



The Gothic Line and **PATHS OF PEACE** *in the Apuan Alps*



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Apuan Alps
UNESCO
Global Geopark



APUANE





Summary

- 2**
BEAUTY AND HORROR
Seven Apuan itineraries along the Gothic Line and beyond...
- 8**
1 THROUGH THE PLACES OF THE "WHITE ZONE"
Sant'Anna di Stazzema
- 10**
2 WHERE THE LAST ALLIED ASSAULT BREACHED THE GOTHIC LINE
Pasquilio di Montignoso – Seravezza
- 12**
3 ALONG THE "APUAN PATRIOTS' FREEDOM WAY"
Antona di Massa – Azzano di Seravezza
- 14**
4 ALONG THE ANCIENT TRANSHUMANCE PATH OF THE LIGURIAN APUANS
Forno di Massa – Vinca di Fivizzano
- 16**
5 THE TRENCHES AND SHELTERS OF THE "MONTEROSA"
Levigliani di Stazzema – Foce di Mosceta
- 18**
6 IN THE STEPS OF THE "GRUPPO VALANGA"
The circular path of mount Rovaio
- 20**
7A/7B BUNKERS AND COMMUNICATION TRENCHES OF THE GOTHIC LINE
Borgo a Mozzano

Paths of peace in the Park/Geopark amidst nature and history

The Apuan Alps Regional Park stretches over fifteen municipalities and over the two provinces of Massa-Carrara and Lucca. From September 1944 to April 1945 this area was crossed by the Gothic Line: the barrier fortified by the Germans which split Italy in two.

The Apuan Alps, places of surprising beauty, were the theatre of battles between partisans and the Axis troops from the first months of 1944. Nazi-Fascist detachments were the protagonists of barbaric massacres which were to leave a profound mark on local communities for years to come. The wish to promote itineraries of knowledge, in places along the Gothic Line, is a tribute to peace, to the memory of those tragic events, to the beauty of these mountains and the people who inhabit them.

What we are proposing, thanks also to the contribution of the associations and individuals who have collaborated with the Park, is a program aimed at promoting the environment and tourism. The aim is to get to know and make known the many traces of a period of history which has left clear material signs for us, to offer, those who wish to benefit from it, the chance to enjoy a rare experience. That of being able to visit a real trench, remained almost intact, or to travel along these well-travelled paths which often lead to freedom. Paths, bunker trenches and other testimonies still visible, at the foot of impervious peaks, with break-taking views: it is a rich heritage in which the Apuan Alps Regional Park has decided to invest, in many cases to recover and, finally, to promote. The paths along the Gothic Line, in a time in which we discover the pleasure of walking once again, fleeing from the ills of our time, in search of reflection and meditation, can represent a fine alternative. The silence, views and landscapes will not disappoint you.

Alberto Putamorsi

President of the Apuan Alps Regional Park

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Beauty and horror

Seven Apuan itineraries along
the Gothic Line and beyond...

By Antonio Bartelletti

The theatre of cruel battles and civilian massacres, the Gothic Line was supposed to be an impassable limit which exploited the severe and inaccessible slopes of the Northern Apennines. The front stretched from the Ligurian Sea to the Adriatic and also crossed what is now the Apuan Alps Park/Geo-park. The fortifications built by the Todt exploited the impervious morphology of the mountains which helped to make this defence system effective: 7 trekking itineraries which introduce us and help us get to know the historic memory of these places and to discover the wartime constructions strictly linked to the geological landscape and the natural environments crossed by the Gothic Line.



“In the most beautiful place in the world”: that is what an American war correspondent wrote in the cold winter of 1945, when he described the failed attempt to cross the Gothic Line at the foot of the Apuan Alps. In spite of the hidden rage for the failure and the pain for the human lives lost, the sensitive pen of the man could not help but describe the wonders of finding himself before this “arch of stupendous mountains”. Almost a consolation which only the beauty of such a magnificent landscape could provide. The same identical feeling which, forty years before and in the same place, Gabriele D’Annunzio had experienced and written about immediately in the verses of the Alcyone: “*Potesse l’arte mia, da Val*

di Serchio / a Val di Magra e per le Pànie al Vara / e al Golfo, tutta stringerti in un cerchio / con l’alpe a gara!”.

Between Versilia and the Apuans, the Twentieth century began with the yearnings of D’Annunzio renewing the symbols of the wild beauty and pagan myths of nature. Here was Eden even for the intellectuals of the “Republic of Apua”, before dawning “modernity” could disturb and finally upset all its ancestral balance. No place – not even this one of incomparable vision – would be able to protect itself from the imminent catastrophe. The unsolved conflicts between nations and social classes would quickly lead all and everyone to the greatest tragedies of our history. Once the narrow interval of a generation had passed, the Century would

Page at the side
The war front on 31 January 1945 along the Gothic Line in a map (simplified) belonging to the American army.

soon bring guerrilla warfare first of all and then war to the Apuan valleys, with a trail of blood never seen before.

