

CASENTINO AND ITS VALLEYS

1. UPPER VALLEY OF THE ARNO - MEDIEVAL TESTIMONIES AND TREASURE TROVE OF MEMORIES AND HISTORY.

Our route starts in the north, where the valley begins and is crossed by the Arno river. Here we find **Mulin di Buccchio**, the first water mill on the Arno, a place full of memories, its original characteristics still intact. Next to the mill the ancient tanks used for fish farming have been brought back into operation. Continuing down the valley, the landscape is dominated by the tower (dating from the year 1000) of the **Castle of Porciano** with its museum around which the ancient medieval village clusters, a veritable "window onto the valley". *"E al fine Stia, bianca elegante tra il verde, melodiosa di castelli serene"* (Dino Campana, *Canti Orfici*) 'And finally Stia, elegant white amongst the greenery, melodious with serene castles' where near the porticoed square overlooked by the Romanesque parish church, you will find the **Forest and Mountain Museum**, an authentic treasure trove of history and stories where, along with a collection of skis, artifacts and tools for working in the woods, there is the "C. Beni Ornithological Collection" from the late nineteenth century. Just a few steps away is the Lanificio di Stia (woolen mill) a large industrial building which currently houses The Wool Museum, attesting to the wool industry of the past, which still today sees its most characteristic expression in the production of a special wool fabric called 'panno Casentino'.

Other places to visit: Sanctuary of Santa Maria delle Grazie; Parish church of Santa Maria in Stia; Multimedia Center of Dante, Palagio Fiorentino in Stia; Planetarium of the National Park in Stia; Parish church of San Pietro in Romena; Castle of Romena; Historic center and Church of the Holy Name of Jesus in Pratovecchio (with works of art); Romanesque churches of Valiana, Ama and Lonnano.

2. VALLE DELLO SCHEGGIA - THE REDISCOVERED PATHS

The Scheggia river descends rapidly, gouging out its bed between the hills that slope down from the Pratomagno mountain, and leads us to the town of Montemignaio. Here the mill, the parish church, the castle, the place names of the main inhabited centers, all sum up the salient features of its history and the surrounding landscape: the abundance of water used in the past to drive the millstones, mainly to grind chestnuts; the Middle Ages, the historical period that more than any other has left its mark with its typical architecture built along an important ancient route. The exodus away from the mountain has certainly not spared this small mountain town which, however, during the summer months regains the vitality of the past. A network of paths has recently been made accessible by the CaiNamastè Association allowing tourists and residents to rediscover the main historical and naturalistic attractions of the area.

Other places to visit: Pieve di Santa Maria Assunta, Castel Leone; Oratory of Santa Maria delle Calle.

3. VALLE DEL SOLANO - PLACES AND MANUAL SKILLS THAT STILL STAND THE TEST OF TIME

The Valle del Solano welcomes you with Strada in Casentino, an ancient market and trading village, overlooked by a castle. In defiance of the passage of time and modernity, craftsmanship still significantly characterizes this strip of Casentino. A skilful combination of matter, natural resources and human ingenuity. Stonework, still practiced by some stonemasons in the area, is celebrated in the **Museum of**

Stonework housed in the former church of the Salesian college. Heading upstream from Strada, expertly constructed terraces lead us to the small village of Pagliericcio where the craft of wrought-iron and an operative water mill are still present. Climbing further on, amongst woods and fields that are once again being cultivated with the famous local potato, we reach the town of Cetica, with its characteristic scattered groups of houses, where one can visit the **Ecomuseum of the Charcoal maker**. A green area with a reconstruction of the charcoal maker's huts characterizes the place where numerous gastronomic events are held throughout the year. The "black man" still lives in the woods around here and every year ... On the wild plateaus / the charcoal makers burn, / solemn fires in sight (G. D'annunzio, Alcyone)

Other places to visit: Parish church of San Martino in Vado, Castle of San Niccolò (only the exterior); the historic town center of Strada; churches of S. Angelo, San Pancrazio and Santa Maria a Cetica

