3) and a sea of pebbles; as the other poet, this time from America, wrote "the mud is full of stones" (4). In Villa Verucchio, where quarrymen have stolen its soul, it becomes something quite different, but returns to its typical conformation in Poggio Berni where it also gives us some fascinating Pliocene fossils. Although its mouth has been diverted to keep it away from the port, it forms an estuary in Rimini before finally flowing into the Adriatic.

Conca

The river springs from Mount Carpegna, which stands over 1,200 metres tall, is almost always snow-covered in winter and has excellent ski-lift facilities. The upper part of the Conca River lies between the top of Mount Carpegna and the village of Monte Cerignone where it is at its steepest. In the village of Caprara, near the provincial road that leads to Villagrande di Montecopiolo and a few hundred metres upstream of the road, the Conca waterfall is an enchanting sight. The water flows over a crag before dropping again onto the riverbed hidden by a dense vegetation of mainly red and hoary willows and black alders. The river descends to the sea flowing through the municipal territories of Monteboaggine,

above
Riviera Golf Club in San Giovanni in Marignano

below
The Marano Torrent in Coriano

Monte Cerignone and Monte Grimano Terme in the province of Pesaro, before reaching the plain of Mercatino Conca where the riverbed widens, slowing the course of the river before entering the province of Rimini. Here it passes through the village of Taverna, in the municipality of Monte Colombo, then Morciano di Romagna, San Clemente and San Giovanni in Marignano, finally flowing into the Adriatic Sea in the elegant resort of Portoverde in Misano Adriatico. It is here that it receives two tributaries; the Fossa del Molino and the Ruscello. It is 47 kilometres long and forms an estuary as it flows into the sea. In 1878 a dam was built across the river to form an artificial lake called the Conca Basin. Close to the A14 motorway, from where it can easily be seen, the lake straddles two towns in the province of Rimini - Misano Adriatico, in the village of Santa Monica, home to the Misano World Circuit racetrack, and San Giovanni in Marignano. Today, the basin is mainly used for agricultural purposes and is part of the *Protected Landscape of the Conca Torrent.* Various fish species are found in its waters, in particular *minnows*; carp, chub, Italian barbel and the more common bleak. As well as these species, close to the mouth of the river there are numerous brackish water fish like eels and mullets.

Marano

This is the third most important waterway in the province of Rimini, after the Marecchia and the Conca. It begins life on Mount Ghelfa (581 metres) between the province of Pesaro, in the municipalities of Monte Grimano Terme and Sassofeltrio, and the Republic of San Marino. It winds its way to the coast, flowing into the Adriatic in Spontricciolo, on the border between Rimini and Riccione, about 30 kilometres later. The middle section of the river crosses the towns of Coriano and Montescudo flowing over gently-rolling hills, valleys and rounded ridges covered in woods and scrubland. It is characterized by a winding course and as it is a torrent, is typically affected by rainfall, making it almost dry during the summer season and fuller in winter. In the initial part of the waterway there are numerous chalk, limestone and sandstone rocky outcrops, whilst the middle section has a lightly undulating riverbed with a slight incline. The downstream section is more winding, with huge loop bends ending in a very simple estuary.

above
The valley of the Ventena Torrent

below
Mount Titano

Rio Ventena

This small waterway flows through the towns of Montefiore Conca and Gemmano, one on its right bank and the other on its left. It begins on Mount San Giovanni in the village of Monte Altavelio in the municipality of Mercatino Conca, before flowing into the Conca just before Morciano di Romagna. Its valley is extremely charming thanks to its unspoilt natural beauty. It is stunning in terms of landscape and also interesting thanks to the presence of extremely lush, spontaneous vegetation. In its initial part, the waterway is in the Marche (province of Pesaro-Urbino) and the valley is scarcely populated, with small villages like Valle Fuini di Ripamassana entirely uninhabited. The second stretch is in the province of Rimini and is a key example of integration between rural areas and wild environment.

It should not be confused with the **Ventena** Torrent and adjacent valley; this brook begins life in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, on Colle Tavoleto to be precise, and flows into the Adriatic to the north-east of Cattolica in the province of Rimini. It is the smallest in the Rimini area and in the southern part of the province flanks the water basins of the Conca, Tavollo and Foglia. Over half of its water basin is in the first part it crosses, in other words, the municipalities of San Giovanni in Marignano and Saludecio.

Tavollo

The sources of the Tavollo are in Mondaino and have been traced to several ditches. After 21 kilometres it flows into the Adriatic near Cattolica harbour having crossed 11 municipalities, 4 of which in the Marche; in fact, it is a natural border between the regions of Emilia Romagna and the Marche.

Ausa

It begins in the Republic of San Marino, at an altitude of 465 metres, due to the confluence of several ditches, the main one being Fosso della Flocca. The first part crosses a morphologically-tormented landscape with numerous calanques. It then continues on more regular terrain of unspoilt land, pastures and cultivated fields. The mouth of the river, in Rimini, has been diverted.

Uso

The River Uso is a 49 kilometre-long torrential waterway that begins under Mount Perticara from two Apennine branches; the Fosso di Camara that springs from Mount Perticara (883 metres) and the Uso di Tornano from Savignano di Rigo (581 metres). They converge near the village of Pietra dell'Uso that takes its name from the river itself. It initially flows through the province of Forlì-Cesena, entering the province of Rimini once in the plain, before flowing into the Adriatic Sea in Bellaria. Its course crosses mainly mountainous and hilly landscapes and its bed flows over a clay and sandy terrain of sandstone origin; the remaining third of the river flows over foothills and plains. Its water flow is irregular and heavily dependent on seasonal rainfall leaving it dry in certain periods of the year. The provincial municipalities in the river basin are Bellaria Igea Marina, Poggio Berni, Rimini, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Torriana and Novafeltria. It has 9 tributaries, the main one being Rio Salto. It is famous for its "whispering aspens" celebrated by Giovanni Pascoli in his poem *The Dapple-Grey Mare* in which he recalls the young mare that brought home his dead father. Although small, the river is very famous. In ancient times its course marked the border between the Italic populations of the centre and the Gallic populations of the Padana plain. In 49 BC, Julius Caesar at the head of his troops crossed this border and pronounced the phrase "alea iacta est" (the die is cast) before deciding to march his army on Rome. In ancient times, the area was covered in marshland and the rivers that flowed into it often changed their course. Only after Roman centuration was the area reclaimed. Over the years, is has experienced much flooding and hydrogeological instability with subsequent changes in the course of the waters. Though many historians believe the River Uso is the ancient Rubicon it is not certain and many other rivers also claim this coveted title, including the current Rubicon River and the Pisciatello Torrent.

3. The Mountains

Mount Carpegna

Mount Carpegna is the most important and best-known mountain massif in the Rimini area. In the northern Apennines, standing longitudinally from north-west to south-east on the border between the

above
Mount Carpegna and the village of Carpegna

below
Mounts Aquilone and Perticara

Marche, Tuscany and Emilia Romagna in the area of Montefeltro, it is mainly in the province of Rimini. The massif includes the peaks of San Leo, San Marino, Villagrande, Mount Canale, Sasso Simone and Simoncello and other minor reliefs. The highest peak is Mount Carpegna that, at 1,415 metres above sea level, remains the most imposing in the Apennines near Rimini. On its southern slopes is the village of Carpegna (748 metres) whilst to the east, wedged in one of its spurs, is the village of Villagrande (seat of Montecopiolo town hall). To the north is the small town of Maiolo (550 metres) and to the north-west the municipality of Pennabilli. Mount Carpegna is in the *Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park*. Its geological nature, primarily limestone, is highlighted by the white rocks that emerge along the sides of the mountain. The limestone-marlstone compounds are visible from a considerable distance, clearly marking out the mountain. Indeed, it is possible to spot the bright white limestone of the crags of *Ripa dei Salti* from the Adriatic coast, especially on a clear day. The area surrounding the peak is dominated by fields, pastureland where livestock roams free, unspoilt natural areas and imposing beech woods, such as ancient Pianacquadio.

Mount Perticara

Mount Perticara (883 metres) or Mount Pincio is a mountain in the middle Apennines between Cesena and Rimini, on the watershed between the valleys of the River Uso to the north and the Marecchia to the south. Its name derives from that of the village of the same name in the municipality of Novafeltria (province of Rimini), just a little further west. It is not the mountain that overlooks the village; this is in fact Mount Aquilone (833 metres) which, despite being lower than Mount Perticara, hides it from view from the village. Worth mentioning is the presence of a nucleus of chestnut trees in the woody area facing towards the sea and rock faces where climbing enthusiasts can fully enjoy this imposing mountain and the views of the entire valley to the coast. The source of the River Uso is on the north face of Mount Perticara, in the province of Forlì-Cesena.

Mount Aquilone

This is one of several fragments of marly limestone dragged here by the “gravitational flow” that ran aground against the massif of

above
Mountains near Casteldelci and Sant'Agata Feltria

below
Mount Simoncello seen from Pennabilli

Mount Pincio - Mount Perticara. It is possible to climb to the peak, which is 883 metres above sea level. Pre-historical artefacts and archaeological material have been found in its chestnut wood, including flint stones, fragments of ceramics and Roman brooches and coins. It is extremely popular with climbers thanks to its beautiful south-east facing rock face and also with flying, paragliding and hang-gliding enthusiasts.

Mount Pian di Rote

Mount Pian di Rote is in the upper Apennines of Rimini in the area of Sant'Agata Feltria, near the border with the province of Forlì-Cesena. It reaches an altitude of 961 metres and is the highest peak in the municipality. Many waterways spring from the mountain including Rio Maggio, a tributary of the River Savio that crosses Cesena, and other tributaries of the Marecchia River.

Poggio dei Tre Vescovi

Poggio dei Tre Vescovi is a mountain in the Rimini Apennines in the upper Marecchia Valley. Its name translates as Knoll of the Three Bishops and is due to the fact three dioceses meet here; San Marino-Montefeltro, Forlì-Bertinoro and Arezzo-Cortona-Sansepolcro. It is on the watershed ridge between the river valleys of the Marecchia and Tiber, midway between Mount della Zucca (1,263 metres), a little to the south, and Mount Loggio (1,179 metres), towards the north-east. Many brooks descend the mountain, carving out deep, narrow valleys to bring water to the Marecchia. It is on the border between the provinces of Rimini and Arezzo although its peak (1,127 metres) is in Casteldelci, in the province of Rimini.

Simone and Simoncello

After Mount Carpegna, the **Simoncello** is the highest peak in the Rimini Apennines and the province of Rimini. It stands on the border between the municipality of Pennabilli in Emilia Romagna, and Sestino in the province of Arezzo in Tuscany. It is in the *Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park* and though its name is a diminutive of the nearby Sasso Simone, it is in fact taller, reaching an altitude of 1,221 metres compared

above
View of Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park

below
Wild crocuses in the park

to 1,204 metres. It forms an intermediary ring in the mountain chain that separates the valleys of the Marecchia River (to the north-west) and the Foglia River (to the south-east), a chain that continues south with the Sasso Simone and further north also includes Mount Carpegna (1,415 metres). Many tributaries of the Marecchia and Foglia Rivers spring from its slopes. The other table mountain that dominates the geographical region of the Montefeltro is **Sasso Simone**. It too consists of tertiary marine sediments and is a fragment of the rocky layers that, emerging from the sea and shifting from west to east, have fragmented and now form outcrops all along the Apennine chain. According to an 18th-century chronicler, from its peak it was possible to see the Adriatic coast from Venice to Ancona. It seems to owe its name to a hermit, called Simone, who came from the east. As artefacts found on the plateau show, there was life here from as early as the Bronze Age. In 1565 it was chosen by Cosimo I de' Medici as the site for his fortress city called "City of the Sun", a name similar to that of "Land of the Sun", the other Medici city built in Romagna. Mount Simone was in fact, strategic for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the city was used in its dual military and civil function for almost a century after which, due to adverse natural and political conditions, it was abandoned at the end of the 17th century.

Notes
(1) (2) (3) This is Tonino Guerra; a poet, screenwriter, writer, painter and eclectic artist who was born, lived and died in the valley. For having sung its praises and enriching it with his work he is known as the *Poet of the Marecchia Valley.*
(4) The American poet is Ezra Pound who travelled widely in the Montefeltro and Rimini areas and wrote extensively about them.

CHAPTER II
LANDSCAPES OF THE SOUL

This chapter focuses on landscapes, intended as a series of places that are visually fascinating and charming, describing the emotions these landscapes arouse and the evocative force they transmit as they enter into contact with our inner selves. We also focus on the social and cultural history that came precisely from the nature of these places and their beauty. In some cases, we will draw from the poetic vision of those who, thanks to their particular talent, were bewitched by them. In each paragraph we will deal with one of these fascinating places, describing their features and peculiarities.

Poetic Sites

Over time, landscapes that were already enchanting given their natural aspect have been enriched thanks to the fruitful creativity of artists who decided to leave their mark. This is the case of the places designed for meditation by the maestro Tonino Guerra, poet, writer, screenwriter, painter and all-round artist who was born in the Marecchia Valley, where he lived for years and where he chose to die. His motto was that more beauty would thus be added to what was already there. Like a modern-day Tolstoy he not only decided to fight to save these places, but also to enhance them and make them better known.

In the valley, his poetic creations form a diffused museum bearing the name *Places of the Soul.*

In some cases Guerra chose not to add anything to them, but to simply sing their praises and make them known through his verses. He included them in a hypothetical museum he called *The Shattered Museum*, giving each a name that would evoke and enchant.

1. Places of the Soul

These are places, each with their own characteristics and themes, united by the aim of stimulating the soul and triggering the imagination. These include *The Petrified Garden* in Torre di Bascio and *The Orchard of Forgotten Fruits,* the *Road of Sundials* and the *Sanctuary of Thoughts* in Pennabilli.

There are many of these places and starting from the upper valley, they accompany visitors along the entire axis of the Marecchia River.

The Garden of Liseo

Ranco, in the upper valley, is the first place where Guerra's poetry, collected in his book *The Garden of Liseo,* becomes tangible and enters the village where Liseo, the main character of his poem, lived. His

above
The Petrified Garden at Torre di Bascio

below
The Orchard of Forgotten Fruits in Pennabilli

is the phrase in the book that explains how "solitude keeps you company", as well as the one referring to God that reads "saying God exists may be a lie, but saying He doesn't exist may be a bigger lie". Here, where the farmer lived, prayed and tended his garden, there are two plaques with phrases by Guerra commemorating his life.

The Petrified Garden

At the base of the ancient tower in Bascio Alta, in a field overlooking a universe of hills, mountains and valleys, are seven ceramic carpets created by Gio' Urbinati. They seem to have been blown here by the wind as it whipped the grass and shrubs and launched itself towards breathtaking views. Designed by Guerra, the garden is dedicated to seven historical figures that were born in or visited the valley, including Dante Alighieri, Giotto, Ezra Pound and Uguccione della Faggiola, "lest we forget them".

Our Lady of the Rectangle of Snow

This is a chapel or rather a miniature church that stands in an area that is part woodland, part field. It is said to have been built on a site indicated by a divine sign. It had been partly destroyed so the poet decided to rebuild it, adorning it with ceramic works of art and signs that recall its origins. "In the 18th century it was decided to build a temple and for years it was impossible to find a suitable site that guaranteed safety and stability. One August day in 1754, snow fell, marking out a white rectangle on that very spot. Thus they understood Our Lady was indicating the place on which to build the small church".

The Orchard of Forgotten Fruits

This is the first unusual museum designed by Guerra and the first in Italy dedicated to ancient fruits. As he declared, it is "a museum of flavours" that brings together species of local fruit trees and bushes that had almost disappeared and pieces by local artists who collaborated with him. Over the past 20 years the site has become fascinating thanks to is many unusual species, including a mulberry tree planted by the Dalai Lama, and works of art like *The Chapel of Tarkoskij,* built using stones from some of the valley's abandoned churches and a fountain called *The Voice of the Leaf.*

above
The Sanctuary of Thoughts in Pennabilli

below
Ponte delle Scale bridge in Pietracuta near San Leo

The Refuge of Abandoned Madonnas

Inside the orchard, this is a collection of sacred images by various artists commissioned by the maestro Tonino Guerra. The idea the poet had was to recall the Madonnas that adorned small chapels once frequently found at crossroads on country roads.