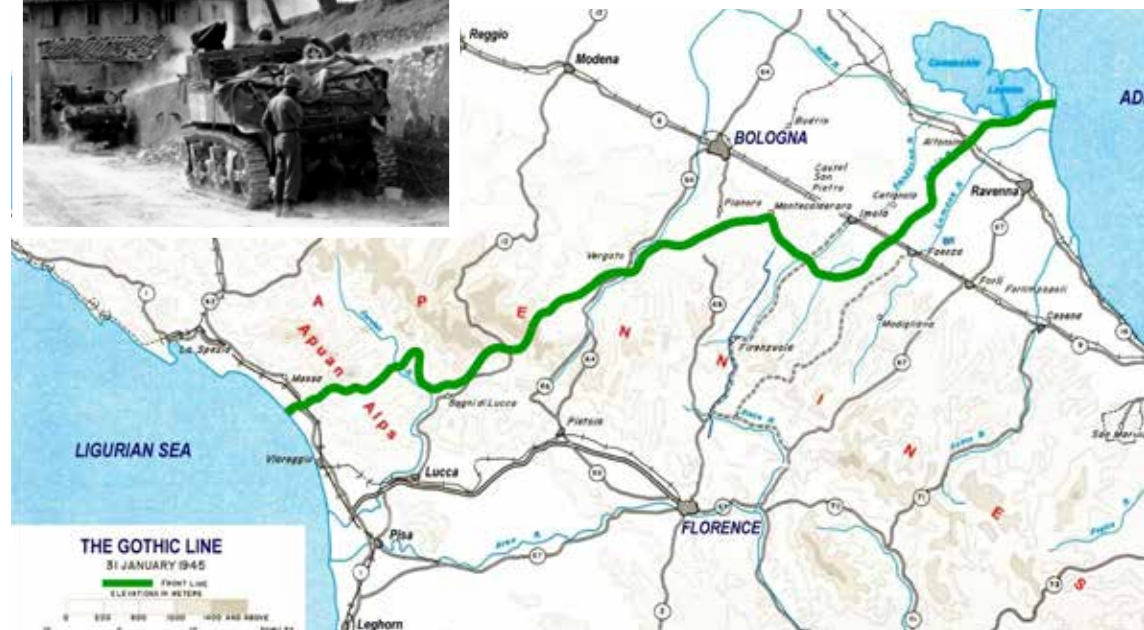
So, the Second World War would deface absolutely beautiful places, causing profound, often mortal, wounds, in every village and among its peoples. The war came all of a sudden with the bombings of the British and Americans, the presence of German troops retreating behind the Arno line and the front going slowly back through Tuscany.

The partisan resistance began spontaneously on 8th September. The first formations found refuge and their baptism of fire on the peaks, slopes and in the valleys of this extraordinary chain of mountains. “Cacciatori delle Apuane” (Apuan Hunters) was the name of the formation

which took up position immediately between the Tambura and the Prana. New groups joined them and alternated several times until the last days of the conflict: the “Gruppi Patrioti Apuani” (the Apuan Patriots Groups) on the mountains of Massa, the “Lunense” division in the upper Garfagnana and still more again.

The thick network of mountain paths, created to link villages, farms, woods, meadows and pastures, became the favourite road for attacks and sudden retreats of the armed resistance. They were the same paths that were used to hunt civilians and partisans or to flee from reprisals during the Nazi-Fascist massacres of the summer of blood of 1944; thus it was at Forno, Sant’Anna di Stazzema, Bardine di S. Terenzio, Vinca and Bèrgiola

Bottom left
American tanks at Seravezza directing their fire towards Mount Altissimo (spring 1945).
Field marshal Kesselring’s visit to the Gothic Line in the Serchio valley (August 1944). German defence stations on Cinquale beach in the initial section of the Gothic Line (1944).



Foscalina, in succession, just to mention the main ones. They are still paths today devoted to the pleasure of the innate beauty of the Apuans, but lived in those days as the only possible route to settle accounts with the horror of war. During the same months, the Todt Organisation proceeded at a frenetic pace to fortify the western Gothic Line, from the coast of Versilia as far as the Valle del Serchio. The defence strategy had requested and obtained a continuous succession of emplacements, refuges, pits and trenches, as well as minefields and barbed-wire fences, exploiting the inaccessible rocky bulwark of these impervious mountains. Originally, the western Gothic Line was supposed to restrict itself to the main divide of the Apuans, with a first section - the "Catenaccio di Carrara" - climbing from Luni-Ortonovo to Mount Sagro as far as Mount Altissimo, after touching the Cavallo, Tambura and Sella. The second segment moved from Mount Altissimo and, more precisely, from the Uncini Pass and linked the Corchia, Foce di Mosceta the Gruppo delle Panie, descending both in Garfagnana towards Molazzana and in the Middle Valley with the impressive fortifications of Borgo a Mozzano. More than a line it was a strip or, better still, a double line of fortifications, made even more obvious when it was decided to add the defence outpost of the "Catenaccio di Massa". It was this last fortified section that became the dramatic theatre of the most cruel final battles between the Germans and the Americans. Here the Gothic Line ran along the western ridge of the Serra valley - from Mount Altissimo, to the Carchio and the Folgorito - with a last series of barricades which continued along the plain as far as the sea, between lake Porta and the mouth of the Cinquale. From September 1944 to April 1945, the Gothic Line coincided with the war front. If, to the east, the Allies succeeded in advancing towards the north from Pesaro to Ravenna, the same did not happen from the opposite side of the first line of battle. For seven long months virtually "nothing



new happened on the western front", in spite of the numerous attempts to breach it. Only in the not so rough Serchio Valley, did the Allies succeed in recovering the few kilometres of ground lost during the battle of Christmas 1944, which was the only and ephemeral success of the Italian-German forces during the entire Italian Campaign. However, the Apuans remained immobile, blocking the road during a particularly snowy winter, making them even more beautiful and out of reach, in spite of the sacrifice and the tragedy that was being consumed around them. Thus, it became a war of position bringing to mind the conflict of the First World War, with the German infantry of the first 148th division along the "Catenaccio di Massa" and the alpine troops of the "Monterosa" division protecting the highest section of the Apuan chain. In Garfagnana, the front was joined by sailors of the "San Marco" and the bersaglieri of the "Italia" division, with grenadiers, machine-gunners and the German mountain troops of the 148th beyond the valley bottom of the Serchio.

Above
The Gothic Line between the Canala pass and mount Folgorito during an allied artillery attack (beginning of 1945).