4. VALLE DEL TEGGINA – WOODLAND, THE "TOWN OF THE CÒRSI" AND THE CROSS OF PRATOMAGNO

A vast green basin with a wide horizon opens up the Teggina valley. Sheep pastures and heronries give way to mountain and forest that lead up to the high ridges. Ancient villages, once castles, dot the hillsides. The first town you come across is San Piero in Frassino, followed by Ortignano, with its characteristic medieval structure, Badia a Tega with its apotropaic heads peeking between the walls of the houses and at the top of the valley, Raggiolo, one of the most beautiful villages in Italy, where the **Ecomuseum of the Chestnut and Transhumance** is located amongst its stone alleyways. Following a specific route, you can make a tour of the whole town, including the chestnut drying room and the water mill. The landscape is very picturesque, with a predominance of chestnut trees, especially the variety known as "Raggiolana" which has been selected here from the Middle Ages onwards because of its suitability for the production of flour. Raggiolo is the starting point for walking paths that lead to Pratomagno with its ridge meadows and its monumental Cross set in an extraordinary panorama.

Other places to visit: Church of S. Antonio a Tega; the historic town center of Raggiolo, the Church of S. Michele Arcangelo and the Ponte dell'Usciolino; the Church of Saints Margherita and Matteo in Ortignano; Giogalto.

5. VALLE DELLA SOVA - THE CASTLE OF THE COUNTS GUIDI AND STORIES OF WOODS, WAR ... AND WOLVES

Poppi Castle, a visual reference point and the place that provides an identity, par excellence, for the whole Valley. A must for every visitor, it houses the Rilliana Library with its precious incunabula, permanent and temporary exhibitions and the Information and Exhibition Space of the Ecomuseum (1). At the foot of the hill, not far from the ancient river port of the monks of Camaldoli, along the road that leads to Camaldoli, you will find the town of Moggiona. This town gradually became a place specialized in the production of wooden artifacts, particularly bigoni (wood containers for grape harvesting) and barrels, which you can find out about in The Bigonaio's Workshop (2). Just a few steps away is the Permanent Exhibition on War and Resistance (3) where you can learn about one of the town's darkest moments: the Nazi Fascist massacre perpetrated on 7 September 1944 which cost the lives of 18 civilians. The National Park of the Casentino Forests has set up the 'Trail of the Wolf' organized in various stages: an educational-exhibition center, a wildlife itinerary and a theme playground, different ways to approach learning about the history and characteristics of the great predator.

Other places to visit: the historic town center of Poppi (one of the most beautiful villages in Italy); the town of Quota; the Hermitage and Monastery of Camaldoli; The National Park of the Casentino Forests.

6. VALLE DELL'ARCHIANO - RECLAIMED LAND AND THE FORESTS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

A pie' del Casentino/traversa un'acqua c'ha nome l' Archiano,/che sovra l'Ermo nasce in Apennino (At the foot of Casentino / a river with the name of Archiano crosses, / which has its source in the Apennines above the Ermo) (D. Alighieri, Divina Commedia - Purgatorio canto V). Leaving the town of Bibbiena, which houses the **Archaeological Museum of Casentino**, we can travel upstream along a convenient cycle/pedestrian path which, near the town of Soci, joins the **"La Terra e l'Acqua"(Land and water) route**. Along this stretch, thanks to the provision of informative panels and the valorization of some artifacts, we can learn about land that has been reclaimed in the area using the 'filling' system. Following along one of the embankments that runs transversally to the river, you will arrive at the **"Casa Rossi" Rural Collection**, a "granary of memories" where almost two thousand objects of material culture are kept, mostly from the Archiano valley. From the bottom of the valley the road climbs rapidly up to Badia Prataglia where, by following the path called **"Il Sentiero dei Castelletti"** with explanatory panels, one can visit the town, its various inhabited centers 'Castelletti' (little castles) and their inhabitants, who still practice some traditional rituals. Every year, during the Mangialonga, the paths that connect the castles are retraced, during an event that celebrates local dishes and typical products.

Other places to visit: Pieve di S. Ippolito and the historic town center of Bibbiena; The Italian Center for Photography in Bibbiena; Sanctuary of Santa Maria del Sasso; Creative Center of Casentino, site of the Emma Perodi Literary Park; the castles of Gressa and Marciano; Villa La Mausolea; Serravalle village and tower; the church of Santa Maria Assunta in Badia Prataglia.

