

Discovering the valleys through the work of yesterday and today

ACQUA FERRO e FUOCO

Arsiero, Laghi, Lastebase, Posina,
Santorso, Tonezza del Cimone, Velo d'Astico



Rural Archaeology



Fogazzaro's Itinerary



Great War



FEASR



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ACQUA, FERRO E FUOCO tra Astico e Posina | PC3 – PSL 2014-2020
(WATER, IRON AND FIRE between Astico and Posina)

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ACQUA FERRO e FUOCO

The purpose of the **ACQUA, FERRO E FUOCO (WATER, IRON AND FIRE)** project, financed by *Gal Montagna Vicentina*, is to rediscover and promote the culture and landscape of the territory that includes the Astico and Posina valleys by relating some important aspects of history, development, traditions and routes. The narration begins and unwinds through the elements that characterised these valleys most: water, a life source and an essential economic resource, given that it was used to power mills, saw mills, paper mills, trip hammers, and today even hydroelectric power plants; iron, forged in ancient times and still worked today in the important areas of the metallurgical industry in the valley; fire, fed by the carbon from the woods, used to melt, forge and move the locomotives that took goods and tourists to Arsiero, but which also transported refugees, supplies and soldiers when the noise of the weapons fired during the Great War sadly echoed through this border area.

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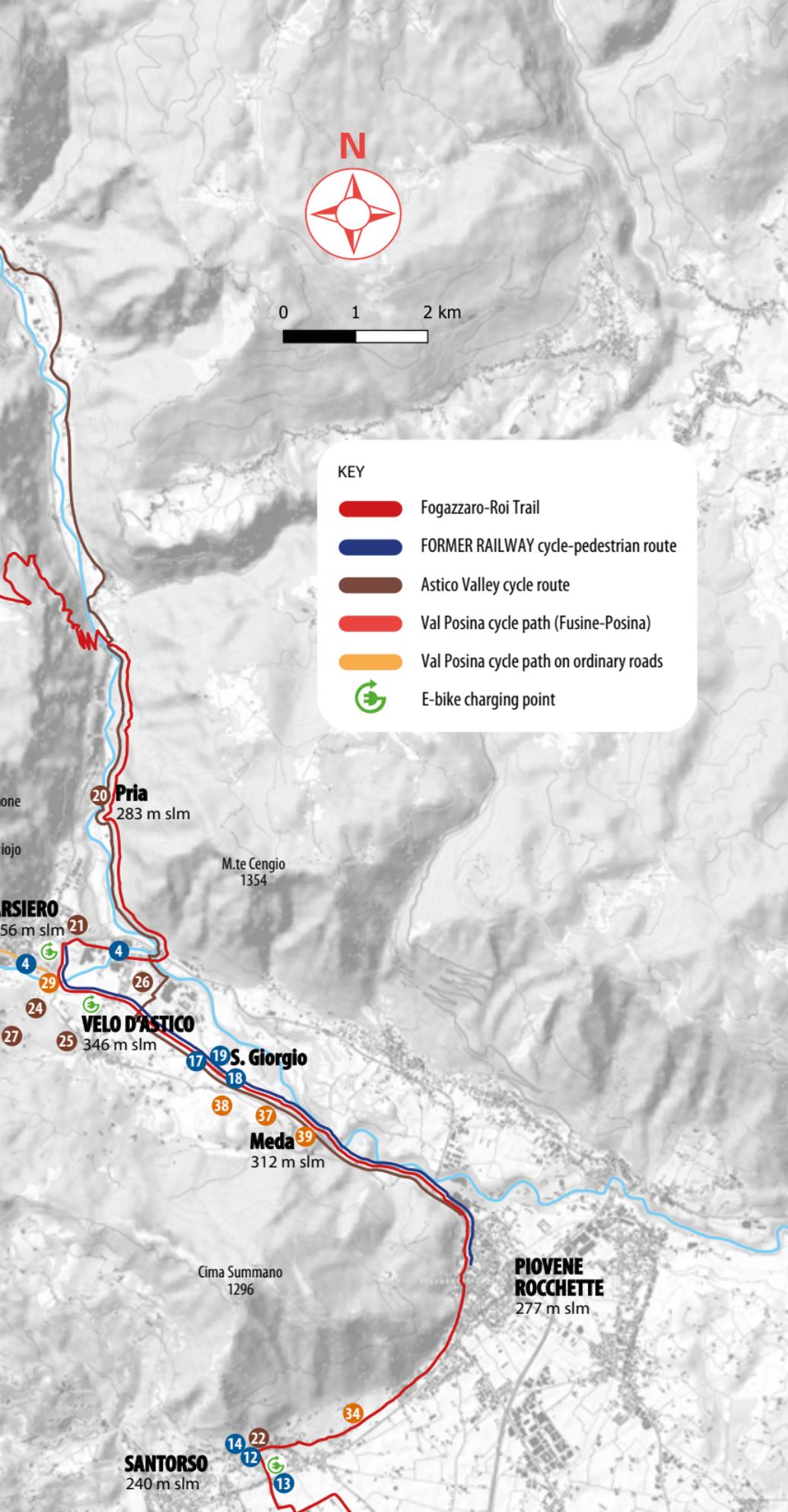