The allied array to the south of the Gothic Line had more freedom of movement than the Axis forces. In the first phase the Brazilian infantry soldiers of the Força Expedicionária also took part, but later the field was held only by the Afro-American soldiers of the 92nd "Buffalo" division, who were joined by The Nepalese Gurkhas of the 8th British-Indian division and the 442nd battle group, formed mainly by Niseans, the sons, born in the USA of Japanese parents. For the first time in history, the populations of the Apuans came into contact with men with different features and skin colours - the sons of totally unknown cultures and traditions - who gave an immediate perception of the global scale of that horrible war. The meeting was also the fortuitous and unexpected chance to reveal these sculpted mountains to the amazement of the whole planet, which could finally greet them as the "most beautiful place in the world". The war which took humanity away from humans, which wrapped everyone in a whirl of suffering and death, made everyone aware of an

innate aesthetic value: no matter on which side you were or during which time you lived; the statuesque beauty of the Apuans dominated and overcame the horror of the moment. And it is still possible today to seek and rediscover that beauty, violated by the war, because the signs of pain, in spite of the passing of time, its changes and the forgetfulness of man, continue to exist in its perfect features. These pages contain a personal invitation to take a journey of reflection in the Apuans, to discover or rediscover places seen from a different historical point of view, following the itinerant tale of the Second World War. It is not a route of successive stages, as others have proposed, along the geographical development of the Gothic Line. Instead we propose seven separate selected routes, among the Apuans, to be travelled on seven different days. Better if during the same week, so as to dedicate the journey entirely to the memory of those events and to the value of freedom sought and/or defended along the Gothic Line and its surroundings.

Above
The central-southern Apuan Alps and the stretch of the Gothic Line from the Versilia plain (left) to the Serchio valley (right).

1 THROUGH THE PLACES OF THE "WHITE ZONE"

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL POINTS

Sant'Anna di Stazzema (651 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

± 113 meters

DIFFICULTY T / E

TIME

1 hour



We are on the far southern slopes of the Apuan Alps. Here we breathe silence, the same silence which on 12th August 1944 was broken by the desperate cries of men, women and children. 560 civilians fell victim to one of the most cruel Nazi-Fascist massacres of the Second World War, even though the German command had defined Sant'Anna di Stazzema as a "white zone", i.e. a safe place to shelter refugees. In 2000 this area was recognised as the National Park of Peace by the Italian Parliament.

Description. The circular trek (nr 2: orange) starts from the little church of Saint Anna (XVI century), where in the adjacent square 132 innocent people were massacred. The first half of the itinerary enters the village of Pero (669 m), climbing then to those of Vinci and Vaccarella (730 m). It was the morning of 12th August 1944 when a patrol of soldiers belonging to the "Reichsführer-SS" entered Vaccarella to search the houses and led the inhabitants to a cattle shed, where

they were shot. The itinerary continues as far as the panoramic point of the Focetta (764 m) and, from here, to the Valleripe spring, along a paved road and trekking path both requiring some care.

The last stop is at the Monumento Ossario (716 m) which dominates the plain and surrounding coast; designed by the architect Tito Salvatori, it is formed of an exposed stone tower 12 meters high with four arches at the base.

After a stop for reflection, we continue towards the Historic Museum of the Resistance, following the so-called Via Crucis, a paved path, with bronze tiles, made by famous artists, which links the Calvary of Christ to the massacre and, symbolically, to every martyr of war and violence, of every place and every time. In the Museum – which is worth the visit – the spatial relationship between the inside displays and the surrounding landscape is clear.

The circular itinerary ends as we return to the church square. Other circular itineraries take



Below
Children from Sant'Anna di Stazzema celebrate the end of the school year (June 1944) two months before they were the victims of the massacre.



in other villages of Sant'Anna di Stazzema, also witnesses of the barbarity of the massacre. Alternatively, the hamlets of Le Case, Franchi, Sennari, etc. can also be reached through the base of the church, as can the belvedere with the surrounding equipped area.

In 2012 the "Sentieri di Pace (Paths of Peace)" project was carried out, in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities of Versilia, offering the chance to follow the autonomous paths of knowledge along the six different circular paths conceived as itineraries of history and nature, which guide the tourist in discovery of the area along the paths taken by the Nazi-Fascists on 12th August 1944 as they carried out the massacre. Note that Sant'Anna di Stazzema can be reached by a panoramic road (about 10 km. long), which winds across the hills of Versilia, through Monteggori and La Culla, or along the ancient mule tracks from Farnocchia, Capriglia-Capezzano and Valdicastello, where it joins the Via Francigena foothills.

HISTORY MUSEUM OF THE RESISTANCE AT SANT'ANNA DI STAZZEMA

The structure, opened in 1982 by the President of the Republic Sandro Pertini, was transformed into the current Museum in 1991. The room on the ground floor, equipped with audio-video equipment is dedicated to educational pursuits, conferences and meetings, while the adjacent one contains an important biography of the historical events of the Second World War, concerning in particular the events of the war in Versilia. Outside, on the facade, alongside the plaque with the ode of Calamandrei to Kesselring, we find a sculpture depicting a detail of Picasso's "Guernica". The layout of the museum space is imagined as the depiction of a global vision in the spatial relationship between inside and outside, between the Museum and the Monumento Ossario which is located on the hill of Cava and which can be reached along a paved footpath. Along this ideological Via Crucis the stations of the Passion and the historic and civil events of 12th August 1944 are reported in parallel. The Ossuary contains the remains of the 56 victims of the massacre of 12 August 1944. The Museum guarantees a permanent information service for visitors and during the whole year organises teaching activities for junior and senior schools. Groups must agree the date of their visit. By request the participation of a survivor of the massacre who will narrate his or her experience can be arranged. Thanks to the help of the Pietrasanta UOEL, the paths of memory can be followed with descriptions of the places of the massacre (service free of charge subject to booking).
Autumn-winter opening (1st September-28 February): Monday closed, from Tuesday to Thursday (9:00-14:00), Friday and Saturday (9:00-17:30), Sunday (14:30-8:00). Spring-summer opening (1st March-31 August): Monday closed, Tuesday and Wednesday (9:00-14:00), from Thursday to Saturday (9:00-18:00), Sunday (10:30-18:00); tel. 0584.772025; santannamuseo@comune.stazzema.lu.it