The Road of Sundials

This boasts seven huge sundials showing famous pictorial pieces commissioned by Guerra, "so we don't forget we use light to measure time". They are all wall-mounted with the exception of one that is on the ground, above the old washhouse in the *Orchard of Forgotten Fruits*, which marks time using the shadow of whoever takes the place of the gnomon.

The Sanctuary of Thoughts

This is a garden where an ancient fig tree has grown against a stretch of wall that was once part of the castle owned by the Malatesta, lords of Pennabilli before becoming lords of Rimini. The lush garden has sculptures designed by Guerra that create a space for meditation and inner dialogue "for good and bad thoughts". It is a little corner of spirituality that recalls the Orient and Zen philosophy.

The Snail Fountain

In Sant'Agata Feltria it is the "snail that narrates, using words made of water" just how important it is to choose slowness. A poetic message that goes beyond the piece designed by Guerra and created by the skilful hands of the Ravenna-born mosaic sculptor Marco Bravura, splendidly positioned on the huge stairway in the old town centre.

Ponte delle Scale

In Pietracuta, where the Marecchia becomes like a wide sea, with fine sandy beaches and other pebble ones (with Saiano and its sanctuary, popular with pilgrims, standing on the rocky crag on the opposite bank), in the summer a bridge is laid whose name, the "*Bridge of Ladders",* recalls the ladders once used to cross the river. To commemorate

above
The Underground Lawn in Santarcangelo di Romagna

below
The Tree of Water in Torriana

these gestures, the valley's poet asked for a footbridge to be put here every year for the thousands of visitors drawn to the beauty of this place where they could spend time sunbathing in peace.

The Water Tree

This is the "portrait of our river whose branches, in the summer, make their way between stones, becoming a water tree", recites the poem Tonino Guerra dedicated to this fountain which he designed. It is in the old town of Torriana and is the bronze cast of a mulberry tree whose branches spray out water.

The Fountain of Memory

This fountain in Poggio Berni focuses on the many fossils that have inspired its shape and that can be found along the Marecchia River, especially in this area. According to Guerra, it is "a fossil that accompanies whoever wants to stop and journey through their memories".

The Underground Lawn

This is a lawn of water with the grass represented by sprays of water and with the Malatesta Fortress and mediaeval village of Santarcangelo di Romagna reflected in its wide basin. It is a place where people can stop, meditate and discover the poetry of a man who was born here and first began to write here.

2. The Shattered Museum

Pozzale

In the village of Sant'Antimo in the municipality of Sant'Agata Feltria there is a large mediaeval well for collecting rainwater that is hidden by the dense vegetation. "It is as round as a tower, a metre tall with a bush of green leaves on top that acts as a hat for it" according to a poem written by Guerra. It is such a pleasant surprise that it is worth the trip.

The Hundred-metre Park

This is in fact not a park, but a poem imagines it to be so as it is an unspoilt place that enchants thanks to its peculiarity of being as wild

above
Mount Carpegna seen from the Pietrarubbia area

below
Andreuccio Lake in the village of Soanne

as “at the time of the childhood of the world” when “masses rolled onto the water” creating a Zen garden. These wandering stones stopped on this torrent, the Storena, a tributary of the Marecchia River that flows through the village of Ca’ Romano and joins it in Ca’ Raffaello.

Canaiolo

In the municipality of Pennabilli and in Sasso and Simoncello Park, two waterways spring from Mount Carpegna and the plains of Cantoniera; called the Canaiolo and Paolaccio, they merge to form the Messa Torrent. They are largely inaccessible and almost entirely unknown, but very enchanting thanks to their wild natural beauty, especially the *Canaiolo*. These are extremely interesting places thanks to their flora and fauna - wolves and wild cats reign - and their morphology, conquering visitors and living long in their memory. The scholar Guerrieri in his book *La Carpegna abbellita ed il Montefeltro Illustrato (Carpegna Adorned and the Montefeltro Illustrated)* gives this description; “the *modest* torrent, commonly known as the *Messa,* comes from a copious spring that gushes forth from a high, rocky crag on *Mount Carpegna* from a strip that makes its waters flow hastily down from above, mainly from its lively spring to the dangerous and horrid pass of the *Canaiolo*. (...) where it flows over the rocky way called the snail”. The two ditches merge to form a Y shape, creating an area of enchanting beauty and rugged wildness. It is here a group of Tibetan Buddhist monks threw the dust of the mandala created in Pennabilli to mark the visit of the 14th Dalai Lama to celebrate Father Orazio Olivieri, the Capuchin monk born in Pennabilli who worked as a missionary in Tibet for over 30 years in the 18th century.

Soanne, its mills and Lake Andreuccio

In the municipality of Pennabilli, the small village of Soanne boasts the remains of several ancient mills. They cling to the land and rocks and clear water still flows strongly between them. These include the ruins of *Soanne Mill,* half-hidden by the scrub and *Borgonovo Mill*, a kilometre above Soanne along a torrent and close to a waterfall, in perfect harmony with the surrounding natural habitat. These are magical and historical places that are worth visiting because, as the verses written by

above
The Marecchia River near Ponte S. Maria Maddalena

below
Sandaccio Mill on the Marecchia River near San Leo

Tonino Guerra state, “the miracle of fresh, flowing water makes you feel you are inside what you are looking at”. Water is also important in Lake Andreuccio, immersed in lush greenery and surrounded by woods that depict enchantingly beautiful landscapes in any season.

The Sea of St. Francis

There are splendid views overlooking the Marecchia near Ponte Santa Maria Maddalena where two ancient mills remain, one of which is called *Sandaci* or *Sandaccio Mill*. This is the territory of San Leo, before the bridge, and Novafeltria immediately after. The area is easy to reach by driving down towards the *Old Mill*, now a restaurant called *Spiga d’Oro*. This is a stretch in which the river takes on an unexpected and somewhat unusual conformation. Rock giants emerge, under which the water is deep and dotted with constantly moving whirlpools. These are like natural swimming pools that are popular with visitors for a regenerating dip. The smooth stone masses are scattered here and there, as if tossed by a Cyclops to act as sentinels over the river. This led the poet Tonino Guerra to imagine a cooling stop here for St. Francis of Assisi too, given that he lived and travelled extensively in this area. Indeed the fact he travelled here, particularly to San Leo, is well documented. When the river is in flood only the tops of these masses are visible and the water rises, flows and whirls at frightening speed.

3. The Invisible Landscape

Montefeltro Vedute Rinascimentali (Renaissance Views of Montefeltro) is an interregional project designed to promote tourism in the area on an international level based on in-depth scientific research carried out in parallel on the territory and on works of art from the Italian Renaissance.

Focusing on the landscape, environment, history, social aspects, art and monuments, the study made it possible to discover an invisible, but real world. What emerged is that the Montefeltro of Piero della Francesca, Leonardo da Vinci, Vasari and many other 15th and 16th-century artists lives on in today’s landscapes.

For five centuries we wondered where the landscapes that

above
The backdrops of Piero della Francesca in paintings and landscapes

below
Aerial view of San Leo

inspired the masterpieces created by Piero della Francesca and other artists were situated geographically. Travelling along our valleys it is easy to say; here are the backdrops of Piero della Francesca, the peaks of his hills and the many profiles, one behind the other, gentle and delicate in the misty haze and colours of morning. Having studied and analysed them, the landscapes of Piero della Francesca have actually been found, located by two experts, a video maker and landscape photographer and a professor of geomorphology; two landscape "seekers" who tracked them down hidden in the hills of Montefeltro, between Romagna and the Marche.

The backdrops of Piero della Francesca

It all begins with the first landscapes located, those painted in 1475 by Piero della Francesca in his *Diptych of the Dukes of Urbino,* now housed in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, behind the portraits of *Federico* of Montefeltro and his consort *Battista Sforza* and behind *The Triumphs.*

The mountains, rocks and rivers are those the artist saw in the lands of the Duchy of Federico of Montefeltro when travelling to Urbino or towards Rimini from Sansepolcro along the Marecchia Valley on the *Ariminensis* road (from Arezzo to Rimini along the Marecchia River - once called *Ariminus)* that he used to reach Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, lord of Rimini, another figure who commissioned a great deal of his work; all landscapes still recognizable today.

Mountain profiles, hills, flat horizons, rivers and above all, hamlets and castles including San Leo, Maioletto, Talamello and Pennabilli, can be traced one by one and there are points from where to enjoy the same panoramic views of the time. These extraordinary views arouse great emotions and take us beyond time and space back to the feverish, glorious history of the Renaissance years.

The Landscapes of Vasari

From comparisons carried out between pieces by Giorgio Vasari (16th-century artist, architect and Italian art historian) - accustomed to travelling between Arezzo, Rimini and Ravenna along the *Iter Ariminensis* - and real landscapes, the two above-mentioned experts found important similarities and correspondence.

above
Rocky conformations in Pietramaura

below
The Vena del Gesso in Torriana

The horizons of Leonardo da Vinci

Similar studies were carried out on the works of Leonardo da Vinci, including the *Madonna Litta* now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Its backdrop also shows features attributable to the landscapes of the Montefeltro area. In fact, he too travelled in these parts to reach towns where he worked, including Rimini and Cesenatico. It is thus still possible to see what he too saw and painted in his extremely famous canvases.

4. Magical Places

In this paragraph we focus on enchanting territories; crystal hills, clay deserts and ancient woods that narrate the history of places and men, as well as rocky conformations whose origins and uses are still mysterious and much more. We will focus on their characteristics and peculiarities to entice you to discover their mystical charm.

The Vene del Gesso

The valleys of the province of Rimini that mark the central Apennines of Romagna are intersected by the “chalk veins of Romagna”; veritable “crystal hills” of extraordinary beauty. Although in the Rimini area they are less stunning than near Imola, with their light and shade and peculiar landscapes these geological environments are still extremely precious. Geologically speaking this is a calcium sulphate ridge - alternately crystallized and stratified in imposing banks - that surfaces and crosses the territories of the municipalities of Torriana, as well as Montescudo and Gemmano further south. Given its composition, extraordinary morphological variety and typical flora and fauna, the chalky-sulphurous formation has heavily influenced the landscape, leaving a mark on the history of these parts and the lives of its inhabitants. Documents dating from 1504 state that “chalk, baked and crushed, is used to build houses”. Unsurprisingly, there were and still are quarries for its extraction. Nature here is stunning, fascinating and surprising thanks to the crystallization of the chalk. Sea water evaporated around 6 million years ago - it was the Pliocene period and the sea invaded these lands lapping the hills - and calcium sulphate deposits gave life to typically *spearhead* or *dovetail-*

above
A cliff face in Verucchio

below
Calanques in Maioletto

shaped chalky crystals. Along the vein that runs from Modena to Pesaro this highly soluble substance created karstic phenomena that made the landscape unique and shaped it into chalky peaks, some of which have fractured or have even been buried. Unsurprisingly, there are numerous fossils between the clay and marl layers, especially in Poggio Berni in the Marecchia Valley and Mondaino in the Conca Valley.

Place names come to our aid by promptly indicating where chalky outcrops exist; consider the "*gessi"* along the road that leads from Torriana to Montebello, *Mount Gesso* and the small village of *Gesso* between Montescudo and Sassofeltrio, the *Mala Valley, Albereto Wood* and *Rio Ventena* riverbed in Mondaino and *Onferno Caves* in Gemmano. These all have a marked geological uniqueness and a great wealth in terms of landscape, vegetation and zoology. Indeed, species of vegetation grow here that have survived for millennia. These veritable botanical relics include *ferns* and succulents of the *sedum* genus, whilst animal species that have found refuge here include rare birds of prey like *hobbies* and *harriers.*

Desertified Calanques

These are fascinating, but also cause some bewilderment, above all because of the ruggedness they afford the landscape and the instability they suggest. This is because the hills where calanques abound are clearly eroded, crumbling, cracked and split. They often appear like long, slender blades of land; bare, whitish Gothic steeples on which chromatic streaks surface due to the mineralization of gold, carmine and ochre. At their edges are woods and cultivated fields. These too teem with vegetation, although it is not very evident; it consists mainly in heroic plants that have adapted to these difficult conditions. They have fleshy stems and leaves, transpiring surfaces and are *halophilic,* or in other words rich in salt, and this gives them sufficient strength to draw water from the depths of the soil. *Artemisia caerulescens* is the most common and takes its name from Queen Artemisia who first discovered its therapeutic properties. Animals that have adapted to the harsh climate of the calanques include a crustacean - *Armadillidium zangherii* - and an insect - a bright blue *beetle,* which only leave their lairs at night. The calanques were formed by runoffs

above
Rocky spur with the remains of Maioletto Castle

below
Onferno Nature Reserve

on the clay substrata; unable to penetrate the soil, rainwater flushed it away and flowed downhill eroding the slopes. This “flaky” or “chaotic” clay formed between 140 million and 5 million years ago in the Cretaceous and Miocene periods. It features in almost the entire Italian Apennine region and in the province of Rimini too forms extremely interesting landscapes. Travelling here is fascinating, with visitors feeling as though they are in a pre-historic territory - mythical places like Cappadocia in Anatolia or Colorado in the United States. When several calanques converge in the so-called “gutter” of a valley (called *compluvium* in Latin or the place where waters merge) they are known as “calanque amphitheatres”. There are several in the Rimini area; two main ones in the Conca Valley - the *Amphitheatre of Onferno* in the Gemmano area and the *Amphitheatre of Rio Salso* in the village of Montespino in the municipality of Mondaino. In the valley of the Rio Ventena are the nearby calanques of Tavoleto, in the province of Pesaro and Urbino. In the Marecchia Valley, the *amphitheatre* that surrounds Maioletto in the municipality of Maiolo is particularly fascinating. Walking here is delightful, but not without difficulty; in winter because the clay becomes muddy and in summer because it turns to dust. However, this difficulty is rewarded by fascinating views that look like those described by Dante in his Purgatory and Inferno. Bare and inhospitable, as steep as shapeless tongues of sand, they retain signs of their ancient history with water rapids and a sense of perpetual movement that should not put visitors off.

Those who intend to come to these extreme altitudes because they love heights and empty spaces should climb the rock face - rigged out for climbers like all those registered in the Marecchia Valley - on whose peak stand the charming ruins of Maioletto castle. Besides Mount Aquilone, Perticara, Pennabilli and Verucchio, as mentioned, the valley boasts the cliffs of San Leo, Pietramaura, San Marino, Balze and Mount Fumaiolo creating an environment that will delight enthusiasts.