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KEY

-  Fogazzaro-Roi Trail
-  FORMER RAILWAY cycle-pedestrian route
-  Astico Valley cycle route
-  Val Posina cycle path (Fusine-Posina)
-  Val Posina cycle path on ordinary roads
-  E-bike charging point



one
iojo

RSIERO
56 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm

S. Giorgio

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

**PIOVENE
ROCCHETTE**
277 m slm

SANTORSO
240 m slm



Lastebasse Montepiano, archive of F. Cerato

"...that is still lucky (the Astico Valley) with Gold mines, according to the flowers and signs that can be seen on her (the valley), even if evident signs appear on the Mount called Melignone, and also other veins of silver, and copper in the Barbarena valley above Tonezza, and silver in the Val dell'Orco near S. Pietro d'Astico, as well as signs of excellent iron under Santa Maria di Brancafora, in Posina..."

Count Francesco Caldogno

Immerse yourself in an enchanting itinerary: you will hear hammers beating, bellows puffing, and mills creaking... you will admire the fascination of ancient roads where nature still reigns unchallenged and where waterways bubble as they flow, reminding you of stories that maybe never existed and dreams that are still to be dreamt.



Arsiero

Terracing



Laghi

The old saw mill



Lastebasse

Waterfalls of Val Civetta



Posina

Nails and forges



Tonezza del Cimone

The Plateau landscape



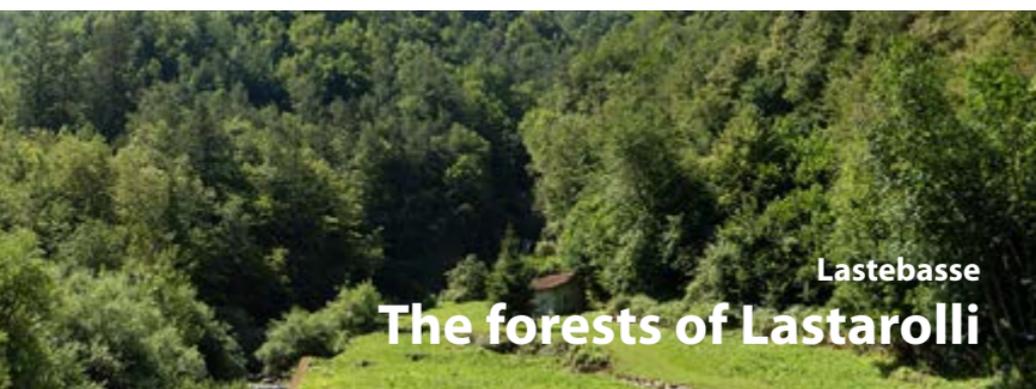
Arsiero

The Peralto icehouse



Laghi

The *casèlo* in Contrada Molini



Lastebasse

The forests of Lastarolli



Posina

The Maìn small lake



Velo d'Astico

Villa Montanina

ARSIERO

1 *Terracing*

The typical crops grown in these valleys were wheat, *formenton* (buckwheat, which was sown in the summer and harvested in October), potatoes (only from the beginning of the 19th century), vines and beans (the most famous and typical species are *Scalda* and the *fagiolo di Spagna Rosso*, also known as *fasòla*). Agriculture was mainly for survival, and the arable land was patiently and onerously taken from the mountain, creating terraces that helped soften the steepness of the sides and made sowing possible. A precondition of terracing was cutting the trees and scrubs, and removing the stones from the soil (this was called *roncare*). Only when the soil became tillable could the *masiéra* be built. This term in local dialect defines a dry wall that held the soil used to make the *vanéda*, i.e. an area where the plants were grown at a certain distance from the edge to prevent their roots from breaking the *masiéra*. The *vanède* were worked almost exclusively by hand, for example fertilising with manure (called *grassa*). After heavy rain, farmers had to carry any soil that had been washed over the top of the wall and into the valley back up to the terrace: this operation was called *terasare*. Today, the wood has taken back those spaces that the long-ago inhabitants won from the slopes, with the terracing at some points reaching altitudes of about 900 m. Only in winter, when the trees are bare and the snow falls, does the extensive network of terraces that sculpted the land reappear, revealing the toil once witnessed by the valley, which today lies almost completely deserted.



2 *The Peralto icehouse*