2

WHERE THE LAST ALLIED ASSAULT BREACHED THE GOTHIC LINE

DEPARTURE POINT

Pasquilio di Montignoso (825 m)

ARRIVAL POINT

Seravezza (65 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

+ 171 - 931 meters

DIFFICULTY

E (EE in sections along the ridge)

TIME 3.20 hours on the way out

3.50 hours on the way back



GOTHIC LINE MUSEUM AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE AT MONTIGNOSO

The Museum is housed in Villa Schiff and spreads over five display rooms: through photographs, posters and paper documentation, two illustrate the war on the Italian front, from the landings in Sicily to the collapse of the Gothic Line on the Tyrrhenian side. In a third room there is a relief map showing the long list of civilian victims and partisans who fell during the war; in the fourth room, through 8 audio-visual monitors, we can listen to the direct testimonies of the people of Montignoso. The fifth and last room contains war remains kept in special display cases. The Museum is the responsibility of the Montignoso ANPI: open on Tuesday and Thursday (10:00-12:00), other days subject to booking; tel. 0585.8271204 (Ufficio Cultura di Montignoso).

The itinerary crosses one of the most important places of the Second World War: the assault on Mount Folgorito which opened the breach in the western Gothic Line and created the conditions for the final collapse, which took place a few days later. From the top of the mountains, on clear days, you can see from the Livorno coast as far as the Gulf of La Spezia. **Description.** The route on foot starts from Foc del Campaccio (825 m), between mount Belvedere and the Carchio. The place can be reached easily by car from Montignoso and from Massa, through the hamlet of Pariana. The Mouth of the Campaccio, also called "Of the Termo" or "Collescritto", is also known as "Il Pasquilio" (although the name refers to the entire mountain pasture) At the end of the asphalted road there is a parking area dominated by a monument erected in memory of the war of Liberation. Before starting the walk the little church of

the Partisans is worth a short visit (the church was started in 1943 and completed after the war). The path first of all enters the woods and then comes out into the open, passing the marble slopes of

mount Carchio. We leave the CAI no. 140 path to follow the track on the left, which crosses the crest to arrive at Le Forche (900 m), where we find the first German fortifications. We follow a path along



the ridge coming to trenches and individual holes (above Campo del Barga and Col di Melo), before arriving at the marble boundary stone of the Gothic Line. In just a few minutes we climb up to the top of the Folgorito (912 m), along a short section which requires care. An impressive cross, which can also be clearly seen from the sea, was erected here in 1986. On the sea side of the peak, the remains of a long communications trench are still visible, linked to an artillery look-out. Instead, to the north, we find a cave dug into the rock providing shelter for a squadron of 12 men. The Allies made their final attack here, surprising the German soldiers, and opened the first breach in the western zone of the Gothic Line. On the morning of 5th April 1944, in the hamlet of Le Forche, the soldiers of the Japanese-American infantry, guided by the partisans, surprised the German defending troops and climbed up to the top of the Folgorito, beginning a harsh

battle which ended the following day with victory for the Allies. Shortly after, it was thanks to this episode that Montignoso (8 April), Massa (10 April) and Carrara (11 April) were liberated. From the top of the Folgorito the path descends through patches of thorny broom. Returning to the boundary stone, we circle the mountain from the slope overlooking the sea and arrive at the CAI no. 140 signpost. We continue our descent towards Cerreta San Nicola (560 m): an ancient pasture with a little church dedicated to San Nicola da Tolentino, the stream and its tiny cemetery. The itinerary continues south towards mount Canala, still following the route nr. 140, with a section giving an extraordinary view over the coast and the Versilia plain. Once we arrive at the Passo della Canala (349 m) we turn left towards Seravezza (65 m). The route is also feasible in the opposite direction but takes a little longer.



Above Montignoso (April 1945): Afro-American and Japanese-American soldiers marching towards the Gothic Line.

3

ALONG THE "APUAN PATRIOTS" FREEDOM WAY

DEPARTURE POINT

Antona di Massa (402 m)

ARRIVAL POINT

Azzano di Seravezza (452 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

+ 885 – 835 meters

+ 339 – 613 meters (in the central
Tecchia – La Polla section)

DIFFICULTY

E / EE (an EEA section, from
Passo della Greppia until it
meets the CAI nr 32 path)

TIME

4.30 hours

3 hours (in the central Tecchia –
La Polla section)

A breach in the western front of the Gothic Line led many people to safety during the winter of 1944-45: crossing it wasn't easy, because it was inaccessible and insidious, especially with the snow and ice. The "Freedom Way", today recovered thanks to the contribution of the Apuan Alps Park, is accessible and partly follows the classical "Pian della Fioba-Tecchia-Passo delle Greppia-Azzano" itinerary. This section of the front towards liberated Italy was in the hands of the "Apuan Patriots Group". Their records document the passage of 1687 civilians who followed it in the month of February 1945 alone.