Rocky Monuments

These are precipices, grottoes, shelters, masses, rocks, cavities and basins that over the years have become sacrificial altars, miraculous places to rest or the beds of hermits, as well as rocks known as

above
Rocky spur and Sanctuary of Saiano

below
A sacrificial altar in Torricella

"the devil's boulders". They have created environments that are extremely interesting; primarily for the mystery that surrounds them. In the Marecchia Valley they create a rich itinerary between the middle and upper valley. In **Saiano** near Torriana, on the rocky spur of the sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, the fairly crumbly rock has created unusual shapes. One in particular invites visitors to sit and is claimed to help expectant mothers who, once seated, pray to the miraculous Madonna. In the municipality of **San Leo** there are two such places worth visiting. One of these is Mount Fotogno where there is a boulder dating from the middle Miocene known as *Sasso del Tino*. Basins have been carved out of the limestone mass, some on the vertical part and others on the upper part, with two of these connected via a 10cm hole. The second is in the historic centre of San Leo, between the cathedral and the tower, where a large hollowed-out stone has become a tub for collecting rainwater; unsurprisingly, numerous grooves all around lead to the tub. This too has a hole, although it is not possible to see where it now flows. In a wood in the municipality of **Maiolo**, on the right bank of Fosso Rasino, a tributary of the Marecchia, there is a boulder known as *St. Paul's Bed*. Two metres tall and measuring 5 x 5 metres it may have been a tomb, possibly part of a prehistoric or even Roman hilltop necropolis. Alternatively, given the grooves along its edges, it may have been a hollow for collecting water. In **Torricella**, in the municipality of Novafeltria, there is another boulder this time an isolated sandstone boulder that is 7 metres long, 3 metres wide and 2 metres high. Here too there is a large basin in the upper part with a groove that drops to a smaller one below. Some experts believe it may have been used in prehistoric times as a sacrificial altar. The *Devil's Boulder* is the name of one of the characteristic rocks on Mount Aquilone in **Perticara**, in the municipality of Novafeltria; it had fallen from the rocky base on which it stood for millennia, but has since been repositioned there. The legend surrounding this odd boulder claims it is the last stone left here on the devil's whim and that it had been destined to be used to build Tiberius' Bridge in Rimini. A journey around these mysterious boulders continues in **Pennabilli** where, about a kilometre from the village, there are two large, round stones that are 2 metres high with a diameter of 3 metres. Two square basins have been carved out of them

Monastery and cypress of St. Francis in Villa Verucchio

and connected via a hole. On Mount Benedetto in **Sant'Agata Feltria** is *St. Sylvester's Bed.* Indeed, there are several sandstone boulders of this type here, caused by the decay of the rocky formation of Mount Ercole. On one of these - hence the name - there is a huge basin that, according to legend, is the place of hermitage and penance of Friar Sylvester who has since become a saint.

Near the ancient castle of **Miratoio** in Pennabilli there are some famous caves used in ancient times. Miratoio knoll is mainly sandstone rock that has been heavily eroded with areas collapsing to create cavities. They all have names and include *"Barlaccio's Lair*" and *"Morroni Cavern"* that was used by Slovenian soldiers at the end of the Second World War after escaping from Anghiari prisoner of war camp (in Tuscany). There's also a cave known as the *"Blessed Rigo"*; this is the most famous in the area as, according to legend, it was the place of shelter and penitence of the 14th-century Augustinian hermit the Blessed Rigo (in some sources indicated as Arrigo or Enrico). Inside there is a step that was used as a kneeling bench. Another famous grotto is the *"Dark Den"* that has two almost inaccessible entrances; during the war it was home to several local families. There are other smaller caves that are also difficult to explore including the *"Devil's Cleft"* and the *"Bats' Cave"*, which is 40 metres long and 865 metres above sea level, although its entrance has been obstructed by a large piece of debris.

In the Conca Valley it is only the upper part that boasts such mysterious remains, although most are linked to the use of boulders as basins for collecting rainwater or preparing wine, all of them outside the province, but in the regional territory. These have not however become part of popular local culture as has happened elsewhere.

Arboreal Patriarchs

These are often huge monumental trees, some several hundred years old that for centuries have guarded the territory, narrating its history. Recognizing and defending them will help us discover natural habitats and safeguard their biodiversity. They are as important as castles and historic villages and it is in the mystery surrounding them our roots lie. For this reason, to protect them, a census has been made of their

Olive trees with Verucchio in the background

presence. In some cases, this process began some time ago thanks to their link with special events, figures, customs or traditions; for example, the cypress tree planted by St. Francis in Verucchio where a Franciscan monastery was built.

Age-old trees also have a symbolic significance; suffice to think of "family trees" or "cosmic trees". However, what should primarily be underlined is that old trees are considered natural micro-ecosystems because many animal and vegetable species live in them. For this reason too they are important from an educational point of view, offering a window onto the territory and a benchmark for the study of the natural environment, starting with the state of health of the air and water. To all intents they are organic recorders; using special appliances to analyse the rings in tree trunks it is possible not only to discover their age, but also to have a map of climate changes, pollution, exceptional events such as fires, floods and hurricanes and much more besides and it is possible to go back in time, depending on their age, two, three or four-hundred years or more.

They can be found in old gardens, farmyards and often in almost inaccessible areas that have favoured their longevity, thanks to their isolation from urban development and deforestation. The most common species in the unspoilt areas and woods are oaks and English oaks. On farms, vines and mulberry trees bear witness to activities, like the breeding of silkworms that in the past had an important role in the economy of the family. Likewise, against the walls of farmhouses there are many pomegranate, jujube and fig trees. Cultivated fields are full of twisted hundred-year-old olives trees that are still productive and can be found mainly near Montegridolfo, Saludecio and Coriano. In addition to the above there are also yew, plane and chestnut trees, as well as cedars and pines brought here from distant lands to adorn the parks and gardens of historical villas, in line with the fashions and tastes of the time. Those interested in the oldest trees should seek out one estimated to be 800 years old; it is St. Francis' cypress tree in the Franciscan monastery in Verucchio that, according to tradition, was planted by the saint himself. In the town centre of Cattolica, the yew known as "the pharmacy yew" is believed to be over 500 years old and also in the same town, there are two black mulberry trees that are over 300 years old in the suburbs. There is a

above
An ancient oak in Trarivi di Montescudo

below, on the left
An ancient cypress in Montebello

below, on the right
An ancient olive tree in Valliano

700-year-old olive tree in San Carlino near Montegridolfo and monumental olive trees that are over 400 years old in Castello, whilst in Mondaino there are ancient tamarisks and oaks. Many trees in the chestnut woods of Mount Faggeto in Montefiore Conca are over 300 years old and there are similar examples in the so-called "Chestnut Tree Jungle" in Uffogliano in the Marecchia Valley. Other old trees in this valley include a cypress in Ca' Fagnano near Torriana that is over 380 years old, an oak in Saiano close to Palazzo that is 250 years old and climbing to San Leo, in Piazza Dante in the town centre, a huge old elm. The municipality of Montecopiolo is home to the age-old beech wood of Pianacquadio, the only one of its kind in Italy, which boasts truly imposing trees. In Rimini too there are numerous old trees such as the linden tree of St. Fortunato on Covignano Hill, believed to be 400 years old. There are too many arboreal patriarchs in the province to list them all, but visitors will come across them in all its valleys and on its hills.

5. Nature and Man

Man has always tried to shape nature, benefit from it and exploit it to guarantee his own survival and that of future generations. This has led to the exploitation of waterways, the subsoil and woodland and the extraction of minerals. In this paragraph we will take a journey to the former sulphur mine of Perticara, the mountains where the work of the last charcoal burners continues, the woody hillsides among truffle hunters and mushroom pickers and ancient chestnut woods where smugglers once found shelter.

The Sulphur Mine

Perticara mine in the municipality of Novafeltria was once one of the most important in Italy with 100 kilometres of galleries on 9 levels. Although now closed, it was active from 1741 until 1964 even if there is much to suggest that mining began much earlier than that. The site has not been abandoned; on the contrary, it is alive thanks to an important museum that narrates its long and complex history. Perticara is a mining basin by vocation as 5 million years ago layers of chalk and calcium sulphate were deposited between its marly clay. Mining activity

above
Perticara Museum and Mine

below
Gunpowder mill in Novafeltria

helped the economy flourish with entire quarters, a store, a church, a theatre, recreational areas and a sports field being built to accommodate thousands of miners and workers. The sports field witnessed the victories of the local team that, incredibly, ended up playing for a time in the Italian 3rd division.

The mine area is particularly fascinating and with its numerous towers, wells, ovens, telegraph pylons, rail tracks and trains is well worth visiting. The area also boasts a museum space called *Sulphur, Mining History Museum,* housed exactly where the mine once was, that faithfully reproduces the various phases of the activity. It is both fascinating and moving thanks to its evocative force because it gives some idea of the mining reality. One of the first examples of industrial archaeology in Italy, it was created to bring to life a history common to many populations in Europe. Its layout includes a theme itinerary that reproduces the various phases, ranging from extraction of sulphur to its fusion. Everything culminates in the *Mine*, a faithful and realistic reconstruction of an underground itinerary.

Gunpowder Mills

Connected to the extraction of sulphur are the area's gunpowder mills. In the upper Marecchia Valley in the 18th century there were 22 plants, 14 of which on the main branch of the Marecchia and 8 on its tributaries. Only three continued their activity into the 20th century, primarily closing due to the introduction of extraction using synthetic explosives like dynamite and derivatives that were easier to handle. Some of these plants remain and can be visited; they are the same that once guaranteed the valley considerable trade, part of which was illegal due to the presence of smugglers who found shelter in the chestnut woods of Uffogliano, Mount Benedetto and Mount Ercole and in woodland near Massamanente and Montetiffi. The mills in Talamello began to produce gunpowder in 1490, an activity that ended about 500 years later in the second half of the 20th century. In San Leo, the *Molinaccio* still bears a name that typically derives from this dangerous activity. A rarity is *della Pieve Mill* in Novafeltria where gunpowder was produced and that has recently been renovated. Perfectly preserved, the former Bonifazi powder

store now belongs to the municipality. Situated in the village of Pieve, on Via Pieve, the road that leads to Maiolo from Novafeltria and just before the bridge, it is housed in two small rooms and still has its original wooden pestle equipment, vertical hydraulic wheels, cylindrical containers for mixing and a system of pestles powered by a fulling mill.

The Road of Mills

Along the Marecchia River and its parallel canals and along the Conca River evidence of ancient milling activity is borne by historical mills, a few of which are still active, in some cases milling cereals and in others producing electricity. Following extensive research, they have all been registered and in both valleys it is now possible to follow the *Road of Mills*, from the lower to the upper valley. It is well worth it given the beauty of the mills, even when they have been abandoned, but above all for the insight they offer, helping us understand just how fundamental they were for the local economy. Furthermore, they were extremely symbolic places, with figures considered somewhat disturbing. In fact, it was believed that magical and seductive practices centred on the figure of the miller who worked day and night and only stopped during dry spells. It was millers who had first use of the water, precisely because the survival of a large part of the population depended on this. For this reason, during droughts farmers could only water their gardens on Saturday afternoons and Sundays when the mills were not operating. Millers lived above the mill, their lodgings directly connected to their workplace. Awkward events sometimes occurred inside given that the most rigorous rules of co-habitation, especially those linked to morality, were often ignored. It was in fact claimed that millers were not very respectful of these rules and unsurprisingly a proverb that dates from the time states, *"If you go to the mill, you get covered in flour".*

There were once over 200 mills in the Marecchia Valley; 35 in the lower part along the *Viserba Canal* or *Ditch* that began in Ponte Verucchio and ended in Viserba in Rimini, 19 along *Fossa Patara* or *Patarina* that also began in Ponte Verucchio and flowed into the sea in Rimini and others along the *Fossa Comunale dei Mulini* that gave its name to the area subsequently called San Martino dei Mulini. This particular ditch met and

above
Raso Mill in San Donato on the Senatello Torrent on the Casteldelci-Balze provincial road

below, on the left
Inside the Sapignoli Mill Museum in Poggio Berni

below, on the right
A detail of the gunpowder mill in Novafeltria

joined with *Fossa Viserba* and flowed towards Santarcangelo where it powered 5 town mills and also served other activities such as the dye works, the mangle, the fishmonger's, the washhouse and the slaughterhouse. In the upper valley there were 82 mills; 16 in San Leo, 23 in Novafeltria, 6 in Maiolo, 7 in Sant'Agata Feltria, 16 in Pennabilli, 12 in Casteldelci and 2 in Montecopiolo. There were others in Tuscany, in the province of Arezzo, and in the Republic of San Marino. Today, 165 have been registered although only a few survive in good condition and can be visited. These include *Moroni Mill* and *Sapignoli Mill*, now the *Museum of the Art of Milling*, in Poggio Berni and *Ronci Mill* in Ponte Messa di Pennabilli where the sawmill and the water mill that produces stone-ground flour are still active. Others have been beautifully restored and renovated, but are no longer used as originally intended. These include *Piega Mill* in the village of the same name near San Leo that is now an accommodation facility called *Locanda di San Leone*. Also in the municipality of San Leo, this time in Monte Fotogno, right on the Marecchia River near Ponte Santa Maria Maddalena is *Sandaci* or *Sandaccio Mill*, which can be clearly seen from the Marecchiese provincial road. Opposite the bridge, in the Novafeltria area, is another ancient mill which is now a restaurant called *Spiga d'Oro*.

The same applies to the Conca Valley where there were numerous mill canals along the river, as the historian Adimari wrote in 1616. As another scholar, Guerrieri, wrote on its banks there were once 76 mills or *mollini* powered by the river. There was plenty of water here with no need to build ditches, but just to carry out maintenance work on the intakes and canalizations due to frequent flooding. Today, the ruins of 63 sites remain; all of them are registered, though not all of them can still be identified as mills. There are 43 on the left bank, starting from Misano Adriatico and continuing towards San Clemente, Monte Colombo and Montescudo as far as Montecopiolo, and 20 on the right bank, starting from San Giovanni in Marignano and continuing to Morciano di Romagna, Montefiore Conca and Gemmano as far as Montecopiolo. Some mills in the Morciano area, such as *Balzi* and *Leardini di Sotto*, are still well-preserved despite considerable renovation work. At the end of the 18th century, many mills were extended with the addition of millstones for acorns, whose flour was used for animal feed, for sulphur, used to

above
The countryside near Coriano

below
The countryside near Santarcangelo di Romagna

produce gunpowder known as “black powder”, and even for woad; by diversifying production, mills were able to increase their profits.

Woad Mills

The territory of the upper Marecchia and Conca Valleys offers visitors the opportunity to take a journey back in time to discover what, until the early 18th century, was one of the most important local production activities; the cultivation of woad. “Woad” or “dyer’s woad” as it is more commonly known is an herbaceous plant that was grown in large parts of Europe. For almost four centuries (14th - 17th) it was the main resource for many Apennine territories, representing its base economy. Used to dye fabric blue, the same blue used by Piero della Francesca, the colour was obtained following a complex process. It led to a flourishing economic activity that continued until dyer’s woad was replaced by indigo from the Indies. The economy linked to woad is documented by the numerous millstones found throughout the Rimini area and now abandoned in fields and along roads or reused in a variety of ways; for example, as bases for crucifixes or to adorn gardens or carved out and used as drinking troughs. It is easy to spot them thanks to their peculiar shape; what once acted as a fixed base had sunburst channelling to permit the paste and liquid to seep out.

The Places of Memory

The province’s museum system has focused heavily on the relationship between anthropology and technology with several museums dedicated to their land of origin. Popular culture, traditions, customs, daily life, work and technological development are the themes tackled, with focus on both scientific rigour as well as attractions. Four museums centre on the agricultural world; *MET - Ethnographic Museum* in Santarcangelo di Romagna, the first to be set up that has become a benchmark for others, the *Ethnographic Museum* in Valliano in Montescudo, the *Rural Arts Museum* in Sant’Agata Feltria and the diffused *Bread Museum* in Maiolo. Finally, as mentioned in previous chapters, there’s the *Museum of the Art of Milling* housed in *Sapignoli Mill* in Poggio Berni.

Thanks to these exposition spaces, visitors can enter a universe that is often unknown, even though it dates from a fairly recent past. Seeing

above
A view of Talamello

below
A view of Sant'Agata Feltria

the artefacts and the real or reconstructed settings is a fascinating way to experience the relationship with the land, the meaning of daily gestures and hard work and the beliefs and customs that our grandparents hung onto until about 40-50 years ago when they were supplanted by modern life. This is a world that in the Rimini area, particularly along the coast, has been modified by changes to the economy and by a mentality that has focused on the rapid development of the seaside industry.