For many centuries, natural ice was used to preserve food and for therapy. As a result, ice houses were fundamental in our territory, until the invention of the refrigerator in the 1920s. The Peralto icehouse has a round floor, a brick dome and a small protected entrance – which points towards the geographic north so as to prevent the area behind it from being heated by the sun – that leads into a main room where the ice was gathered and preserved, and a semi-circular stairway to access the depths of the ice chamber. The bottom was covered with tree trunks and the ice piled on top of them in layers separated by straw; the ice, which was collected in jute bags, came from the mountain *buse* (holes) in the nearby valleys. In 1876, following a *miliaria* epidemic (an illness that causes high temperatures and disturbing rashes similar to grains of millet, from which it gets its name), the request for ice to be used as a relief from pain was so great that 947.98 quintals (1 quintal = 100 kg) had to be bought from two companies in the Pasubio Valley. Several years later, in 1897, the Municipality commissioned two projects for the realisation of a new icehouse and the Town Council unanimously approved that of Peralto, at an overall cost of ITL 4,278.86. In 1900, some council resolutions confirmed its regular filling with both ice purchased from external suppliers and the ice produced in the 'dei mori' area, between the *contrade* (districts) of Peralto and Cise, where tanks were filled and left to freeze. Fallen into disuse, it was sold to Mr. Antonio Busato di Giobatta in 1943, then abandoned and used as a dump for demolition material. In 2014 the Peralto icehouse was returned to the Municipality by way of a thirty-year loan for use agreement and restoration work began, thanks to the united strength of the Local Authorities and volunteers.

3 *The public fountains*

In 1847 the Regno Lombardo Veneto (Kingdom of Lombardy–Venetia) issued a disciplinary decree to keep clean and pure the waters of the ‘public washing points’ in the various small towns, among which Fontanelle (probably Caodilà). The decree established that only healthy animals could drink from them, and that only clean buckets could collect the water needed for domestic use. The penalties and fines for those who washed their dirty bodies there, or immersed dead or live animals in them, or who “*resenta*” (cleaned) any kitchen utensil or any other object in them, were severe. The oldest fountain in Arsiero, which no longer stands, was probably the Vignette, with its own source. How were the wash houses built? When a source was found, a hole was made next to the spring and its bottom was made partially waterproof by placing large stones next to each other. Once the basin was formed, the sloping stones for washing were put in place. The large covered wash house of Caodilà, commonly called *el Fontanon* (the great fountain), was built in 1888 and was a truly imposing and luxurious piece of work in relation to the washing points governed by the decree of 1847. From then on it was used for washing, or today above all to slake the thirst of cyclists and excursionists. It is a very enjoyable phase of La Magnacorta, a historical event organised by the Pro Arsiero.



Arsiero, Caodilà fountain



4 **Cartiera Rossi and the energy of water**

The Rossi paper mill in *località Perale* produced rag pulp, mechanical wood pulp and paper (for printing, publishing, letters, stationery, drawing and wrapping, etc.), pelure paper (for cigarettes, citrus fruit wrapping, tracing paper, etc.) and paperboard (for textile machines, white paper-based, grey fibre-based, coloured, etc.). The process involved 4 steam boilers which were used to clean the rags and dry the paper. In 1893, Mr. Rossi bought the well-established paper mill in *Pria di Cogollo*, where he started the production of mechanical wood pulp and plant-based paperboard; at the same time, he had a hydroelectric power plant built for the paper mill in *Arsiero*.