Before February '45, no single route controlled by the partisans existed and thousands of people



had joined the Anglo-Americans, with serious risk and danger, through other steep, difficult breaches along the Gothic Line (some of these crossing points can still be recognised today). **Description.** The itinerary starts at Antona (402 m), accessible by road from Massa (about 8 km) and ends at Azzano di Seravezza on the opposite Versilia slope. We follow CAI route no. 41 or, by car, the provincial road towards Pian della Fioba (850 m), where we



find the CAI Refuge Città di Massa and the "Pellegrini-Ansaldi" botanical gardens, an area of three hectares containing many plant species endemic and relict of the Apuan Alps. After going through the short unlit Tecchia Tunnel, a clearing contains the "Sacrario della Tecchia" (870 m), dedicated to those who fell along the Gothic Line. We can start the path on foot from here, taking care to leave the CAI no. 41 path to take no. 188, continuing towards the Passo



della Greppia. After initial ups and downs through a sparse chestnut wood with some terraces, the path climbs again, first gradually and then more steeply. After about 1 hour 40 minutes, a steep grassy slope leads towards the Passo della Greppia (1209 m), a name which derives from the medieval Latin grippus (crag, rocky place). We climb along a canyon under the "Uncini" before reaching the Pass. A table and solitary tree suggest a well-earned pause. We then descend from the opposite slope, along the historical "Freedom Path", along a wide grassy canyon on the south-west side of Mount Altissimo. The beginning of the path is dug out from the sweet-vernal grassy slope and, after this, along exposed ledges which soon bring us to the bottom of the canyon, from where we come out on the left climbing up a short rocky section again with the help of an iron chain. From here the path follows, descending slightly along the slope of Mount Altissimo



Photo on the side

The Alpine soldiers of the "Monterosa" (R.S.I.) defend the northern flank of mount Altissimo (winter 1944-45).

called "Agheti", until we cross path no. 32, opened in 2013 by the Pisa CAI section. The descending path, dug along a wide sparsely treed slope leads into the wood below and along a marble road built in the Fifties, and then arrives at the hamlet of La Polla (596 m), from where the Serra river starts. After crossing a large marble path and coming out in the square of Mortigliani, the itinerary comes to the chapel of the Madonna dei Cavatori. From here we descend the final section of the marble road and continue along the vehicle road (via Martiri del Lavoro) as far as the village of Azzano (452 m). A landslide today blocks the final section of the path which descends from the Passo della Greppia. Until it is removed we can follow path no. 32, starting from the junction with the "Freedom Path" under the "Agheti", until it joins the old marble road and descends along this as far as la Polla.



THE MARTANA AIR-RAID SHELTER IN MASSA

Situated in the historic centre of the town, the Shelter was built to protect the civilian population from air raids during the Second World War. People sought refuge here when the sirens sounded to warn of danger. Built in about a year between 1942 and 1943 by miners from Belluno in the Veneto, it was the largest air-raid shelter built in Massa and could hold thousands of people. After the order to abandon the town was issued in September 1944 by the German military command, the shelter was occupied by the Nazi troops who installed field kitchens there to serve their own soldiers employed in protecting the Gothic Line. The shelter is composed of a large tunnel dug into the rock 450 meters long with three entrances. On the tunnel face there are artificial openings functioning as ventilation holes to ensure a constant exchange of air inside the shelter. After the end of the war, the shelter remained closed for sixty years and was reopened for cultural and historical educational purposes in 2006. Currently the shelter is managed by the Sancio Pancia Cultural Association which is responsible for opening it to the public, for guided visits and for setting up and organising cultural events. The shelter is open (entrance and guided visits free of charge): Saturday (16:00-18:00). Bookings for groups: sancioip.ms@gmail.com; tel. 329 0227861

4

ALONG THE ANCIENT TRANSHUMANCE WAY OF THE LIGURIAN APUJANS

DEPARTURE POINT

Forno di Massa (190 m)

ARRIVAL POINT

Vinca di Fivizzano (808 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

+ 1275 – 657 meters

+ 611 – 657 meters (from Case del Vergheto)

DIFFICULTY

E

TIME

5.30 hours

4 hours (from Case del Vergheto)



From Massa we take via Bassa Tambura until, along the Frigido, we come to the hamlet of Forno: from the historic centre it is about 7 kilometres along the road at the bottom of the valley.

About 500 meters before the village, we come to the monument in memory of the 68 victims of the Nazi-Fascist massacre which took place on 13 June 1944. Just passed the village, on the right, the impressive buildings of the former Cotonificio Ligure (Ligurian Cotton Factory) which, at the end of the Nineteenth century, was part of the much larger plant in central Italy, employing about 900 workers. The waters of the near-by spring of the Frigido (1.500 l/sec) had operated the huge turbine of this Mill until 1944, when it was destroyed by German bombs. After years of abandonment, the former Cotonificio Ligure underwent restoration works and the surviving

machinery is displayed as industrial archaeology museum pieces. The itinerary includes an initial stop at Case del Vergheto (854 m). The hamlet can be reached by car from Forno, or on foot following CAI route no. 169. In the latter case, take via Scalette and climb



up towards Pizzo Acuto, leaving the old Cotton Mill behind you. After about an hour you come to Fonte Antica (fill up your water bottles) and we climb up towards Colle dei Prunetti and the amazing panoramic balcony of Pianello del Vergheto (720 m). Here we meet

path no. 38 which climbs towards Case del Vergheto and then we reach Foce Luccica (1028 m), where we find a marble Madonna, the sign of devotion of the quarry workers who worked in the near-by quarries. We remain at the same altitude flanking the Spallone and Mount Sagro. In a barren, wild landscape we cross marble quarries abandoned in the Sixties; traces of the steep marble paths which descended towards Canal Regollo and the ruins of houses where the quarrymen lived are still visible. One of these, Casa Pisani, is worthy of a public renovation project due to its historical value and exceptional geographical position. Finally, a couple of steep climbs brings us to Foce di Vinca (1333 m). The whole ridge as far as Foce Rasori (1316 m), along CAI route no. 173, is full of dug-out trenches and some short tunnels built by the Germans to fortify the Gothic Line. These paths follow very ancient

transhumance ways, traced by the Apuan Ligurians before Roman colonisation. Between the end of the 1400 and the beginning of the 1500, the area had been the theatre of violent disputes between the shepherds of Forno and Vinca, concerning pasturing rights. At the time, Niccolò Machiavelli intervened to defend the rights of the inhabitants of Vinca. From Foce Rasori we descend towards the Vinca valley following path no 186 as far as 153 and finally no. 38; the scenery changes with respect to the climb, because it is surrounded by fir, beech and chestnut forests. In an hour and a half we come to Vinca (its bread is famous all over the province), crossing Prada-Maestà di Doglio (880 m). This village, too, suffered a Nazi-Fascist massacre: between 24 and 27 August 1944, 173 people, mostly women, children and the elderly, were massacred by the troops commanded by Major Walter Reder.