Wood and coal

Climbing towards the mountains, through the impervious woods near Sant'Agata Feltria, Casteldelci and Pennabilli, the most mountainous areas of the province, amid sheer cliffs, ravines, woodlands dense with shrubs and coppices, the cyclical rites that have accompanied the seasons since time immemorial continue to be repeated. This is the cycle of wood and fire, like the stifled fire of the charcoal pits that in these parts can still be found along many foot or bridle paths. For visitors these charming piles of wood prepared by charcoal burners look like magical volcanoes. They are extraordinary constructions because the wood, prepared to produce charcoal slack, is positioned by skilled hands in an extremely fascinating manner. There are two different procedures to follow. For charcoal slack a hole is dug and then covered by a sheet of metal raised as much as it needs to be and at just the right time to guarantee the slow and steady combustion of the small pieces of wood buried inside. The charcoal slack produced is used for barbecues and grills. For charcoal on the other hand, hardwood is needed and is placed upright, piece after piece, to create an almost conical shape up to 3 metres high. A number of meticulous operations are then carried out in sequence, marked by gestures and times handed down through the generations. Sods of turf are placed on top of the skilfully-built wood cone and then leaves and finally mould, the so-called shirt. At the top of the charcoal pit, an opening is the mouth of the oven and fuels combustion. When the fire is well-lit, the charcoal pit begins its work. Dense smoke rises from the cracks like hundreds of vents pouring out of the sides of a volcano. This continues slowly, day after day, for up to 12 days. When it stops breathing, it is allowed to cool, the shirt is removed and checks are made to see if the charcoal is ready.

above
A chestnut wood in Montefiore Conca

below
Truffles and mushrooms

These are also the lands of lumberjacks that cut and gather wood for chimneys and stoves. The work of the woodcutter also requires ancient skills and cannot be improvised. Just like with charcoal workers we know where they come from, but we never know where they may go. They form teams that move around using various means and lodge in cabins near where they work. Even if off-road vehicles have now replaced donkeys and everything is mechanized, it is still a hard job that lasts all year round because of the huge quantities of wood used to fuel fireplaces and stoves, even in the cities.

Mushrooms and Truffles in the Undergrowth

Travelling along paths in the hills of Rimini, especially in summer and autumn, visitors may come across people, either in groups or alone, and some with dogs. It is easy to imagine that those with dogs are looking for truffles as they grow abundantly here, particularly black truffles although precious white truffles can also be found. The latter, at times of famine, were almost like gold dust, as the prices paid at stalls at the many local fairs, such as the famous *National White Truffle Fair* held in Sant'Agata Feltria every Sunday in October, would suggest.

Mondaino also dedicates an autumnal fair called *Fossa Cheese, Truffles and Cerere* to this famous tuber and not only. The precious *Tuber Magnatum* is usually celebrated on the third Sunday in November.

For mushroom pickers too these areas are a haven, with a wealth of varieties ranging from common Porcini mushrooms, Caesar's mushrooms, honey mushrooms, parasol mushrooms and clavaria to rarer ones such as spring varieties like the famous *St. George's mushroom*. A fair dedicated to the latter has been held in Miratoio di Pennabilli for almost 30 years. As well as mushrooms and truffles the area also has plentiful wild asparagus, bladder campion, rampion, borage, mallow, poppy stems and lots of beneficial wild herbs.

Benevolent Chestnut Woods

Chestnut woods, present in the province in "islands", create delightful settings for walks in October, although picking chestnuts is not especially easy as the weather is not particularly mild at the time and

above
Casteldelci and Mount della Faggiola

below
Fields and chestnuts woods in Talamello

they often grow clinging to craggy slopes. Chestnut picking however is popular with young and old alike, especially in the upper Marecchia Valley near Talamello, Uffogliano, Perticara, San Leo and Casteldelci and in the Conca Valley in Montefiore Conca and Gemmano. In October in both valleys, in Talamello and Montefiore Conca, fairs and fetes are held to honour chestnuts with guided visits for picking organized. The locations are easy to find and in some cases it is possible to reach an agreement with the owners of the land for a day's picking. On Mount Faggeto in Montefiore is one of the province's most important woods, thanks to the presence of very old trees and particularly rare flora set in an environment of particular significance. Other chestnut woods that form the nucleus of Montefiore are those of Case Suore, Mount Maggiore and Mount Auro.

Uffogliano near Novafeltria is home to the best-known chestnut wood in the Marecchia Valley, called the *Chestnut Tree Jungle*, where the ancient castle or "castellaccio" once stood on a rocky spur. The entire ridge is covered in dense woods and the ruins of the castle are overgrown with vegetation in places.

Some even larger chestnut woods can be found on Mount Pincio in Talamello, on Mount Ercole and on Mount Benedetto popular years ago with gunpowder smugglers who sheltered there with the Pope's gendarmes first and then those of the Reign of Italy on their heels. Lastly, the chestnut woods of Casteldelci are characteristic of mountain life and a source of subsistence.

The introduction of the cultivation of chestnuts can probably be traced to monks who settled in the valleys during the Middle Ages, although it may date to as early as the Roman era. Sustenance was not the only benefit the local population obtained from chestnut trees. Expansion of their cultivation was favoured by other key activities including the extraction of sulphur in the Marecchia Valley. To support the galleries that were a few hundred metres deep, chestnut wood props and beams were used as it is one of the most durable woods found in Europe.

With the arrival of the industrial era, chestnut wood lost much of its importance. The fruit-bearing trees, often struck down by serious diseases, were abandoned and in the years following the Second World War gradual well-being reduced the age-old link that existed between

man and chestnuts. Their cultivation was thus relegated to an increasingly limited area and carried on by just a few enthusiasts.

No Longer Forgotten Fruits

The poet Tonino Guerra dedicated a museum to these fruits that he called a museum of flavours. It is the *Orchard of Forgotten Fruits* that for over 20 years has offered a positive and poetic message from Pennabilli. Its importance lies in the fact the fruits, which had been abandoned along with farmhouses, farmyards and farmer's market gardens, were saved, recovered and brought back to life here to offer us the flavours, fragrances and colours of yesteryear. The awareness raised thanks to this unusual orchard has encouraged more people to look for fruit trees and save them where possible. Ancient fruit trees found on these hills produce *rose apples, limoncello apples*, *russets, quinces, Volpina pears, Renetta apples, azaroles, cornels, sorbs*, *medlars, cherry plums, rosehips, hawthorns, sloes* and *junipers*; in other words, species that once represented the backbone of the farming economy and that are now being rediscovered. Those who don't want to look for them on the territory can easily find them for sale at *The Forgotten Fruits Fair* held in Pennabilli in October or head to Saludecio at the end of April where an event dedicated to the natural world called *Saluserbe* has been held for the past 20 years. Here, as well as exhibitions, conferences and meetings, a spring fair is hosted for all those interested in naturopathy, natural medicine and alternative cuisine.

6. Natural Caves and Mysterious Hypogea

The Rimini area boasts numerous natural caves well worth visiting. Already famous in ancient times they were considered so mysterious that their darkness and shadows earned them the name of *Inferno*; in the territory of Gemmano they are today known as the *Onferno Caves*.

In Santarcangelo di Romagna visitors should not miss other caves that were not naturally formed, but carved by man over the centuries. To this day, there is no clear explanation to the origin of these underground caves, which merely increases the mystery that surrounds them, making them even more fascinating.

All over the province there are ditches, granaries, underground tunnels and other caves that over the years have been used for various purposes and indeed still are.

Onferno Caves

The site is called *Onferno*, a name that in 1810 replaced the ancient name *Infernum* or *Inferno*, considered too "diabolical" by the then Bishop of Rimini, Gualfardo. However, the original name clearly evoked the peculiarity of this place: the presence, under the rocky spur on which the village stands (documented as early as 1231), of a complex of caves stretching for over 850 metres into the very heart of the chalk vein of the Conca River valley. Some experts have identified these exact caves as the place that inspired the poet Dante Alighieri in his description of the underworld in his *Divine Comedy*, claiming at least 80 similarities between the places described therein and the landscape of the caves, starting with one of the entrances. Moreover, considerable evidence has been collected regarding Dante's exile in these parts. The historian Ugolini dates the poet's arrival here to 1305, a date compatible with his travels in Romagna. What is certain is that, however intriguing, the huge underground space, once largely inaccessible, also struck fear in local inhabitants. Although bleak, there is now nothing infernal about this territory, but its charm remains unchanged. Indeed, it has perhaps grown, thanks to another peculiar feature of the caves, which provide shelter for a *colony of over 6,000 bats* belonging to at least 6 different species. They are all harmless and particularly important from a scientific point of view and therefore, protected because considered endangered species.

The beautiful caves are part of a natural context that is equally interesting and has been protected since 1991 when the *Onferno Oriented Nature Reserve* was set up; the particular features and landscapes of the reserve can be enjoyed by following the numerous paths that cross it.

The caves are open, in part, to the public for guided visits that follow an initial external path, which from an altitude of about 300 metres descends through a wood to 196 metres. Here the entrance to a veritable underground canyon can be found, along which it is possible to admire fascinating otherworldly environments. Following the main canal

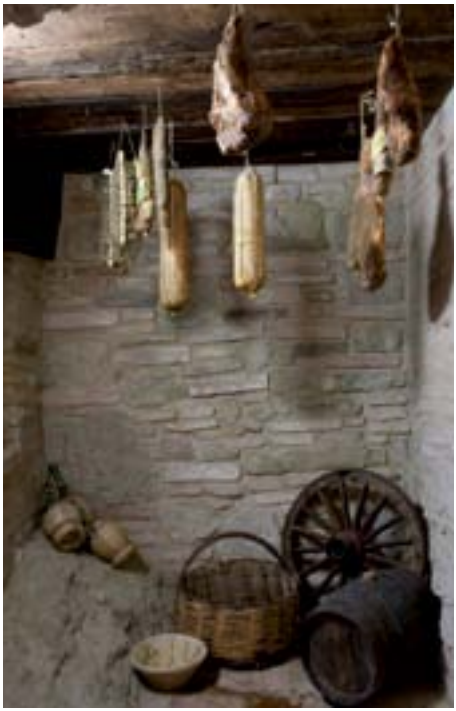
created by the water, visitors can see amongst other things, scintillating chalk crystals, ceilings and walls smoothed and polished by the flow of the torrent over the years and numerous chalk solidifications. Visitors walk through chambers and narrow passageways and the presence of several entrances to the underground caves favours excellent ventilation. Lighting comes from the lamps mounted on the safety helmets provided for visitors, thus making is possible to enjoy the caves in all their natural beauty and above all, avoid disturbing the animals, in particular the precious colony of bats that each year chooses to give birth to over 1,700 young in the *Quarina Room* (the largest in the complex). Although it is not possible to enter this protected space in order not to disturb the bats, a visit to the caves remains an excellent opportunity to observe these unusual mammals close up.

Visits to the caves last about 90 minutes and are held by expert guides. Only a limited number of people are allowed to enter at a time, again in order to protect the fauna, so booking is recommended. We also recommend wearing sturdy shoes with a good tread, as the dampness inside the caves makes walking slippery and a sweatshirt and/or waterproof anorak even in summer as the temperature is always between 10°C and 12°C. At the end of the visit, climbing back up through the wood, it is possible to see the effects of the thermal exchange between the inside of the caves and the surrounding area that has influenced the external environment, creating an unusual micro-climate that favours the growth of botanical species that are rare for this area.

Mysterious Hypogea

These are the most notable and important phenomenon in Romagna, where wells and underground passageways abound. A system as diffused and complex as that in Santarcangelo di Romagna is however unique. The entire old town centre stands on an immense network of mysterious hypogea, sometimes linked to each other, inside which large circular spaces have been created along with rooms, tunnels, niches and passageways. They are of different sizes and shapes and organized and structured in different ways, yet are all of considerable architectural importance. The entire hillside of *Mount Giove*, called *Mons Iovis* in the Roman period, where it is believed people worshipped the Father of

the Gods, is criss-crossed by over 500 tufa caves, of which 200 have been registered. Despite the surveys, studies and research carried out their exact origin is still not known nor is their primary function or date of origin and theories abound. What is certain is that they form a charming underground city with a network of rooms on several levels. Despite having some architectural differences they also have common features, the most important being the constant orientation and freedom of layout compared to the passageways. Three main types exist; firstly there are parallelepiped or cube-shaped rooms once used to store food, a second category concerns galleries with a complex form that themselves vary as their shape is quite elaborate and not suitable for a single use and finally, there are numerous caves that belong to the third group. These have a "comb-like" structure with a sloping central tunnel or corridor flanked by sometimes many niches and side arms that in most cases end in a large circular space, which also has sunburst cavities or semicircular or rectangular niches. In most cases these have apses, as do the rooms themselves and numerous tall ventilation shafts. After a large access ramp, one of the caves, the *Felici Cave*, has a large rectangular space with two rows of pillars marking it out into three aisles almost as though it were a basilica. On an axis to the access ramp there is another atrium with two apses that opens onto a circular room. The analogy with similar caves in France and in other places in Asia Minor has led some scholars to believe they were used for religious purposes, believing them to be early Christian hermitages or places where pagan rites were celebrated. In particular, this was thought to be a rocky basilica for communities of Basilian monks, representatives of Oriental monasticism in the West. These underground caves are documented as early as the 15th century and seem to have existed since time immemorial. From the 18th century on documentation regarding them becomes more consistent and they are often referred to as being used for storing food, weapons or wine. Despite the lack of concrete answers regarding their origins and use, what counts is the fascinating experience they offer, which is both unexpected and unforgettable as they are so evocative; for this reason alone, they deserve a special trip. They can be visited every day and often in the evening too, subject to booking. Caves can also be found under residential buildings and houses in the old



town and owners are often happy to show them off. It is even possible to see them by simply paying a visit to a restaurant or tavern in the mediaeval town centre.

Ditches and granaries

Preserving food was an imperative at a time when there were no refrigerators. Snow and ice houses were used and there are numerous examples from the Malatesta period still standing, including those in Coriano and Santarcangelo di Romagna, which can be visited. There are also granaries built to store wheat and cereals; suffice to walk around the old town centres of San Giovanni in Marignano and Santarcangelo di Romagna. There are other ditches too, some carved out of tufa soil, but above all from sandstone and now used to mature cheese. It is what is known as "fossa" or "ditch-matured" cheese and is considered a delight for the palate by real gourmands. This tradition has ancient origins and was revisited with particular attention and scientific rigour in the 1970s and 80s. In the ditches, the cheeses take on the aroma of wood, truffles and musk from the environment surrounding them. The cheese can be either sweet or piquant or slightly bitter depending on the milk and indeed the ditches used. After being kept in the ditches for 3 months, from August to November, the cheese emerges with a stronger and more decisive fragrance and is always delicious. Anyone wishing to savour it and see the ditches should go to Talamello in the Marecchia Valley; there are about 15 in the town, where a special celebration is held in November called the *Ambra di Talamello* fair, the name the poet Tonino Guerra gave this cheese. In Sant'Agata Feltria and Perticara too some cavities are used for maturing cheeses, though experts call it "improving" rather than maturing. In the Conca Valley the tradition has also been renewed, in particular in Mondaino where on the third Sunday of November visitors can try cheese that has just been "unearthed" and where such an intense fragrance emanates from the ditches and permeates the village it almost inebriates visitors.

CHAPTER III
PARKS

The "green sea" of the province of Rimini, a fascinating territory that offers all kinds of itineraries and breathtaking landscapes, is exalted by its national parks. In the first place there's the *Interregional Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park*: 4,847 hectares straddling the provinces of Pesaro and Urbino and Rimini, in the municipality of Pennabilli where there is also a *Natural History Museum* and *visitors' centre*. The park has one of the largest Turkey oak woods in Italy and two *mesas* that look like they belong to the canyons of Colorado and Arizona. Also in the Marecchia Valley, one of the main valleys in the province is the *Fauna Oasis of Torriana*, home to the *Marecchia Valley Naturalistic Observatory* and where a particular attraction are the chalk veins of Torriana. Directly opposite is the *Ca' Brigida Oasis* in the municipality of Verucchio with annexed *WWF Environmental Centre*. Poggio Berni is home to Cava Park, dedicated to the important fossil deposits that came to light in the riverbed of the Marecchia River. In the Marecchia Valley there are several bridle paths and the river can be enjoyed by anyone who practices canoeing or kayaking. The Conca Valley has two parks. In 1878 a dam was built along the course of the river creating a lake called the *Conca Basin* now part of the river park called the *Protected Landscape of the Conca Torrent*. The other park is *Marano Park* that borders with the Republic of San Marino and has several picnic spots. Mondaino is home to the *Arboretum Environmental Education Centre*, called *Arboretum Park*; a botanical garden and former experimental arboretum for Mediterranean flora covering 9 hectares that specializes in trees and bushes with over 6,000 arboreal species, as well as two woods, small forests, a pond and marked footpaths. The famous *Onferno Caves and Oriented Nature Reserve* are in Gemmano; 274 hectares protected because of their undeniable natural importance.

1. Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park

This is one of the most beautiful natural areas in Italy, with one of the country's largest Turkey oak woods and two *mesas* that recall American canyons. Bordering the Tuscan nature reserve of the same name in Sestino in the province of Arezzo, the park is in the ancient Montefeltro area that straddles the regions of Emilia Romagna and the Marche, just 40 kilometres from the coast of Romagna. The mountainous landscape is marked by the reliefs of Sasso Simone and Simoncello, Mount Canale and Mount Palazzolo, with peaks standing between 670 and 1,415 metres above sea level, and Mount Carpegna, the highest part of the park and watershed between the Foglia and Marecchia Valleys. The territory covers 6 municipalities; Carpegna, Frontino, Montecopiolo, Piandimeleto and

Pietrarubbia in the province of Pesaro and Urbino and Pennabilli in the province of Rimini. The park authority was set up thanks to regional law no. 15 dated 28/04/1994 and has continued to promote the territory that was already considerably important in terms of its history, nature and environment. A law to establish an interregional park is currently awaiting approval. The key morphological feature here is the clear contrast between the limestone outcrops that form the main mountain reliefs and those that consist mainly of clay that form the more harmonious hilly landscape.

Geology. From a geological point of view the entire area of the Sasso Simone and Simoncello Regional Park consists in a vast blanket of heterogeneous chaotic terrain called the "Marecchia Valley flow". The "flow" was formed in the area of Liguria where it slowly slid towards the east, overlapping the original land in the area of Umbria, the Marche and Romagna. Water, wind and snow have eroded the blanket in a selective manner, removing the softer clay and marl material much more quickly and leading to the emergence of blocks of harder rock: this is how the "Sassi" or boulders were created. The main ones are the two characteristic mountain plateaus (*mesas*) of Sasso di Simone (1,204 metres) and Simoncello (1,221 metres), which are about 300 metres apart although, as the considerable accumulation of detritus between them would suggest, they were probably once united. They are extremely fragmented, due to the tectonic deformation underway, which is particularly clear on the southernmost part.

Vegetation. Following the park's footpaths the extreme diversification of vegetation is clear. The area around the two mountains consists in a wood that extends for over 800 hectares; trees in the wood are primarily Turkey oaks, although there are also a number of other species such as beech, white and black hornbeam, maple and ash, as well as mountain and domestic sorb. On Mount Carpegna and to the east of Sasso Simone the woods are mainly hazelnut and maple and colour the peaks with warm shades in the autumn. The upper parts of Mount Carpegna, once covered in beech and silver firs, have since been deforested and now feature fields and pastureland that in late spring

bloom with numerous species of orchid. The vegetation below 800 metres is characterized by woods composed of a variety of species such as downy oak, Turkey oak, black hornbeam, manna ash and maple and field maple and dogwood, cornel and hazelnut bushes. Along with white hornbeams, Turkey oaks - a species of the oak genus - dominate the vast Mediterranean mountain forest that extends for over 800 hectares from the Cantoniera Pass to the Sassi Simone and Simoncello and Valpiano. This wood still has some splendid examples of holly and several types of maple, European ash and beech. Many typical herbaceous species can be found in the undergrowth, including European wild ginger and Turk's cap lily, whilst on the edges of the forest, perennial cornflowers, which although rare in other parts are common here, flourish. On the sunny slopes of Mount Canale, Mount Cassinelle and Mount Carpegna, primarily devoted to pastureland for grazing, the landscape is dotted with shrubs such as juniper, which is plentiful here, and dog rose. It is also possible to find hawthorns, blackthorns and bramble bushes. Meanwhile, in woods above 1,000 metres, where the climate is cooler there are mainly beeches, as well as sycamore maples and in some cases yews, Norway maples, Alpine laburnum and holly, whilst ferns sprout from the dense carpet of leaves. In the first half of the 20th century, reforestation was carried out on the eastern slope of Mount Carpegna primarily using black pine. Although artificial, this woodland area is important from both an aesthetic and environmental point of view and in the less dense areas has arboreal and herbaceous varieties of spontaneous flora. The pastures on Mount Carpegna, around 1,200 - 1,400 metres above sea level, were created by cutting down beech and probably fir woods. At the beginning of spring, these green fields are covered in blue crocuses, followed by multicoloured orchids and by autumn crocuses towards the end of summer.

The City of the Sun. Hidden in the heart of the park is the *City of the Stone*, known as *Eliopolis* or *City of the Sun*, built by Cosimo I de' Medici from 1560 onwards. It was supposed to symbolize the power of the family in an outlying part of their state that was, at the time, difficult to govern. Although almost nothing remains, this fortress city on the peak of Sasso Simone was built following the principles of late-Renaissance

urban style. It had around 50 similar-sized dwellings, including the captain's house, a court, prisons and a chapel, in addition to an old church dedicated to St. Michael Archangel. It also had armoured turrets, an arms and munitions store, an oven, a forge, a melting pit, a portico for the weekly market and two entrance gates. Several roads connected it to nearby castles and a cobbled "main" road led to Florence. The bold and slightly foolish strategic-military idea of creating a fortress city on Mount Sasso crumbled when the worsening climate made life at such an altitude almost impossible. In 1627 the fortress had 46 inhabitants but fifty years later, now almost deserted, lost its role as a military garrison; time did the rest. Today, walking along the still well-preserved cobblestones of the ancient access road is an extremely emotional experience and visitors have a sense of the courage needed to challenge nature in such a decisive manner. All that can still be seen is a large tank for collecting rainwater for civilian use and two for military use, part of the defensive wall and, through the dense vegetation, remains of the road along which the quarters of the city stood. There are other traces of man's presence on the wide plateau of Simone; a cross, in memory of the religious settlement. Some artefacts housed in Sarsina Museum confirm the presence of man here in the Bronze Age around 1,000 BC and during the Barbarian invasions. It was basically the strategic position of the site that drove the main urban developers of Sasso; initially Benedictine monks in the 12th century, then the Malatesta in the 15th century and the Medici in the 16th century. The former were responsible for building an abbey dedicated to St. Angelo, probably on the site of a chapel dating from the Longobard era (St. Angelo was the patron saint of the Longobards), which in turn had been built on a place of worship. The Benedictine motto of *"ora et labora"* was able to find justification on the Sasso and surrounding territories thanks to the wealth of pastureland and woods, as well as the considerable scope for reclamation. The onset of particularly rigid winters and the opening of new and easier pilgrims' ways led to the decay and decline of this site, which almost crumbled due to the plague in 1348. It was abolished under Pope Pius II who annexed it to the monastery of Piandimeleto in 1462. A small church dedicated to St. Michael Archangel remained and was used to celebrate summer festivals until the last attempt to repopulate the area

above
An Apennine wolf in the Natural History Museum in Pennabilli

below
A porcupine in Sasso Simone and Simoncello National Park

made by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1566, retracing the political and strategic goals of Malatesta Novello, lord of Cesena and Sestino. The Medici duke had already governed most of the Montefeltro area around 1520 and in his policy of reorganization of the territory, the construction of a fortress city was a useful bulwark for reaching the Adriatic. The radiant sun, symbol of the new "ideal city" was, in fact, symptomatic of the military culture and strategy of the time. However, climate changes defeated the intentions of the Medici, as did the difficulty in finding material for construction and the numerous obstacles encountered in arming the fortress. In 1673 the military garrison was abandoned, given that even political reasons no longer existed following the death of Francesco Maria II Della Rovere and the transfer of the Duchy of Urbino to the Church.

Fauna. Today the territory is inhabited by the fauna typical of the central Apennines and registers the stable presence of Apennine wolves, hunted excessively in the past. It is also home to numerous species of wild animals. Whilst the fox is the most common carnivore there are also wild cats, badgers, which make their characteristic lairs in the woods, small and agile weasels, stone martens and polecats, mustelids with decidedly nocturnal habits. The smallest and most common ungulates are roe deer. Their presence was sporadic until 30 years ago, but they can now be found in all the Apennine area. In the evening, at twilight or in the early morning they can be seen stepping out from the dense brush to feed in the clearings and on uncultivated land. Less common are fallow deer, which stand out from roe deer because they are larger and have palmate antlers. Wild boar can be found here as in almost the whole Apennine region thanks to the introduction of specimen from central Europe for hunting purposes years ago. Among smaller mammals, squirrels are common, as are wild mice that in the reforestation area of Mount Carpegna feed on seeds from pine cones. Other mammals include shrew mice, water voles, hazel dormice, that as their name suggests adore hazelnuts, dormice, moles and hedgehogs. Porcupines, the largest rodents in Italy, also inhabit the park area, as do hares, especially the ecotonal zones, and there are several species of bats, in particular horseshoe bats and vesper bats. Amphibians include crested and smooth newts, red and green frogs, tree frogs and common toads that

above
Pennabilli under the snow

below
Pietrarubbia Castle

can be found in temporary ponds and drinking troughs near pastures, whilst cave salamanders prefer cool, damp clefts. Although outside the park, fire salamanders have also been found near Sasso Simoncello. The common viper is the only species of poisonous snake in the area, but other reptiles include the green whip snake, the Aesculapian snake, the grass snake, the common wall lizard and Italian wall lizard, the green lizard, the three-toed skink and the slow worm.

The Fauna Park. This covers an area of 5.5 hectares and has three fundamental stages. The first focuses on domestic and farmyard animals such as goats, sheep and mules; animals that the area's farming families relied on for milk, meat and for working the land. The second takes visitors up close to wild animals that live freely all over the park and include roe deer that find plenty to feed on in clearings and in the undergrowth. There are also frogs, toads and newts in ponds. The itinerary ends with arrival at an observation point external to the park and from which it is possible to watch wild boar as they roam free searching for bulbs, tubers and acorns or as they bathe in mud to clean themselves. In the park it is possible to practice bird watching; in fact, observation points have been created with benches and numerous houses-nests for the many sparrow-like birds that find a huge variety of berries to feed on in the bushes in these parts.

Visits. A visit to the protected area or the municipalities of the park will satisfy everyone - those looking for beautiful panoramic views or fascinating natural excursions, as well as good food lovers or those looking for historical remains. Accompanied by park guides, visits are mainly held during the summer period, but guide services for organized groups and school groups operate all year round. For the latter, there are numerous environmental education offers too. The park's footpaths have recently been put onto the Internet and can be downloaded, even using modern phone appliances. The park can be visited on foot, on horseback or by mountain bike. Visitors can also climb in the area, for example in Pennabilli on the rock face popularly known as the "Penna natural gym", right under the Roccione on which what remains of the Malatesta castle stands.

The Visitors' Centre and Museum in Pennabilli. There are in fact, two visitor's centres; one in Pietrarubbia (PU) in Pontecappuccini, and the other in Pennabilli, also home to the natural history museum. Inaugurated in 2004 by the park authorities in collaboration with the municipality it is an extremely interesting place and illustrates the characteristics of the park, offering a scenic exhibition of dioramas of the main animal species in their faithfully-recreated natural habitats. The stuffed animals on display include nocturnal and daytime birds of prey like *owls, barn owls, long-eared owls* and *tawny owls*. Of particular interest are the European *wild cat* that is here thanks to a rare find in the park in 2002 and the display case with an *Apennine wolf*. Given its primarily educational objectives, the museum has a multi-purpose classroom with multimedia stations, perfect for educational workshops, screenings, meetings, conferences and research and studies. It is a flexible space that adapts to requests by organizing workshops (on an ancient form of printing with natural colours, artistic recycled paper, natural bread-making, the observation and analysis of exhibits using a stereomicroscope) and guided naturalistic, historical, cultural and sports excursions. There are plenty of opportunities for adventure too with excursions at night, treasure hunts and orienteering.

2. Onferno Oriented Nature Reserve

In Gemmano, in the Conca Valley, Onferno Oriented Nature Reserve covers an area of 274 hectares of outstanding beauty that boasts the presence of natural caves that extend for over 850 metres. It is protected due to its undoubted naturalistic value thanks to the presence of rich and dense vegetation, wild fauna, including some rare species, and an unusual geology, closely linked to its numerous chalk veins and calanques. This is an ideal territory for excursions to observe and discover the natural and landscape riches of the area either on foot, by bicycle or even on horseback, along the various marked paths and trails that cross it. For the more adventurous, there's also the chance to take a trip underground inside the chalk caves, accompanied by one of the reserve's guides.

Onferno Caves. Accompanied by qualified personnel, a visit to the caves consists in a walk through a wood along an initial external

path, which from an altitude of about 300 metres descends to 196 metres. Here the entrance to a veritable underground canyon can be found, along which it is possible to admire fascinating otherworldly environments. Following the main canal created by the water, visitors can see scintillating chalk crystals, ceilings and walls smoothed and polished by the flow of the torrent over the years and numerous chalk solidifications. Visitors walk through chambers and narrow passageways and the presence of several entrances to the underground caves favours excellent ventilation. The most spectacular cave is the *Quarina Room* (currently not accessible), also known as the *Mamelons Room* due to the huge conical chalk protuberances that jut down from the ceiling, some of the largest of their kind in Europe. The caves are home to over *6,000 bats* belonging to at least 6 different species that populate the various underground environments.

Onferno Oriented Nature Reserve Natural History Museum. Founded by the municipality of Gemmano in 1995, the natural history museum, which is housed in the old *parish church of Santa Colomba*, is dedicated to this territory and its particular conformation. The building dates back to 1136 and although seriously damaged during the Second World War, it has been beautifully restored. The museum houses numerous natural history exhibits, models and illustration panels, including some interactive ones, to help visitors better understand the area's geology and fauna: from rock samples to a scale model of the caves, from the life of bats to dioramas dedicated to roe deer and other mammals, birds and amphibians in an imaginary itinerary to discover the nature reserve and its inhabitants.

Not only caves. All year round, the staff of the *nature reserve* offer visitors a packed programme of activities, initiatives and educational workshops dedicated to families, school groups and all other visitors. Their aim is to raise awareness about these areas, their particular characteristics and the best way to defend and preserve them. Bats and other fauna in general, botany, geology, sustainability and history are just some of the topics it is possible to study in depth or discover for the first time during one of the many events the natural history museum hosts in its multimedia room, in the inn or along the paths of the reserve itself. By checking the

above
A view of Montebello

below
Monastery of Sant'Igne in San Leo

protected area's official website or directly contacting members of staff, visitors can receive up-to-date information on all events being held during their visit to Onferno.