An ever-increasing need for water resources drove Mr. Rossi to buy up some of the numerous trip hammers and water-mills in the valley. In 1895, he acquired the Barbieri copper mill and the mills belonging to Giovanni and Antonio Dalla Via in *località Pria*, *Arsiero*. Proof of the progressively worsening crisis of handmade-paper mills is given by the sale, in 1910, of the small factory belonging to Cesare Nado in *località Barco*, which was converted into a hydroelectric power plant. The water was drawn from the River Posina and channelled to the plant; it flowed along a canal which still today runs through open and closed trenches, through a canal on brick pillars, across a 114 m canal bridge, and through short stretches of tunnel until it reaches a basin. From here, a steel pipeline on brick pillars fed the water into a Francis turbine (reaction turbine), exploiting a 22.4 m water head. Rossi's paper mills were later powered by a third hydroelectric plant in *località Schiri*, *Cogollo*.



TONEZZA DEL CIMONE

1001 m slm

15 16

M.te Cimone
1226

M.te Cavojo
1111

Peralto
446 m slm

2

ARSIERO

356 m slm

3

4

Pria

283 m slm

4

M.te Cengio
1354

VELO D'ASTICO

346 m slm

17

19

S. Giorgio

18

Meda

312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

aforà

Giove
96



Arsiero, Laghi, laghetti

LAGHI

5 *The Lissa charcoal pit and the calcàra de' in Gusela*

This **charcoal pit** belonged to the Lissa family, who also owned *Contrà Tretti*. The pit (also called *piassa de carbon*), which was 6.3 m in diameter, sat at an altitude of 770 m in a large open space, propped up by the remains of a dry stone wall. Here, a charcoal burner would build a turf-covered wood pile around a wooden post, leaving it to burn for days.

The **Calcàra de' a Gusela** sat at an altitude of 640 m and was one of the largest local lime kilns. Quicklime was produced here by burning tonnes of limestone. The kiln was a round brickwork chamber with two holes: one for wood, and the other for emptying the ash that formed as the wood burned. It could reach temperatures of up to 800 °C.

6 *Contra' Molini, the dairy and the old Rosin saw mill*

Contrà Molini: an area rich in water that was used to power the wheels of three mills and the ingenious gears that moved the cableways, essential for transporting materials and the manure used to fertilise the terracing. The water was captured upstream and taken by channels, called *canaléte*, or *sitole* if closed, to the required point for paddle movement.

The **casèlo** (dairy) in *Contrada Molini* was a cooperative dairy whose members delivered their milk and took it in turns to produce cheese.

The **old Rosin saw mill**, situated 575 m above sea level, started working in the Napoleonic era. It provided its services to all the surrounding districts and remained operational until the late 1900s. In its last years, the paddle wheel was replaced by a more efficient turbine. Above the saw-room there was a carpenter's workshop where some machines were powered by the same force that drove the saw.



7 *The tèda de Andolòn, terracing, and the work done in the village*

The first signs of fixed settlements in the valley, scattered in originating clusters of houses where the *contrade* (districts) can still be recognised, date back to the 11th century, a period when Cimbrian families of lumberjacks, miners, etc. began arriving, bringing their Germanic influence to the names of those places. The first terraces appeared in the Middle Ages, turning the rugged terrain at the foot of the slopes into land for subsistence farming. The difficult life of the people in Laghi was made more complicated by the continual wars for border control, changes in dominion, and fights with the adjacent communities on how the forests and pastures, essential assets for survival at that time, were divided. Then came World War I, with the Lorenzi, Molini and Vanzi *contradas* under Austrian occupation from 1916 to 1918, and the tragic story of the refugees. There was a small Austrian-Hungarian field hospital above *contrada Molini*, and the terracing held a small cemetery: until 1928 it held the remains of 48 Austrian soldiers, which were then transferred to the *Santissima Trinità* cemetery in Schio. (photo)

In the following decades attempts were made to rebuild, but then World War II arrived, with new destruction caused by partisan fighting when the valley became a 'no man's land'. Finally, the industrialisation that occurred in the 1960s marked the definite depopulation of the valley, and the end of a centuries-old mountain civilisation, with the *contrade* and terraces being abandoned. Some interesting proof of the typical work of a rural economy and the daily habits of the mountain populations still remain.