Below

Civilians climbing the ridges of the Apuan Alps during the winter of 1944-45



PERMANENT “RESISTANCE 1943-1945” EXHIBITION OF THE CITY OF MASSA

In the premises formerly used to wash the buses of the public transport company CAT - in via Bassa Tambura in Massa - 141 panels illustrating the historic events and protagonists of 1943-1945 are displayed. The images are the faithful reproduction of part of the iconographic material donated to the Municipality in 1994 by the local section of the ANPI. The originals are kept in the Historical Archives of the Resistance in the municipality of Massa. Entrance is free of charge. Guided visits by the Municipality and ANPI Gothic Line- Apuan Patriots-Massa Section, bookings: 329.0227861; tel. 0585.490500; eleonora.vecchione@comune.massa.ms.it

5

THE TRENCHES AND SHELTERS OF THE "MONTEROSA"

DEPARTURE POINT

Levigliani di Stazzema (582 m)
Tourist entrance Antro del Corchia (880 m)

ARRIVAL POINT

Foce di Mosceta (1182 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

+ 658 - 58 meters
+ 380 - 58 meters (from Antro del Corchia)

DIFFICULTY

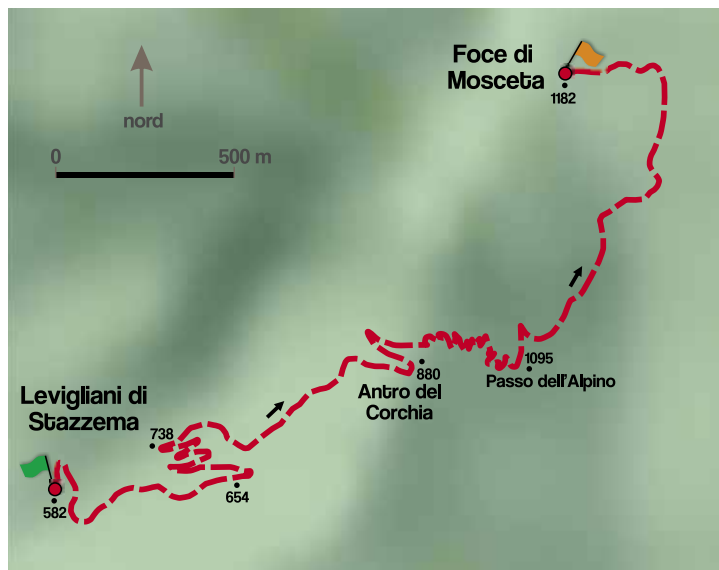
E

TIME

2 hours
1 hour (from Antro del Corchia)

The ancient route crossing the Apuans allows us to see trenches and shelters built in 1944 by the Todt Organisation and controlled by the Alpine Soldiers of the "Monterosa" division (Italian Social Republic).

Description. The itinerary starts from Levigliani (582 m) and follows the paved road - CAI route no. 9 - as far as Antro del Corchia (880 m); if you like you can reach the same place by car (2.3 km), or by a shuttle bus service (when the cave is open). The mule track for Mosceta turns off about 150 metres on the left of the old quarry, from which the artificial access tunnel to the tourist cave starts. CAI path no. 9 climbs along the southern side of Mount Corchia (1678 m) with 20 bends along a steep grassy slope: it is the "via delle Volte" or "le Svolte", today better known as "le Voltoline". After 40 minutes we



come to the Passo dell'Alpino (1095 m), named this because of the defensive positions of the 4th alpine "Monterosa" (R.S.I.) division; the battalion remained active during the winter of 1994-45, in the highest section of the Apuan Alps, from mount Altissimo and beyond the Panie group of mountains. Here we meet illustrative panels and arrows directing us towards five fortified positions: the inside of shelter no. 1, situated lower down, cannot yet be visited; so we start from position



no. 2 (1120 m), in a moderate state of conservation and located not far from the Pass, climbing towards Mosceta. Outside, a short trench, surrounded by dry stone walls, penetrates inside the mountain, in an irregular chamber dug out of the rock which provided protection and repose to soldiers between one watch and the next. Leaving station no. 2 we return and continue along route no. 9 for another 25 meters. Corresponding with the last bend of "le Voltoline" a path



starts (direction arrow) climbing up to station no. 3 (1150 m), similar to the previous one. Proceeding along CAI path no. 9, the last section is marked by small plaques dedicated to the civilians who were killed just after the war in the minefields in the surrounding area. Now, we come to the marginetta/maestà (place of shelter and prayer) of the Mount (1139 m), built in the XVIII century by the Community of Levigliani; from here we go down to station no. 4 (1120 m), which cannot be visited, or, climbing up again on the left, to no. 5 (1170 m), after an uphill section of around 150 metres. Station no. 5 is a fine observation point dominating the Canale del Bosco valley, the area of Cansoli and the villages of Basati, Terrinca and Levigliani (at the time controlled by the 92nd Afro-American "Buffalo" infantry division). A small iron cross was erected in memory of the soldiers of the "Intra" battalion who lived here from October 1944 to April 1945. Descending again to CAI path no. 9, the itinerary continues. climbing

slightly, along an almost straight section of the Gothic Line. In the final part, we cross a thick wood of silver firs and beech until we come to Foce di Mosceta (1182 m), where we find the Cippo ai Caduti della Guerra di Liberazione (Monument in memory of those who were killed during the War of the Liberation), erected in 1949. The "Del Freo" Refuge (1195 m, CAI, Viareggio Section) is only 250 meters from this ancient pass, between Versilia and the Garfagnana, linking the two main slopes of the Apuans. The headquarters of the 14th company of the "Intra" battalion of mountain infantry was based in this area until 16th April 1945. Following the same route but in the opposite direction, without stopping, we return to Antro del Corchia (45 minutes) and Levigliani (1.15 hours).