3. Fauna Oasis of Torriana and Montebello

In the gently rolling hills, the rocky spurs on which Torriana, Montebello and Saiano stand offer unparalleled riches. Showing great foresight, a *fauna oasis* was set up here some time ago. It covers 1,200 hectares and was created to protect a territory that is extremely interesting in terms of its geology, vegetation and fauna. It is dominated by huge cliffs; rafts of rock that 35 million years ago came from the Tyrrhenian Sea and ran aground here, wedging themselves into thick cushions of clay. This is how we explain the contrast between these invading boulders and the serene undulating autochthonous hills. There are "power struggles" between the different rocks and terrains leading to shifts, landslides and debris often visible to the naked eye. There is a wealth of flora here that, given the climate, is typical of an area where there is a transition between the continental climate of the Padana plain and the moderating action of the Adriatic. To the north, where it is wetter, woodland prevails and to the south there are more fields, with bare slopes in parts. Even on the latter there is vegetation, with stubborn and resistant species finding a home here. These include the *Sedum* and *Sempervivum* genera that retain water in their large fleshy leaves. These plants have a certain furriness that limits transpiration, they are light in colour in order to repel the sun's rays and have a widespread root apparatus to anchor themselves to the soil. In the fields, wild grasses are common, as is the fragrant curry plant, wormwood and rue, whilst the riverbanks are mainly covered in shrubs, primarily broom, juniper, terebinth and holm oak before it develops into its arboreal form. Maintaining this optimal ecosystem has permitted the restocking of animal species. The numerous species of amphibians and reptiles are a good indicator of the health of the natural environment and there are 135 species of avifauna. In the calanques and shrub areas there are birds of prey like kestrels, buzzards and Montagu's harriers, as well as some common migratory species. Mammals here include porcupines and roe deer that descend to the river to drink and roam freely.

above
A cliff in Verucchio

below, on the left
Free climbing

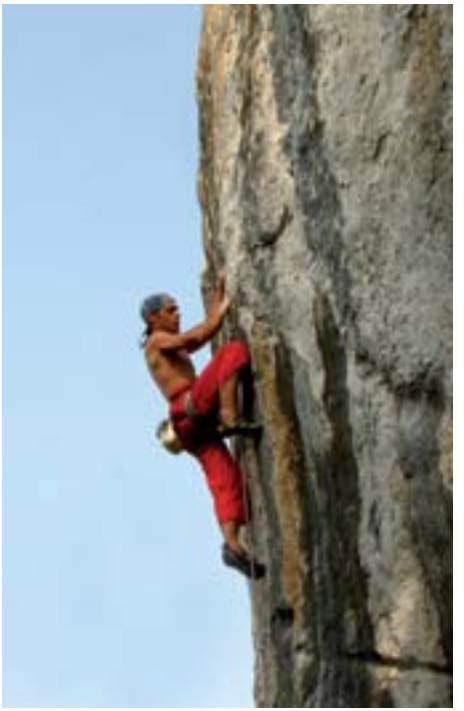
below, on the right
Excursion to the Ca' Brigida Oasis

Marecchia Valley Naturalistic Observatory. This is in the *Fauna Protection Oasis* in Montebello. It is the ideal position for offering the possibility to discover the valley's fantastic peculiarities. The observatory has two sections, each of which takes into consideration a specific aspect of the territory. The large room on the first floor displays the various natural environments that visitors can find along the Marecchia Valley with plant and animal species that populate the waters of the river in the large aquaterrarium. On the next floor, attention turns to the area's geological and geomorphologic features and the relationship between man and the land. There is also a large collection of Pliocene fossils, rocks and minerals characteristic of the valley. A botanical path has been set up outside the building and follows a circular itinerary around the village of Montebello, with the possibility to spot and recognize several plant species.

4. Ca' Brigida Oasis in Verucchio

This oasis is situated in the Marecchia Valley in the village of Il Doccio in the municipality of Verucchio. It covers 17 hectares along the slopes and valley bottom of the Rio Felsina that crosses it for a long stretch. It includes woodland, cultivated areas and a farmhouse with annexed park. Furthermore, inside the oasis there are settlements that belonged to the ancient Villanovan civilization of Verucchio. The fauna includes roe deer, porcupines, badgers, daytime and nocturnal birds of prey and various species of amphibians and reptiles. Facilities include a hostel, an exhibition area with material documenting the valley's natural history, a documentation centre and the WWF library, as well as guest quarters, a nursery, a wild animal recovery centre, a butterfly garden, a garden of ancient plants and work fields. Ownership was handed over to the municipality by Gustavo Voltolini, a member of the WWF. He left it to the organization in his will and it now runs the oasis, one of over 100 reserves it manages. It is open all year round for groups and school groups, though booking is necessary. Visits last about one hour.

Verucchio is a popular place in the Marecchia Valley for climbing. To welcome free climbing enthusiasts is a rock face that stands just under the ancient Augustinian monastery, now the Villanovan Archaeological Museum.



above
The golf course in Villa Verucchio

below
The golf course in San Giovanni in Marignano

In the same municipality, but in the town of Villa Verucchio, close to the Marecchia River, visitors can enjoy a game of golf on a delightful 18-hole course.

5. Protected Landscape of the Conca Torrent

Recently set up by the Province of Rimini, the aim of the protected landscape is to promote the environmental upgrading of the river environment via interventions to restore the ecosystem, re-establish wet environments and create an integrated network of paths, rest areas and educational information points.

In particular, foot and cycle paths between the coast and the inland area represent a system of urban integration, connection and bridging linking the coastal resorts and inland area with the river environment.

At the moment, it has some areas in it that have been turned into parks. These include the *Conca Natural and Urban Park* in Morciano where many activities are carried out with goals focusing on the ecology, recreation and urban culture aimed at guaranteeing fruition of the park and complete osmosis with the historical urban system. It is a very welcoming park with footpaths and furnished picnic areas.

The *Conca Protected Landscape* boasts an artificial reservoir that is the heart of the protected landscape for its flora and aquatic fauna that can be seen by walking on the banks of the lake and from the WWF observatory on the left bank.

In the part where the reservoir is, near Misano World Circuit in Santa Monica in Misano Adriatico, an *oasis for the protection of wild fauna* has been set up called the *Conca Fauna Oasis*.

This highlights the strategic importance of the area in relation to migratory birds who find this the ideal place to stop and feed during periods of migration, in spring and autumn. Aquatic birds winter on the banks of the artificial lake which, thanks to their natural environment, host small birds that nest in the dense cane thickets and shrubs. Nearby, Rio Agina is worth visiting and just after the small bridge and the motorway, following the river, which at a certain point is canalized and covered, *Mare Nord Park* which is on the coast in Misano Adriatico. The river

can be enjoyed for long stretches and it is worth making the most of the opportunity offered by the cycle paths flanking it. Some of these have been upgraded and there is one that runs for about 11 kilometres from Morciano di Romagna, through San Giovanni in Marignano to the coast in Cattolica and another that leads upriver from Morciano to Montefiore Conca and Gemmano.

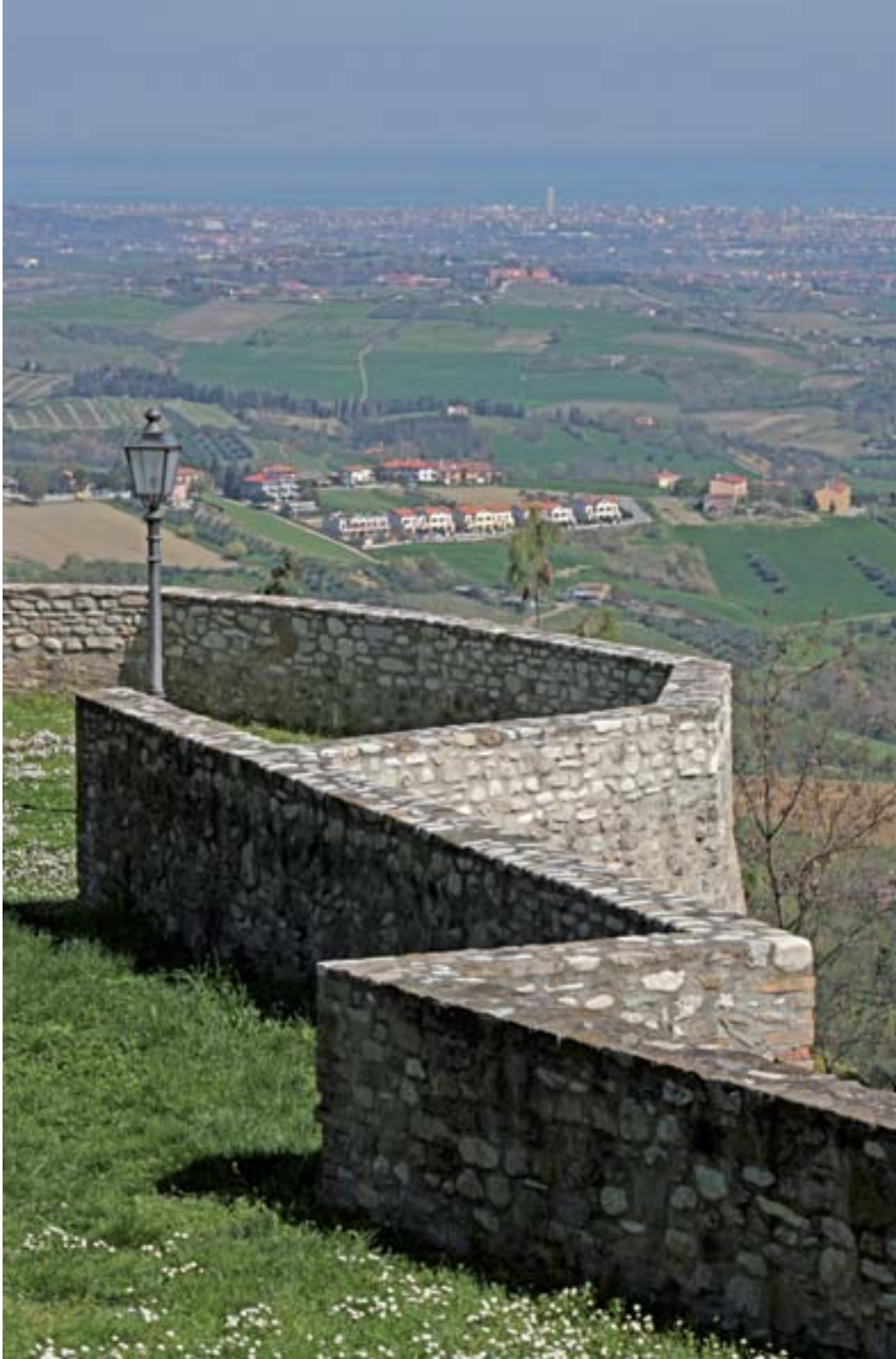
In San Giovanni there is a fairly new 18-hole golf course with annexed academy for beginners.

6. Conca Fauna Oasis

This was officially opened in 1991 by the Province of Rimini and includes the Conca Torrent between Morciano di Romagna and its mouth, a total of 702 hectares. Of particular interest are the riverbed and the holms in the municipalities of Cattolica, San Giovanni in Marignano and Morciano on the right bank and Misano Adriatico and San Clemente on the left bank. We recommend visiting the area by following the foot and cycle paths that develop along the two riverbanks. The Ornithological Observatory is situated on the left bank of the artificial basin near Via Sant'Ilario with road signs clearly marking it. It is a prefabricated wooden building with external shielding with slits. It has openings for bird watching and educational facilities. The artificial basin and oasis are home to egrets, grey herons, great white herons, night herons, bitterns, stilts, waders, seagulls, corvids and various passerines. Rarer species that can sometimes be seen are white storks, black storks, spoonbills and pelicans. In the basin, when the water is high, ducks, geese, cormorants and grebes may appear. The great crested grebe, certain species of rails and ducks, geese and swans use the reservoir for reproduction.

7. Marano River Park

Although near the coast, this park surprisingly features lush vegetation and a wealth of different species of fauna. These include mammals and birds such as egrets, hoopoes, cuckoos and kingfishers. It extends along the basin of the river and has several furbished rest areas. It is perfect for walks thanks to numerous paths that at times flank the river. In the middle section it touches the towns of Coriano and Montefeltro, crossing gently rolling hills, wide valleys and rounded ridges rich in vegetation. There's also



a splendid wood near Fiumicello bordering with San Marino, with English oaks, white poplars and several species of willow. This beautiful park, which the municipality of Coriano showed great awareness in setting up, begins in Ospedaletto and extends to the border with San Marino. It is popular for numerous activities. The furbished part includes a lake that is popular for angling and there are several horse stables too. Of particular interest in the area is Albereto Wood near Montescudo, which covers 25 hectares and boasts a wealth of blackberries, mushrooms, truffles and wild asparagus. In the village of the same name is the splendid mediaeval castle *Castrum Albareti*, once owned by the Malatesta Seignory, that offers breathtaking views spanning the horizon and taking in the entire arch of the Riviera of Romagna from beyond Milano Marittima to the promontory of Gabicce. It can also be reached thanks to several foot and cycle paths or on horseback. Taking a historical walk around the Marano in the Coriano area visitors will find the remains of 7 mediaeval castles; the most important is in the main town, whilst the others are in Cerasolo, Passano, Mulazzano, Besanigo, Monte Tauro and Vecciano. Climbing towards the beautiful historic village of Montescudo, visitors will still find artisans producing traditional terracotta, a craft linked since ancient times to the type of soil found here.

8. Arboretum Environmental Education Centre in Mondaino

Just a few kilometres from the elegant town of Mondaino, in the village of Bordoni, is *Arboretum Park*, a botanical garden and former experimental arboretum for Mediterranean flora that covers 9 hectares and specializes in trees and bushes with over 6,000 arboreal species, as well as two woods, small forests, a pond and marked footpaths. It is an environmental education centre open to visitors, where study and research projects are carried out. Founded thanks to the contribution of the Province of Rimini, it is part of the INFEA network (Environmental Education and Training Information) and pursues its objectives. It hosts educational and recreational activities for schools, families and adults. Thanks to guided visits and workshops, the aim is to promote the relationship between creativity, art, play and nature. In fact, the Arboretum is also a tool for promoting the culture of sustainability and local heritage. The particularly delightful natural context favours an interdisciplinary and “sensorial”

above
A view of Mondaino

below
Fossils in the Paleontology Section of the Museums of Mondaino

work method and approach. A nucleus of operators has reconstructed its origins; the premise for a targeted preservation activity and for upgrading work. The main arboreal species present here have been registered and catalogued in 70 display cabinets housed in the centre's multimedia classroom. In the same classroom there is a library with around 300 books, mainly on the environment. The project involves the organization of refresher courses, meetings, conferences, theme exhibitions and various other activities including the publication of studies and research.

A theatre with guest rooms has recently been added to the park as a component of the landscape; it was designed and built to look like a huge leaf resting on a lawn and its architecture blends in and is in harmony with the environment. A series of meetings on scenic and visual art, the landscape and its culture, contemporary languages and natural therapies are offered in order to outline art, communication and nature *Itineraries*.

As mentioned, the nearby **Mala Valley** is of considerable natural and cultural interest. In the old town centre of Mondaino, part of the Municipal Museum circuit, there is an important section that documents the territory's geological origins.

The Paleontology Section of the Museums of Mondaino. Dedicated to the formation and conformation of the territory, the Paleontology Museum narrates the extraordinary events of millions of years ago when the area was a huge saltwater lake that was 100 - 200 metres deep and covered the current territories of Mondaino, Montefiore Conca and Saludecio. Over the millennia, evaporation slowly dried it out permitting the fossilization of the animal and plant organisms that inhabited it. This is why these areas are particularly rich in fossils, found in Mondaino from as early as the 19th century, but studied above all since 1983 when a landslide led to an excavation campaign.

The museum houses fossils, in particular the ichthyolites found here. It has an educational layout and for this reason, the oldest history of the land is presented with reference to a long period that scholars date between the Miocene and the Pleistocene, the Messinian era that dates to about 6 million years ago. It has a great variety of exhibits from the excavation campaign and the result of finds made on various other occasions and in other parts of the

PESCE LANTERNA
Lampanyctus Sp.
Mondaino

territory; numerous species of fish fossils, some of which particularly rare, as well as molluscs, echinoderms and terrestrial plants. One fossil species found here and that seems to be unique to it is that of the *lantern fish* called *Ceratoscopoles miocenicus*. In the display cabinets, alongside modestly-sized and small fish there are some shark teeth that show that the basin was also home to large fish such as the *Procacharodon megalodo*, a huge shark that could grow to up to thirty metres, common during the Miocene period. The museum is on the ground floor of the 14th century Malatesta Castle, which is adjacent to a splendid semi-circular piazza with porticoes.

9. Cava Park

This park is dedicated to the important fossil deposits of the Marecchia Valley. It is in the Poggio Berni area, on the very bed of the river. Its position is extremely significant for two main reasons; firstly, because it made the environmental recovery of the activity of the quarry ("cava" in Italian) that once was here possible and on the other, it is located close to the fossil deposits.