Tèda de Andolòn, a barn in the foothills above *Contrà Menara*, was used by the valley dwellers as a place to grow crops and hay in summer. In autumn, it served as a stopover to delay the return of grazing livestock so that the valley's hay stocks would last longer.





LASTEBASSE

8 Montepiano

The ancient origins of this *contrada* (district) are the stuff of legend. It is believed to have been founded by three brothers who had fled their hometown of Gallio after committing crimes unknown. They found refuge on a small plateau 600 m above sea level swathed in a thick forest of beech, hornbeam and oak under Venetian jurisdiction. There is some truth to this story, as Francesco Caldugno, Superintendent of the Vicenza border since 1600, spoke of men from Folgaria who had been authorised to manage the woods and pastures of Melegnon and to seek minerals, which allegedly abounded in the ground and rocks. He mentioned a promising low-altitude gold mine, fairly close to the River Astico and not far from *contrada Posta*. The remains of località Lezz are believed to lie in this location. Permission to mine was needed from the family of counts Velo, who often granted it to outsiders, especially from *Altopiano dei Sette Comuni* (Plateau of the Seven Municipalities). This is a potential link with the legendary brothers from Gallio.



Lastebasse Montepiano, Church of Saint Stephen

The population of Montepiano grew fairly rapidly and divided into two clans: the Moretti clan, which expanded towards the mountain, and the Frangini clan, which spread towards the Astico, where it joined two other families, Dall'Olio and Tamburinaro, who were long-time inhabitants and spoke only German. Together they founded the *contrada Posta*. Montepiano was the last settlement in *Val d'Astico* (Astico Valley) to stop speaking German, although 90% of its place-names are still Germanic. Montepiano became Posta's first parish, with the first church being built here in the early 17th century to assist the religious life of this remote district; the parish of Brancafora was in fact far away and under Austrian rule. Montepiano had two old votive capitals: the one in the centre of the village was completely destroyed during World War I; the one on the road for Tamburinari still stands. Both were dedicated to Saint George. In the 1960s, the first stone of a Gothic-style Alpine church dedicated to Saint Stephen was laid. Completed thanks to generous donations by its parishioners, its inauguration on 10 August 1965 was attended by the bishop, other religious and civic figures, and a large crowd of celebrators.

9 ***Lastebasse, forests and waterfalls***

Where does the village of Lastebasse get its name and who are the *Lastarolli*? In his *Storie di Confine* (Border Histories), Tarciso Bellò argues that *le Laste* is the only possible name for the mountainous area between Costa d'Agra, Valle Orsara, Campomolon, Passo della Vena and Valle Lozza. *Laste* are the characteristic slabs of smooth rock found on the valley floor, and it is here that River Astico, also called 'river of the laste', originates, which surrounds the rocks in a watery embrace. Francesco Caldogno, Superintendent of the Vicenza border, described them in 1600 as follows: "*The...Mountain...of the Laste...is divided into two parts: 'Laste di Sotto' (Lower Laste), whose foothills are lapped by the River Astico... and 'Laste di Sopra' (Upper Laste), the tops of each and every one threatened by several mountains [Monte Toraro and Monte Maggio].*" Given its wealth of forest resources, this mountain area has always been contested and the cause of centu-