Above

Partisan formation at the quarries of Carrara (1944)



6

IN THE STEPS OF THE "GRUPPO VALANGA"

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL POINTS
Foce di Piglionico (1127 m) with circular route around Mount Rovaio

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE
+ – 270 meters

DIFFICULTY
E (EE for a short section)

TIME 3.20 hours

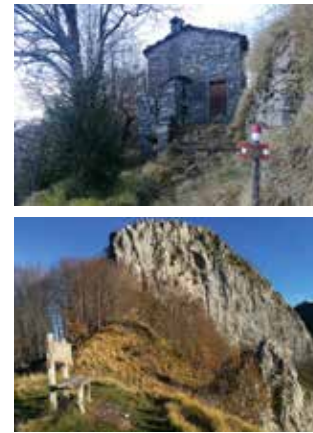


A trek through the places which witnessed the unequal battle between the partisans of the "Valanga" division and the more numerous and better armed German alpine troops. **Description.** Foce di Piglionico, or more simply just Piglionico (1127 m), is the starting point accessible from Molazzana towards Foce di Grottotondo and le Rochette. Here, we find the wayside shrine dedicated to Commander Leandro Puccetti and the other 18 young men of the Valanga division who lost their lives during the battle of Monte Rovaio. On 29 August 1944, the partisan formation was attacked by German divisions while it defended the civilian population and controlled the Panie area, strategically important for the allies when they dropped weapons and food. From Piglionico CAI path nr 138 descends to Colle to Panestra (1011 m). The little village, with its washing trough, public fountain and typical alpine houses, is located under the far southern point of the rocky Rovaio peak, called Nome del Gesù (Name of Jesus) (1145 m). It is here that the circular route actually starts, proceeding outside the network of CAI paths. It is better to follow it in a clockwise

direction from Colle to Panestra, towards the left, along the western side of this smaller mountain in the Panie range. The first section of the route is wide and easy with excellent views. We proceed half way up the side of the mountain as far as Casa Tréscola (983 m), where Mamma Viola (whose real name was Violante Bertoni Mori) gave shelter to the partisans of the "Valanga" division. A marble plaque



and an illustrative panel recall the events of those dramatic days, with the names of the young men who were killed. A detour on the right takes us back up the mountain, first in the shade of woods and then through an open area of scree and fallen rocks. The path, dominated by the western wall of the rocky peak, becomes narrower and is subject to landslides, so extra care is needed. The last section, along grassy



slopes, ends on the panoramic top of the Rovaio (1060 m), from where we can also appreciate the rocky peak containing three of the four defensive stations of the partisans during the "battle of Mount Rovaio": one in the centre, the others at the north-west and south-east edges. A fourth and last outpost of machine guns was located below the first one, on the mountain side pointing towards the west. Now we turn back for a short section: once we come to the path we climbed before, from Casa Tréscola, we turn left onto the eastern slope of the small mountain taking us to Casa Bovaio (1046 m). The appearance of this place is typical of shelters or refuges under the rock. A "Celtic" cabin with a partially preserved thatched roof bears witness to the passing of time. Now we descend, flanking the cliffs of the eastern slope of the Rovaio, where partisans tried – with serious losses – to retreat towards Alpe di S. Antonio. We flank a small buttress inviting us to head towards Casa Colle and Tiévora: instead, we must cross it and continue on the right, down a short, steep hill, which soon becomes easier and wider, until we arrive at the hamlet of Pasquigliora (982 m). The little settlement



marks the far western point of Alpe di S. Antonio and contains the house where Fosco Maraini (1912-2004), the ethnologist, alpine climber, writer and poet, lived.. Now all we have to do it to climb up again as far as Colle a Panestra (1011 m), along CAI path no. 133, to come to the end of the Rovaio circular route and return to the point of departure along path no. 138.



SECOND WORLD WAR MUSEUM AT MOLAZZANA
Opened in June of 2016, the museum is organised in the former elementary school of Molazzana.

There are two museum rooms: the first contains materials belonging to the Axis troops (mannequins wearing German and Italian uniforms, including the Alpine soldiers of the Monterosa division and the sailors of the San Marco); the second room shows visitors material linked to the partisan world and the Anglo-American troops, for example mannequins wearing uniforms of the time, photographs and war objects.

Opening hours: Sunday (9:00-12:00; 15:00-19:00), from Monday to Saturday subject to booking (tel. 328.9631202).

For guided visits and excursions: tel. 342.3687500 / 335.5444622 / 349.8526937 / 328.9631202 / 346.8326161.

7

BUNKER AND COMMUNICATIONS TRENCHES OF THE GOTHIC LINE

DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL POINTS

Borgo a Mozzano (90 m)

Domazzano di Valdottavo (172 m)

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE

± 10 meters (Borgo a Mozzano itinerary)

± 165 meters Monte dell'Elto itinerary)

DIFFICULTY T / E

TEMPO DI PERCORRENZA

2 hours (Borgo a Mozzano and Anchiano)

5 hours with trek to Mount Elto (there and back)