Studies carried out from the 1970s on indicated the presence of fossils in the Marecchia River and the existence of a large fossil deposit was soon revealed. In 1981 the first excavation campaign using scientific criteria was carried out by the director of the Natural History Museum of Verona, where a large number of the exhibits recovered at the time are housed. Other campaigns were organized in 1982, 1983 and 1984 that brought to light over 2,000 pieces.

Most of the fossils are of fish because during the Pliocene period the entire deposit zone was under seawater. There are a large number of extremely interesting exhibits as many genera had never been found before in the Mediterranean basin. These include fossils of fish that can now only be found in tropical and subtropical seas such as the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. The park was inaugurated in May 2000 and was built thanks to funding from the Emilia Romagna Region and the Province of Rimini.

There are two parts to the visit, which is free, but subject to booking; the first involves the viewing of slides and educational material regarding the fossils and the second part is a visit to the park itself.

CHAPTER IV
FASCINATING ITINERARIES

Walking itineraries no. 1 to 7 were taken from:
Sentieri. Percorsi riminesi tra natura e storia
Guide to excursions in the Province of Rimini
Promoting body: Province of Rimini,
Council for the Environment
Associations involved: WWF Rimini
and Italian Alpine Club Rimini
Published by: Province of Rimini
Written by:
Lino Casini, Technical coordination and editing
Loris Bagli, Descriptive texts on the environment
Giovanni Fabbro, Topographic description charts
Year: 2009
Not available in print.
Available for download from the tourism site of the Province of Rimini on the following page, in Italian only: http://www.riviera.rimini.it/publication/sentieri.html

The itineraries in the Montefeltro from no. 8 to 10 were chosen by Lino Casini and taken from:
Itinerari escursionistici del Montefeltro
Excursion circuit of the Upper Marecchia Valley,
Mountain Community of the Upper Marecchia Valley
scale 1:25,000
A particular thanks goes to the "D'là dé foss" Environmental Culture Association of Pennabilli for its effective and expert collaboration.

Legend
SS = State Road
SP = Provincial Road

The numbers and markings on the routes are by the CAI - the Italian Alpine Club.

Marecchia Valley
Route 1 - From Rimini to Ponte Verucchio, cycle and foot path along the right bank of the Marecchia River
Route 2 - Ponte Verucchio, Montebello, Torriana
Route 3 - From Montebello to Mount Matto

Conca Valley
Route 4 - From Faetano Lake to Montefiore Conca
Route 5 - From Mondaino to Cerreto Castle
Route 6 - From the mouth of the Conca Torrent to Molino del Cerro, cycle and foot path along the left bank

Marano Valley
Route 7 - Marano Park, Cerasolo, Mulazzano, Vecciano

Marecchia Valley (routes not present in the "Sentieri" provincial guide)
Route 8 - From Villa Maindi (Pennabilli) to Badia Mont'Ercole (Sant'Agata Feltria)
Route 9 - Right ridge of the Marecchia Valley: from Scavolino to Miratoio
Route 10 - Left ridge of the Marecchia Valley: from Villa di Fragheto to Mount Loggio

Route 1
From Rimini to Ponte Verucchio, cycle and footpath on the right bank of the Marecchia River

municipalities of Rimini, Santarcangelo and Verucchio
CAI number: 017
Distance: 20.6 km
Difference in altitude: -1 +117 metres
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 6 hours 40 minutes

Rimini, Tiberius' Bridge
Take Via Circonvallazione Occidentale towards the sea; just a few metres before Tiberius' Bridge take a small road with wooden

fencing on the left as far as Marecchia Park (XXV Aprile) following the path to the left.

Marecchia Park (XXV Aprile)

Cross the park to the bank of the Ausa Torrent that should be crossed using the ramp on the right that descends to the cement-covered riverbank then immediately climbs the right bank of the Marecchia River (when the river is in flood use the nearby pedestrian bridge).

Marecchia riverbank

The handy dirt road leads to the SS16 underpass. Continue along the right riverbank past the A14 motorway as far as the wing shooting field and adjacent restaurant; there are left turnings along the entire route, linking with the SP258 Marecchiese and the SP49 to Santarcangelo further on.

Wing shooting field

Continue as far as the model airplane strip then at the landslide area take an alternative route on the left; after about 300 metres, return to the trail as far as the ruins of an old bridge on the Marecchia River. Continue to the SP49 underpass and then onto Lake Santarini and adjacent quarry.

Lake Santarini

From here, after the turning on the left, near the elbow bend there is a panoramic spot in the village of Molino di Terrarossa.

Golf course

Following the trail again, leave the village of Corpolò on the left and continue to the golf course following the south-west perimeter for a long stretch. Continue ahead as far as a panoramic point overlooking the gorges carved by the Marecchia.

Marecchia Gorges

Continue, passing the turning on the left that connects to the SP258 and the village of Villa Verucchio, before reaching Marecchia Park.

Marecchia Park

Follow the edge of the park for its entire width and then go straight ahead passing a series of turnings on the left (ignore the CAI

above
Cycling tourists in Maiolo

below
The coast seen from Verucchio

arrow towards Pieve on the left); continue before turning left and after a short climb reaching the old Via Marecchiese in Ponte Verucchio. The cycle and foot path ends here.

Route 2

Ponte Verucchio, Montebello, Torriana

municipality of Torriana
CAI numbers: 03 / 03A
Distance: 16.1 km
Difference in altitude: +393 -393 metres
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 4 hours 45 minutes

Ponte Verucchio
Take the Ponte Verucchio exit on the left from the car park following the CAI arrow, follow the road as far as the junction then turn left, after the barrier, onto the cycle path as far as the junction for Case Palazzo.

Case Palazzo junction
Continue straight as far as the junction for Madonna di Saiano, then continue on the dirt road on the right towards Montebello to Fontebuona where there is a water fountain; continue climbing to the iron cross and then turn right towards the small chapel.

Small chapel
Continue right for 30 metres then left on the path; after a short but steep climb, descend on the left towards the Lupo Pass. The path ends at a wide bend in the SP120 near the bus stop.

Bus stop
Follow the SP120 towards Torriana; after the turning right for Saiano and Gessi, continue to the castle junction before descending towards Torriana for 500 metres. The Scalette path begins on the left, next to the car park.

Scalette
After the short stretch of road, turn left onto the steep and at times exposed path as far as the observation point in front of the castle;

above
Torriana Castle and paths near the village

continue along the path on the left as far as the junction for the tower then turn right and descend to the restaurant.

Restaurant

Immediately on the left, climb towards the peak of Mount Borgelino, turn left at the second junction.

Peak of Mount Borgelino

Descend following the little stone men marking the route as far as the gazebo; follow a short stretch of road towards Torriana then turn right onto Via Poggiolo as far as the village of Palazzo.

Palazzo

This is an ancient village in the process of being restored; from here return towards Saiano before taking the road on the left towards Ponte Verucchio

Ponte Verucchio

The route ends at the car park.

Route 3

From Montebello to Monte Matto

municipality of Torriana
CAI number: 03A / 05
Distance: 5.9 km
Difference in altitude: -203 +203 metres
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

Start

Drive along the Torriana-Montebello SP120 and before the winding climb to Montebello, turn right onto Via Sabioni; keep to the left at the junction with Via Scanzano and park at “La Fontanaccia” parking area.

La Fontanaccia

Continue and after the turning to Montebello on the left, indicated thanks to a small chapel, reach an iron cross located on the left of the crossroads between Via Sabioni and Via Rontagnano.

above
Rocky spur and Sanctuary of Saiano

below
Montefiore Conca Castle

Iron cross
Continue downhill along Via Rontagnano, then turn right at the farmhouse as far as the ruins in Pian di Porta; continue along the dirt road as far as the junction for Case Rontagnano.

Case Rontagnano junction
Leaving behind the small chapel on the left, leave the dirt track and turn right onto a cart road as far as another junction; turn left here onto the path towards Mount Matto and continue as far as the next junction.

Junction
The path divides; to the right it circles Mount Matto and to the left it leads to the peak of the mountain.

Mount Matto peak
From the peak continue straight on the path that descends towards south-west before climbing for a short stretch along a slightly exposed path and descending again to another junction.

Junction
Turn right along the wide (often muddy) path that circles Mount Matto - ignore the path on the right that climbs towards the top and continue to return to the junction from where, following the right path, we had reached the top of Mount Matto.

Junction
Continue left to the next junction where you should keep to the right and take the cart road that returns to Case Rontagnano junction.

Case Rontagnano junction
Follow the dirt track and continuing towards Montebello return to the ruins of Pian di Porta before heading back to the iron cross and La Fontanaccia car park where we began.

Route 4

From Lake Faetano to Montefiore Conca

municipalities of Montescudo, Monte Colombo, Gemmano and Montefiore
CAI number: 019
Distance: as far as Chitarrara 8.2 km, from Chitarrara to Montefiore 10 km
Difference in altitude: 1st stretch +411 -375 metres;

2nd stretch -233 +471 metres
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 7 hours 20 minutes

The departure point is reached from Ospedaletto di Coriano by following a stretch of Via Montescudo as far as the crossroads with Via Parco del Marano, turning right and continuing as far as Lake Faetano. Park near the small lake.

Lake Faetano

The path begins 200 metres from the state border with San Marino; leave the road and turn left onto a path as far as Marano Torrent that should be forded. Continue straight as far as the junction then turn left to reach the top of the climb, ignoring the two junction turnings.

Top of the climb

Continue on the marked path as far as the village of Montirolo, then continue on the road that is joined by the path leading to the village of Albereto.

Albereto

Keep on the road and then join with the SP131 for Montescudo.

SP 131

Turn left onto the road that climbs to Casa Falconi junction, turn right as far as the junction with Mount San Felice D'Albereto.

Mount San Felice junction

Near a house on the left of the road, turn left onto a steep dirt track that leads to the top of Mount San Felice and the ruins of a church; continue until you join the road then turn right and climb to the top of Montescudo.

Peak of Montescudo

Descend as far as the Via Monte - Via Comanduccio crossroads then continue on the left as far as the roundabout. Follow a stretch of the SP131 towards Montescudo as far as the junction with Via della Rocca.

Via della Rocca junction

Take a left towards the centre of Montescudo, then turn onto

Largo Borgo Malatesta for a stretch before turning right onto Via Torgnano. Continue as far as the junction for Torgnano.

Torgnano junction

Continue, keeping to the right, as far as another junction where there is a shrine dedicated to Our Lady and then turn left onto a dirt road as far as the remains of a farmhouse.

Remains of a farmhouse

After the remains, keep to the left and take a sharp bend to the left towards the ditch. Climb towards Monte Colombo across a field as far as an olive tree that is at the top of the climb on the right of the path. From here, take a path that makes its way between the trees, flank the ditch on the left, cross the hump and follow the path that leads to the washhouse in Monte Colombo.

Crossroads with washhouse path

Continue climbing as far as Via Ca' Mini and follow it on the left towards the centre of Monte Colombo; near the church, take Via Borgo on the right and keeping to the right, continue descending along Via Colombara until it joins onto Via Lazzaretto.

Via Lazzaretto

Continue for 350 metres until it joins the road in the village of Salgareto, turn right and after the Via Piggiole-Via Salgareto crossroads continue until you reach the SP18, cross it and head to Chitarrara.

Chitarrara

After crossing SP18, continue on the dirt track as far as the crossroads, turn right towards the Conca River, ford it (careful when the river is in flood) to reach the right bank.

Right bank of the Conca

Continue straight on the track between the trees until the road; keep to the left, climbing and descending, and after a wide bend the sanctuary of Santa Maria di Carbognano is a short stretch further on.

Santa Maria di Carbognano

Continue climbing for a long stretch, ignoring several junctions, as far as the SP132 for Gemmano in the village of Villa.

SP132
Continue on the left, descending for a short stretch as far as the junction. Turn right onto Via delle Fonti and continue as far as a three-way junction; keep to the right on Via delle Fonti and turn left at the next junction onto a dirt track that leads onto Via Farneto.

Via Farneto
Cross the road and take Via Borghetto on the left that descends steeply; continue along it until you reach Via Farneto. Continue descending as far as the junction with the path; take the path on the right and continue as far as Casa Casino.

Casa Casino
Continue along the path as far as the Rio Ventena Valley bottom in Gemmano.

Rio Ventena
Turn left onto the dirt track, then flank the left bank of the stream for a long stretch before crossing to the right. Ignore any junctions and continue as far as the junction with CAI arrows. Turn right onto path no. 19 and continue on the marked track as far as the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Bonora car park.

Sanctuary car park
Turn right onto the square in front of the church. From here, take the road towards Montefiore and after 300 metres turn left onto a path that leads to Borgo Pedrosa; climb Via Borgo Pedrosa to the village of Montefiore.

Route 5
From Mondaino to Cerreto Castle
municipalities of Mondaino and Saludecio
CAI number: 019 / 09
Distance: 14.6 km
Difference in altitude: -638 +638 metres
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 4 hours 45 minutes

Mondaino
From the car park under the walls of the town hall, turn into Le Fratte Park and cross it. At the end, turn right onto the road until it crosses Via Fonte Leali. Continue on the left towards the sports centre and immediately after the bend at the edge of a clearing on the left there is a path. Descend along a terraced stretch as far as a dirt track then turn right as far as a gate. Continue after the gate then turn left along a path beside an olive grove. After about 200 metres, turn right and climb steeply as far as the road that ends in Ca' Antonioli.

Antonioli road
Turn left and descend for 300 metres, on the edge of a wide bend take a path on the right and descend towards a ditch; keep climbing as far as an orange house then continue until it leads onto a dirt road. From here, turn left and climb along a cart road. Circle some ruins and continue on the left, turning right just before the San Teodoro three-way junction.

San Teodoro three-way junction
Continue towards San Teodoro for 1.4 km as far as Ca' Fariani; turn left onto a small farm road that descends steeply. When it joins the dirt track, turn left again and continue as far as the bridge over the Rio Ventena. Continue on the left to Case Palazzi on a dirt track flanking the stream.

Case Palazzi
Turn left and cross back over the Rio Ventena. Continue towards Case Pontia as far as just beyond Cerreto Castle, an enclave of the municipality of Saludecio.

Cerreto Castle
From here, turn left onto a road then continue for about 200 metres before turning left onto a path that leads to Calbianco.

Calbianco
Continue keeping to the left then at the small chapel turn left towards Mount Baicano. After 900 metres there is a panoramic point; take the path on the left. Turn left at the junction then continue straight on to the ruins of Ca' Mainardi.

above
Cerreto Castle

below
Piazza Maggiore in Mondaino

Ca' Mainardi
Turn right as far as Borgo San Teodoro and then return to the San Teodoro three-way junction.
San Teodoro three-way junction
Return to the path that leads to Mondaino; turn left after about 250 metres then, circle the orange house on the small road that leads to the ditch.
Ditch
Climb until you join the road that leads to Ca' Antonioli.
Ca' Antonioli road
Follow the road, climbing for 300 metres before heading back onto the path on the right marked by a telegraph pole.
Telegraph pole
The path descends steeply until it crosses another path; turn left and after a short stretch take a small road that leads to a gate.
Gate
After passing the gate again, turn left after a short stretch onto a terraced path; at the end of the path take the road again. Ignore a junction on the left and continue keeping to the left. At the end of the uphill stretch, turn left before crossing Le Fratte Park again and reaching Mondaino.
Mondaino
The route ends at the car park under the walls of the town hall.

Route 6
From the mouth of the Conca to Molino del Cerro, cycle and foot path on the left bank
municipalities of Misano Adriatico and San Clemente
CAI number: 037
Distance: 7.8 km
Difference in altitude: +37 metres
Difficulty: tourist level
Duration: 2 hours 20 minutes

above
The countryside near Coriano and Mount Titano

below
Portoverde in the municipality of Misano Adriatico

Mouth of the Conca River left bank
Start from the beach near Portoverde harbour and follow the path along the left bank of the Conca Torrent. After the Via Litoranea Sud and railway under pass, follow a bend to reach the bank of the torrent where the trail begins.

Start of the route
In quick succession, pass under the Adriatica Interna national road and the SS16 then the route leads onto a small road in the village of Molino Calce and becomes a path again.