ries-long disputes. In September 1605, the historic 'Rovereto sentence' redrew the borders, confirming *Laste Alte* (Upper Laste) as part of Vicenza, and awarding *Laste Basse* (Lower Laste) and the *Sette Montagne* (Seven Mountains) area to Folgaria, Trentino. It also recognised Venice's sovereignty over the Vicenza mountains. In 1612, Lastebasse broke away from Folgaria which, however, set about removing the rights of the people of Lastebasse, the *Lastarolli*, to exploit local woods, meadows and pastures, gradually reducing them to poverty. The Republic of Venice was so concerned that it came to their aid. Although the Lastarolli had won civil autonomy, they were still economically and socially dependent. From 1750 to 1754, a 'Second Council of Rovereto' was held between the Republic of Venice and the Holy Roman Empire in a bid to end the territorial disputes between the *Lastarolli* and the inhabitants of Folgaria. The result was that in 1752 the *Lastarolli* were forced out of their village into the valley below; their homes were destroyed, with the displaced being sheltered by families in the *frazioni* (hamlets) of Busatti, Giaconi, Snideri and Posta. They were to stay here until the Republic of Venice had built new homes in the location where the town is today. The name of frazione Giacconi derives from 'Giacon', the surname of hamlet's founders, who settled here for the area's precious water resources. Water is abundant here as the nearby *Val Civetta* waterfall flows into River Astico, with additional water sources springing up at the foot of the hamlet. The inhabitants made good use of the water, powering a pair of mills with the water from Val Civetta and a hammer forge with River Astico. Historian Gaetano Maccà speaks of "a mill wheel, a timber saw and an iron hammer". The water descending from the magnificent raging Val Civetta waterfall flows beneath an elaborate vaulted stone bridge, handcrafted by skilled local artisans. The Busatti families settled at the narrowest stretch of River Astico to exploit its plentiful water resources, as the river never runs dry here and the area abounds with springs. The Busatti also built two mills and a hammer forge. Today, few traces of these buildings survive. One of the Giaconi mills, however, was converted into a hydroelectric power station, producing and supplying electricity for homes and public lighting in nearby districts during the interwar period.

9

LASTE BASSE

585 m slm

31

Ponteposta

447m slm

8

Montepiano

587 m slm

M.te Campomolon
1853

Spiz Tonezza
1694

M.te Toraro
1897

**TO
DE
100**

Gusella
553

M.te Tormeno
1292

Cimone dei Laghi
1480
Castellone
1291

M.te Seluggio
1098

30

Molini

6

7

LAGHI

570 m slm

M.te Calgari
926.4

M.te Sogli Bianchi
1005

Castana

415 m slm

1



POSINA

10 *Nails and forges*

Nail forges were located inside a rectangular room measuring about 4 x 4.5 metres internally. The walls were made of rough stone, the gabled roof was of wood, as were the overhead wooden joists, and the roof was of curved tiles. The highest point of the roof rose 2.60 m from the earthen floor. Spaces were left in the walls for the entrance door and some windows, which provided light and air for the room. Externally, the window spaces were covered by an iron mesh, and in some cases by glazed wooden shutters that opened internally. Even the door, which was made of wood, opened inwards.

The rectangular stone forge, measuring about 1.35 x 0.90 metres and with a working surface from 65 to 68 cm high, was positioned in the centre of the room. The square-shaped hearth, with sides of about 48 cm long and 10 cm high, lay in its centre. On the shorter side of the hearth there was a small wall with a spout (about 35x50cm). A pipe that passed through the building wall would bring in air to keep



Posina Fusine, Costamala nail forges

the fire burning. On the opposite side there was a stone cooling tank that rested on the extended longer sides of the forge. The tank measured about 60x25 cm, and was about 20 cm deep, with a waste area below it. Up to 6 anvils were positioned around the forge, each one made of cast steel and weighing about 85 kg.

The nailor's anvil had a hole at each end; the one on the left was fixed to a chisel, the one on the right to a *chiodaia* (*cioara* in local dialect), an iron tool with a central hole into which the nail shank and point were inserted to form the head. Each nail type had its own *chiodaia*.

To make nails, the nailor would start by warming a small piece of iron in the embers until it became red, then would beat it with a hammer, increasing its length and creating a point. Using a chisel, he would then make a groove in the nail, but not deep enough to separate it from the remaining piece of iron. After this, he would place the shank and point in the *chiodaia* and bend the leftover piece of iron to separate it. It took 20 to 30 hammer strikes to make a *brocca* (a nail used in shoes long ago), but they had to be done quickly and precisely to prevent the iron from cooling and losing its pliability.