Borgo a Mozzano was protected by the ranges of the Apuan Alps and the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, but also by the numerous, well-preserved fortified structures of the Valle del Serchio. We find ourselves half way between Lucca and the Garfagnana; here the Gothic Line has kept its original characteristics: bunkers, clearings, communications trenches and anti-tank stations bear witness to the tragic years of the war. The suggested itinerary – but not the only one – allows us to visit the Museum of Memory and the fortifications of Borgo a Mozzano and Anchiano. **Description.** After visiting the Museum of Memory, we can visit some fortified sites on the valley floor. We arrive at the hamlet of Madonna di Mao (80 m.) on foot or by car, descending provincial highway 20 “Lodovica” towards Lucca for



around 80 metres. At the side of the road we can see the remains of an anti-tank wall, in reinforced concrete, around 2.5 metres high, which blocked the valley from one side to the other, protected by two pillboxes on the left and right bank of the river Serchio. Near the anti-tank wall, with the



necessary help of a guide (see the Museum documentation), the bunkers of Madonna di Mao and Pòzzori can be visited. The itinerary continues by car towards the medieval village of Anchiano (106 m), on the opposite side of the river Serchio, on the slopes of Mount Gallione (km 3 from Borgo

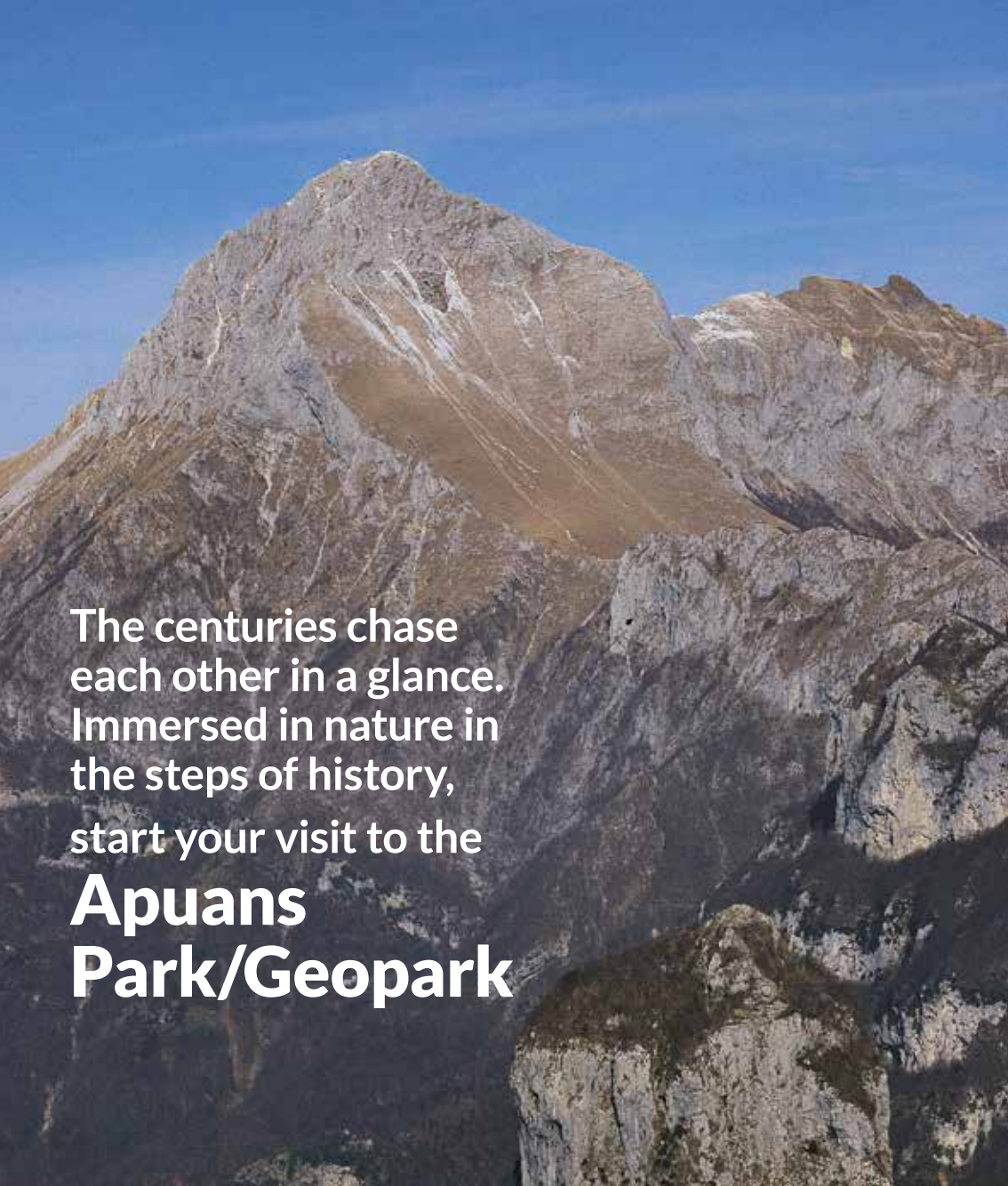


a Mozzano). The anti-tank wall we saw before continues in the hamlet of Cartiera. Near the rocky spur, on which the church and castle are located, there are many very well preserved fortifications. To complete the trip we can visit the fortifications of the front line of mount Elto (337 m.). Communications trenches and bunkers are 40 minutes on foot away from the cemetery of the village of Domazzano di Valdottavo (172 m.), which can be reached by car



MUSEUM OF MEMORY AT BORGO A MOZZANO

Just like the recovery of the fortifications, the Museum was an initiative of the Committee for the Recovery and Valorisation of the Gothic Line of Borgo a Mozzano. The museum is located in the premises of the former railway station, in piazza Marconi. There are two sections: the first is dedicated to a collection of objects documenting the ancient history of the Valle del Serchio; the second is reserved to the war events of the Second World War and the construction of the Gothic Line. In addition to this, oral testimonies, finds and posters of the period have been collected. Opening hours: Tuesday (16:00-18:00), Thursday (9:00-12:30), or by appointment. For bookings and info: 0583.888881 / 347.7167559 / 320.4403801 (Pro Loco Borgo a Mozzano - from Monday to Saturday: 9:30-12:30); lineagoticaborgoamozzano@virgilio.it



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