Path
Climb the course of the river and pass under the A14 motorway before turning right onto a small pebbly road that leads towards the large Conca reservoir as far as a junction.

Ca' Signori junction
Ignore the road that branches off to the right and continue straight along the reservoir as far as a road close to a barrier situated at the access to a path that leads to the protected area of the Ornithological Observatory; continue to the visitors' centre.

Observatory Visitors' Centre
Continue to flank the reservoir, taking time to admire the birds from the specially-designed stations. After leaving the observatory, continue along the path flanking a branch of the reservoir then, near a road with some houses on, the path descends to the bank of the basin before climbing again and passing over a fluvial dam. Continue then the path veers right, leaving the course of the torrent to reach the road to Ghetto Fondi.

Ghetto Fondi
Continue along the road heading south, pass in front of a restaurant and continue to the junction. Here turn left and head back onto the path that follows the course of the Conca. Continue until the path leads onto a dirt track. Turn slightly left and after 350 metres, reach a crossroads near a bridge in the village of Molino del Cerro.

Molino del Cerro
The trail ends here as further on the path is no longer passable.

above
Marano Park

below
Marano Torrent

To return, as well as going back along the same itinerary, you can cross the bridge and take the path on the left that heads along the right bank of the Conca Torrent.

Route 7

Marano Park, Cerasolo, Mulazzano, Vecciano

municipality of Coriano
CAI number: 033 / 031
Distance: 10.5 km
Difference in altitude: -362 +362 metres
Difficulty: tourist level
Duration: 2 hours 45 minutes

Marano Park
From the car park follow the provincial road west for 400 metres as far as Via Vecciano junction; turn right onto Via Vecciano and after the confluence with Via Loreta continue until Via del Fagiano junction.

Via del Fagiano junction
Turn left onto Via del Fagiano for a short stretch of road that then becomes a dirt track, as far as Via Palombara junction. Turn left onto Via Palombara, as far as the junction with Via Monte.

Via Monte junction
Take Via Monte turning right and after a descent of 400 metres turn left onto Via La Roncona. At the end of the tarmac stretch of road, continue on the left on a dirt track as far as Villa Irene.

Villa Irene
The dirt road ends here; continue straight along a grassy animal track as far as the course of the Rio Mortella, hidden by branches.

Rio Mortella ford
The animal track reaches beyond the confluence of two waterways; to ford them only once, turn right for about 50 metres following the right bank of the stream and the edge of a cultivated field. Beyond the stream and after having crossed a small stretch of dense scrubland turn right onto a country road heading north

and climb steeply to Case Fantini.

Case Fantini

Turn left onto Via Ciavatti and climb it until it joins with Via 1° Maggio, turn left and continue as far as Cerasolo.

Cerasolo

Turn left onto Via Il Pedrone near Cerasolo church and continue to the junction with Via Olmo. At the bottom of the descent, turn left onto Via dell'Olmo to the small bridge that crosses Mortella ditch. The climb begins here and after 700 metres reaches Via Levata junction.

Via Levata junction

Veer right onto Via Levata and continue as far as the junction with Via Europa. Turn left onto Via Europa and continue to the centre of Mulazzano.

Mulazzano

In Piazza Mula D'Oro turn left onto Via Agello and continue along it as far as the junction with Via Ripa Bianca. Turn left here and continue downhill for a long stretch on Via Ripa Bianca. Near Vecciano, the name of the road changes to Via Loreta and leads back to the junction with Via Vecciano.

Via Vecciano junction

Turn right onto Via Vecciano and continue until it leads onto the Marano provincial road. Continue left towards Ospedaletto and back to Marano Park.

Marano Park

The trail ends at the car park.

Route 8

From Villa Maindi (Pennabilli) to Badia Mont'Ercole (Sant'Agata Feltria)

municipalities of Pennabilli and Sant'Agata Feltria
CAI number: 99
Distance: 12 km
Difficulty: tourist/excursion level
Duration: 5 hours 15 minutes

Villa Maindi
From the village of Villa Maindi (643 metres), 2 km south of Pennabilli, the path that detaches itself from CAI path no. 95, called the right ridge of the Marecchia Valley, starts from the four-way crossroads near the village, descends to Ca' Morlano, near the bar, and reaches Ca' Franchi on a short stretch of carriageway.

Ca' Franchi - Ca' Bicci
From Ca' Franchi take the cart way on the left and after about 200 metres descend on the right heading towards Messa Torrent before leaving it and reaching the carriageway near Ca' Bicci, a beautiful late 18th-century farmhouse (as indicated in the engraved stone in the wall) with a typical adjacent farmyard. Descend along the carriageway that after about 800 metres leads onto the SP Marecchiese, 100 metres from the Romanesque church of San Pietro in Messa.

Marecchiese
Continue along the SP Marecchiese towards Rimini for 1.2 kilometres then turn left and cross the bridge near Pennabilli swimming pool before starting to climb towards Sant'Agata Feltria.

Bridge over the Marecchia
Just after the bridge over the Marecchia (333 metres), leave the carriageway and walk around the Forestry Corps nursery. Turn left and climb towards the village of Casalecchio. Continue along another stretch of road as far as Ca' d'Orazio then climb the carriageway on the right to Petrella Guidi.

Petrella Guidi
Petrella Guidi (530 metres) is rightly considered one of the best preserved and most fascinating mediaeval boroughs in the Marecchia Valley that over the centuries had various rulers.

Mount Benedetto
From Petrella Guidi descend south-west as far as the church near Ca' Bardaia then turn right and climb the mule track for Ca' Galoppo and Cannero as far as the Petrella-Sant'Agata road above Mount Benedetto (731 metres).

above
Vigiolo cliff face near Perticara

below
A view of Pennabilli from the rocky spur of Billi

Mount San Silvestro

From here, after a few dozen metres, climb sharply on the right along a very steep path and passing through the hamlet of Villa continue to the ridge to the north-east of the radio and television aerials on Mount San Silvestro (810 metres, 844 metres at the top). On the pass, leave the carriageway and descend on the other slope through a chestnut wood. Descend again and after the chestnut wood, where the vegetation changes and is replaced by a wood of mixed trees, there is a metal bridge formed by huge tubes. Continue a little further to a large farmhouse in Badia Mont'Ercole and the road near the small church of Our Lady of Succour. Nearby it leads onto CAI path no. 96 called the "left ridge of the Marecchia Valley".

Route 9

Right ridge of the Marecchia Valley: from Scavolino to Miratoio

municipality of Pennabilli
CAI number: 95
Distance: 11.3 km
Difficulty: tourist/excursion level
Duration: 6 hours 30 minutes
The path is the stretch upstream of the long CAI path no. 95 called "Right ridge of the Marecchia Valley" that begins in Pietracuta and ends in Miratoio, for a total of about 16 hours.

Scavolino

The path we suggest begins in the square in Scavolino, at an altitude of about 740 metres, on a small paved road that climbs slightly in a southwards direction. After leaving the last houses, continue in the same direction along a cart road.

Rio Cavo

After about 1 km, ford Rio Cavo near Scavolino Mill, lower down. Once over the ford, the cart road leads into woodland for about 600 metres then comes out again and continues, without any

above
The rocky spurs of Maioletto and San Leo

below
Pastureland near Mount Fumaiolo

particular variation in level, as far as the road to Cantoniera, in the village of San Lorenzo (740 metres).

San Lorenzo

On the hill, on the right and partly hidden is the small church of Santa Maria in Cella, built on the church of San Lorenzo which in turn was built on the ruins of an Etruscan-Roman temple. Cross the road in the village and descend along a path, which is not very clearly marked, on the edge of some arable land. Turn onto a carriageway and passing the Messa Torrent, climb to the crossroads with CAI path no. 99 near Villa Maindi.

Mount Canale

To reach Serra Valpiano from this point, climb the carriageway on the left that higher up turns into a mule track. Continue climbing in a south-easterly direction; higher up the mule track turns into a delightful path that leads through some young beech trees and European hornbeams. Continue past some shaded bends from where it is possible to sometimes spot the course of Paolaccio ditch (that flows into the Messa Torrent), which flows lower down on the left forming beautiful little waterfalls. After the last bend (995 metres) the path heads south-south-west and becomes almost flat. The vegetation thins out and the scrubland consists in junipers and a few downy oaks. Head westwards towards the highest point of Mount Canale (1,052 metres) flanking a fence that follows the upper edge of the wood. From here it is possible to enjoy splendid panoramic views; Mount Carpegna to the east, Sasso Simone to the south and the Alpe della Luna, Mount Fumaiolo, Mount Ercole, Mount Perticara and Maioletto to the south-west; a spectacular all-round view of the Marecchia Valley.

La Petra

From here, descend on the field, passing inside the hairpin bend as far as the carriageway from Villa Maindi, about 50 metres before the road. Cross the road near the small cross and descend towards the hamlet of Il Casone (where there is a mineral water plant) and walk along some stretches of arable land as far as a group of houses called La Petra near the road for Miratoio.

above
A panoramic view of the village of Senatello

below
Rocky cliff faces in Balze di Verghereto

Miratoio

Cross the road again and head into the wood, bypassing Miratoio knoll, just above the cemetery, and head into the centre of the village where there is a welcome water fountain. CAI path no. 17 that leads to San Gianni and to other paths in the Tuscany region begins at this very spot.

Route 10

Left ridge of the Marecchia Valley: from Villa di Fragheto to Mount Loggio

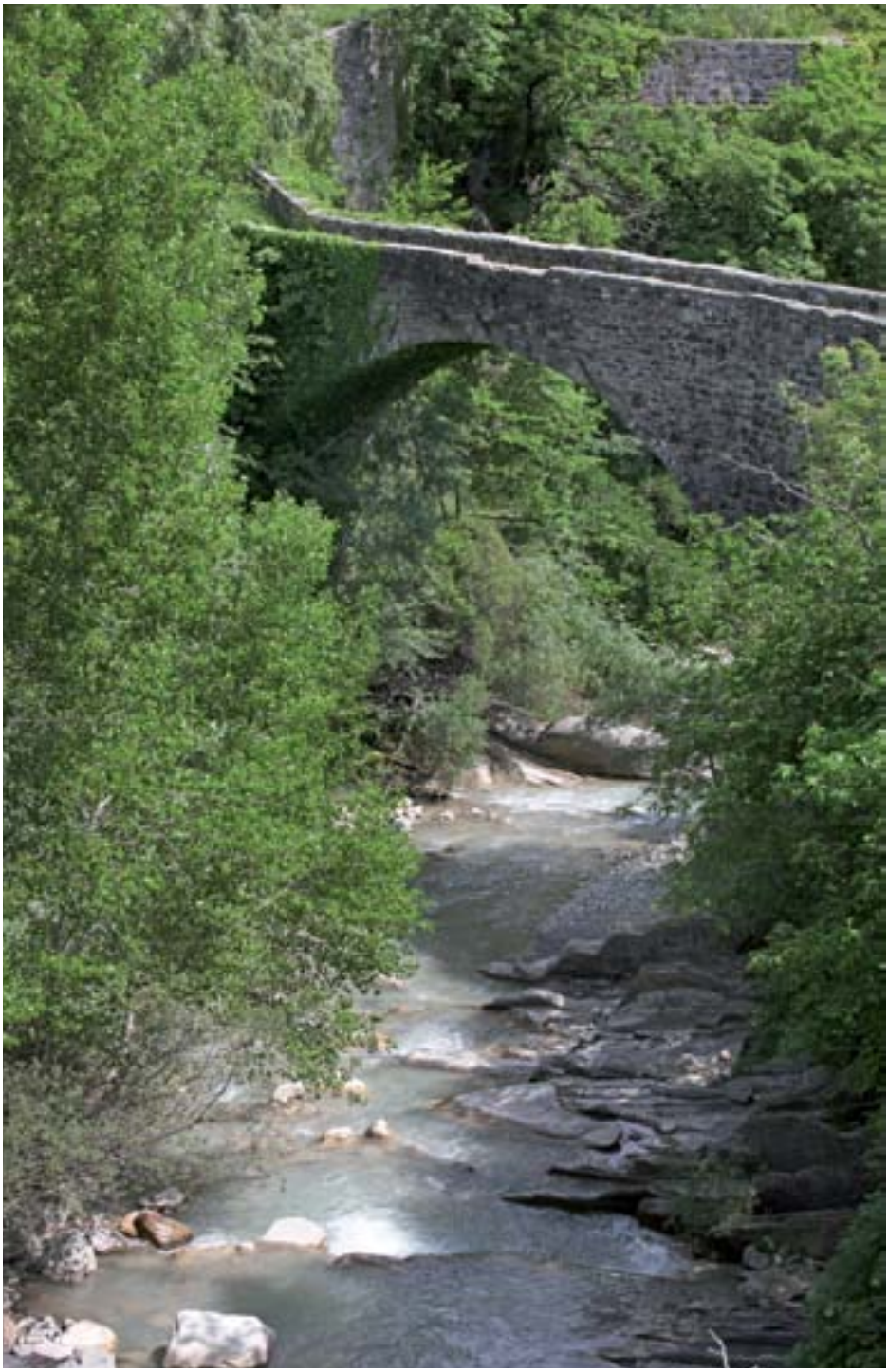
municipality of Casteldelci
CAI number: 96 and 23
Distance: 10 km
Difficulty: excursion level
Duration: 5 hours 30 minutes
The path is the stretch upstream of the long CAI path no. 96 called "Left ridge of the Marecchia Valley" that begins in Pietracuta and ends in Mount Loggio, for a total of about 23 hours and 45 minutes.

Villa di Fragheto

Villa di Fragheto (620 metres) can be reached by car by climbing from Casteldelci junction to Molino del Rio. From Villa di Fragheto descend in a south-west direction along the mule track as far as a carriageway downstream, near Molino del Rio. Cross the small bridge near the old mill and then climb along the path to Poggio del Tesoro and Poggio Calanco (where there is an abandoned village).

Casteldelci

Descend in a southerly direction along the mule track and then the carriageway that, after a few hundred metres, leads to Casteldelci (565 metres). After a worthwhile visit to the typical mediaeval village, descend along the old and very steep path that leads to the mediaeval bridge over the Senatello, near the old mill. Alternatively, continue along the road that has a few hairpin bends from where it is possible to enjoy beautiful panoramic views of



The old bridge in Casteldelci

Casteldelci and the surrounding area. Cross the bridge, where the mountain community authorities have built a furbished lay-by around a small lake.

Giardiniera

Continue to the Giardiniera junction (544 metres), near the restaurant and petrol station, cross the road and head onto a steep carriageway that begins alongside the sports field. After the first bend, turn onto the path on the right that climbs amid dense vegetation to the yard of a recently-built villa a few hundred metres away. From here, turn onto a mule track that starts next to a shrine to Our Lady.

Poggio della Veduta

Continue on the mule track that leads along the ridge towards Poggio della Veduta (946 metres). From the above-mentioned villa it is possible to reach the nearby road that leads to Mount di Sopra. From here, turn onto the carriageway that leads to Campo and Gattara.

Mount Loggio

Continuing instead to Mount Loggio (1,178 metres), the path climbs slightly and continues for another 3 kilometres offering spectacular views of the surrounding landscape before the hairpin bend that leads, after about a kilometre, to the peak of the mountain.
At a certain point, before the hairpin bend, on the left towards the east, CAI path no. 96 joins CAI path no. 100 that descends towards Gattara and on the right, towards south-south-east, CAI path no. 23 that climbs slowly following the border with the Tuscany region, to our destination.

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Where to find us

Distances

Amsterdam 1,405 km	Munich 680 km	Bologna 121 km
Berlin 1,535 km	Paris 1,226 km	Florence 165 km
Brussels 1,262 km	Prague 1,089 km	Milan 330 km
Budapest 1,065 km	Stockholm 2,303 km	Naples 586 km
Frankfurt 1,043 km	Warsaw 1,533 km	Rome 325 km
Copenhagen 1,770 km	Vienna 887 km	Turin 447 km
London 1,684 km	Zurich 645 km	Venice 270 km

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