11 *Mulino Main (Main watermill)*

Early water wheels used an undershot system, i.e. the water passed beneath the wheel. Flowing water struck the wheel,



Posina, Main watermill



which turned a shaft mounted onto a millstone, a simple model that was suitable on a small scale. It was later found that water falling onto the wheel from above was more efficient, ushering in vertical wheel mills, known as Vitruvius mills. These wheels often required an additional system to ensure that water flowed regularly. Common practice was to dam waterways to form a basin, with a drainage channel conveying a regular flow to the wheel. Vitruvius mills provided more power than previous types, not only revolutionising grinding, but paving the way for the mechanisation of many other industries. Although mills had been used since Roman times, it was during the Middle Ages that they were exploited as technical instruments and became a source of economic power. Marc Bloch writes: “We must not fool ourselves; despite being an ancient invention, watermills did not become widespread until Medieval times.” Throughout history, watermills were used for a host of different purposes before the industrial era. Their oldest use was to grind cereals, but they also drove sawmills, fulling mills and looms; they were used to work metal, powering millstones, forges, and forging hammers. They also drove hydraulic pumps. From the 13th to 18th centuries, watermills were used in papermaking to pound rags and wood pulp with beaters and spiked hammers. More recently, they were used to produce electricity via a generator.



Posina, Main small lake



Cimone dei Laghi

1480 Castellone

1291

Molini

6

7

LAGHI

570 m slm

M.te Calgari

926.4

M.te

del Coston

651

Sojo Lovalbante

1506

M.te Pelle

606

M.te Gamonda

1006

Fusine

450 m slm

11

POSINA

540 m slm



10

Costamala

645 m slm

M.te Caliano

1648

M.te Rione

1691



SANTORSO

12 *Parco Rossi*

The romantic garden of *Parco Rossi* (Rossi Garden) are the cornerstone of a complex that includes the villa with its garden at the foot of Mount Summano and the model farm further downstream. Commissioned by Alessandro Rossi and designed by architect Antonio Caregaro Negrin between 1865 and 1884, it is one of the finest examples of a landscape garden in northern Italy. It is a place where the lushness of nature prevails over human rationality.

A small lake surrounded by a majestic row of exotic, century-old trees greets you at the entrance, wrapping you in a magical, timeless atmosphere.

As you move further inside, you come across all the typical elements of a 19th century garden: winding paths, rustic follies, an aquarium, mock ruins, water features, groves of tropical and native vegetation – all laid out with perfect mastery to create a picturesque setting that never ceases to captivate and amaze.

Emotions are the heart of the garden, which was designed to contain many different landscapes that constantly offer new suggestions to those who walk along the trails.

13 *Il Podere Rossi*

The *Podere Rossi* (Rossi Farm) is the network of historical locations designed and lived in by Alessandro Rossi.

Podere Rossi includes the 19th century villa belonging to the famous businessman, the adjacent Garden and the Model Farm.

The Model Farm, to the south of the Villa, came about as a result of Alessandro Rossi's idea to create a modern farm that would become an example thanks to the technologies it used.

The farm extended over an area of about 50 hectares that included 130 fields; like the garden, it was also separated into two parts by a road (Piovene-Schio). A railway was built later on, more precisely in 1876; some of its tracks transport-

ed manure inside the Rossi property.

Grapes were grown on the part of the Farm closest to the villa, while the flattest area was reserved for the vegetable gardens, all inside a wall which was 4350 metres long. A pomology and horticulture school was annexed to the Farm, to demonstrate that technical achievements should not replace agricultural activity, but nevertheless were necessary for alleviating the farming crisis that was current at the time. Young people from the whole of the Kingdom of Italy would come to the Farm to study at the *Scuola convitto di orticoltura e pomologia* (Horticulture and pomology boarding school) in Schio to put what they learned into practice. The water that flowed freely in the mountain was used for irrigation, helped by an additional large tank built at the Farm boundary.

Casa Gialla (Yellow House) was built to the east of the vineyard. This three-floor building was used by the head growers, the farmhands and the farmers. Four in all, the Houses were named after the colour of the plaster used on them: *Casa Gialla* (Yellow House), *Casa Rossa* (Red House), *Casa Celeste* (Sky Blue House) and *Casa Bianca* (White House). They are picturesque buildings that still mostly mirror their original aspect, which reposes the typical rural homes of the Veneto region; the exception is *Casa Gialla*, which has an elegant neoclassic façade. Following the wishes of Rossi, the portico on the ground floor is identical to the one in the 18th century Villa Zanella Facci, which is also in Santorso. The side façades appear more modern; the architect used raw stone and arched windows with visible earthenware mouldings. *Casa Bianca* on the south-eastern edge of the second section of the farm is particularly interesting because it preserves much of the 19th century structure, in spite of the modifications made to the ground floor. As the original plan shows, the layout and elevations of the three floors indicate how the indoor and outdoor spaces are structured; the façades are uneven and the roofs at different heights, giving the impression of movement. The architecture is pure and minimal, not banal, reflecting the ever-present fervid imagination of Negrin, an artist who answered the true requirements of a rural environment by creating a work that was not in line with the academic discourses of the time.