7. UPPER VALLEY OF CORSALONE - VALLESANTA: A VALLEY IN MOTION, WHERE OLD AND NEW INHABITANTS MEET

Located between Badia Prataglia and Monte de La Verna, Vallesanta welcomes us with its numerous scattered settlements, many of which have come back to life thanks to the arrival of families of new inhabitants. The **Vallesanta Ecomuseum**, set up following the creation of a "community map", is embodied in a series of places, activities and initiatives aimed at presenting and highlighting various local particularities. Numerous are the elements that characterize the area: geological formations (Marmitta dei Giganti) 'Giants cauldrons', gastronomic specialities (tortello alla lastra), walking paths of great historical import (Via Romea, Via di Francesco), local craft and food markets. Tip for visitors: if you are lucky, in some secret places you may meet a very particular inhabitant: the badalischio. What is it? Ask the old people of Vallesanta ...

Other places to visit: Sanctuary of La Verna; The National Park of the Casentino Forests.

8. VALLE DEL RASSINA - HEALING WATERS AND SMUGGLERS' STORIES

The waters and springs along the Rassina river are special, as evidenced by the Etruscan bronzes found along its banks, the passage of pilgrims along the Via Romea and some spring water catchment and

collection projects like that found at The Treasure Hole "La Buca del Tesoro". Along with the healing waters of varying composition (sulfuric, ferruginous ...) other unusual and surprising activities were carried out here like the production of gunpowder, officially recognized and produced in the past in factories using hydraulic power, but also made in clandestine rudimentary mortars (pilli) hidden in the woods. Over time a census of these 'pilli' has been carried out. Tobacco smuggling, along with the work of the cigar makers, brought a certain economic well-being to this area, which borders with Valtiberina. History, anecdotes, and exhibits are waiting for the curious and attentive at the **Ecomuseum of Contraband and Gunpowder in Chitignano**.

Other places to visit: Castello degli Ubertini in Chitignano, the churches of Rosina and Taena;

VALLE DEL SALUTIO - GUIDO'S NOTES, MOUNTAIN HAMLETS AND AN ETRUSCAN SANCTUARY

From the town of Rassina, heading east, a visit to the Pieve di S. Antonino in Socana where archaeological excavations have brought to light, among other things, a valuable Etruscan sacrificial altar, is not to be missed. The road forks here. The right fork will take you to the old town of Castel Focognano with its medieval remains and the **Documentation Center on Rural Culture**. Climbing further upwards you will reach Carda immersed in the woods, the "piccola regina bianca in trono a dominare la triste solitudine dei monti"(the little white queen who dominates the sad solitude of the mountains from her throne" (E. Noyes), the mountains of Pratomagno, and whose church houses a treasure trove of valuable works of art. The fork on the left passes through the town of Salutio, which also has a parish church with numerous art works, and continues to the town of Talla. On a hill, known by locals as the Castellaccia, near a church of the same name, is **Guido Monaco's birthplace** where tradition has it that the inventor of modern musical notation was born. From Talla, various roads lead us to the numerous mountain hamlets that cling to the slopes of the Pratomagno mountain. Amongst the greenery of the woods the stone ruins of the Abbey of Santa Trinita in Alpe speak to us of ancient roads and monks who came from afar.

Other places to visit in Salutio: the church of S. Eleuterio; the Sanctuary of Santa Maria in Bagno.

10. LOWER VALLEY OF THE ARNO - THE WATERS OF THE ARNO AND THE GUARDIANS OF ANTIQUITY

The lower course of the Arno takes us to the gates of the city of Arezzo. The horizons of the Valley widen and the landscape changes; the hills soften and the woods give way to olive groves and vineyards. The now mature Arno, overlooked by ancient mills, bridges, hydroelectric power stations and medieval towers, tells us its many Water Stories in the towns of Capolona and Subbiano. The history of the area, on the other hand, finds space in the Archaeological Documentation Center of Subbiano which houses artifacts and material testimonies found during excavations and archaeological surveys carried out over the years. The area is also home to religious architecture, at its best in the Pieve di Santa Maria Maddalena in Sietina. From this place, also considered the first stopping point of the "Via delle Pievi", the ancient way along the valley floor that runs longitudinally to Casentino, we can mentally retrace the itinerary described above through the minor valleys of the "Valle Chiusa". And the journey continues ...

Other places to visit: The Permanent exhibition on WWII "Quelli della Karin" in Subbiano; the Church of San Michele Arcangelo in Castelluccio; the Church of San Martino Sopra'Arno; the Parish church of Saints Giovanni Battista and Marino, in Pieve San Giovanni.