The other three buildings mirror *Casa Bianca*, but with some variants: they have inner stairs, porticoes, loggias made of wood and balconies that allow light and atmosphere to enter the rooms.

14 **Fountains**

Santorso speaks the language of water, abundantly present both on the slopes of Mount Summano and in the town centre where, over decades, it was channelled to numerous public fountains. Some no longer exist today, others are privately owned, still others are well maintained and visible: all of them, however, had the same purpose and were important meeting places for the community.

Villa Rossi Fountain

The fountain outside the villa was already there when Senator Rossi became the owner of the structure. Today, just like then, the fountain is supplied by the *Fonte Bonifacia* (Bonifacia Spring), which takes its name from the old owners.

Thanks to additional conduits, that same source supplies the water features of the fountains and the small lake in *Parco Rossi* (Rossi Garden), as well as some private fountains where local farmers can take their animals to drink, or use the water to irrigate their vegetable gardens.

The Bonifacia spring supplied part of the water used by the



Santorso, Villa Rossi, fountain

Municipality of Thiene. When Alessandro Rossi made a request to buy the land, the Municipality stipulated that an agreement be signed which would guarantee the supply of water even in subsequent years.

Fountain in Piazza Aldo Moro

Until a few decades ago, there was a fountain at the foot of the stairs going up to the parish church. Considering its central position in the town, it was big enough for a large number of people.

Just like most other fountains, it was divided into basins, each one with its own particular function. This fountain had four: the first held potable water for use at home; the second drinking water for animals; the third had a lavoir for doing laundry; the fourth, and smallest, was used to wash *paneséi* (cloth nappies).

Now, there is no trace left of the structure, but plenty of historical photos remain as proof of its existence.

Fountain in Via Pozzetto

In Via Pozzetto, just a short distance from the parish church, there used to be a fountain. Even though no longer present, its size and shape can be seen thanks to the stone slabs to the right that are very visible (currently integrated into the wall) at street level.

Fountain in Via Murello

There used to be a fountain with only two basins on two different levels at the crossroads in Via Murello, just after the shrine. Today, only a few photos are proof of its presence.

Fountain in Via Masena

The public fountain in Via Masena was made of stone and had a single basin.

There are no photographs showing its original aspect, just some confirmation from the citizens. Over the years the fountain and the whole area were modified and repaired, with the aim of creating a meeting place.

Fountain in Via Grimola

The fountain in Via Grimola is one of the best-preserved examples in the whole municipality.



Like many fountains, it is divided into three basins. the first, called a *làbio* and closest to the source, was a trough for animals; the second was used to do laundry and recognisable because of the washing stone; the third was for washing *paneséi* (cloth nappies).

The basins were laid out in a manner that gave priority to drinking water for families and animals, working companions and a means of sustenance for all the citizens. There is also confirmation that prawns and shellfish lived in the first fountain basin, an indication of how pure the water was.



Private fountains in Via Timonchio

This fountain is hidden behind the wall that marks the boundary of private property. It is one of the thirty-three fountains supplied by *Sorgente Serpoia* (Serpoia Spring), located at the start of the piping, the reason for it becoming one of the first to remain waterless during dry periods.

The photo shows a single basin made of stone slabs, today held together by some iron rods. If you listen carefully, you can hear the flowing water from the road.

Fountains in Via della Stamperia

There are two fountains, both private, along Via della Stamperia. The first fountain is inside the Marangoni property, recognisable thanks to the well-preserved *barchesse* (porticoes) from the 1700s. The fountain, with two basins, stands against the wall to the left. It is not easy to see, but can be heard from the road because the only one of the two that still works.

The second fountain is located in the yard after the barchesse. It has three basins (now without water) that follow the curved progress of the wall.

The ancient lavoirs in Via Rio

There is plenty of proof that a fountain with old lavoirs used to be located here.

The photo shows a woman on the right who is busy washing her laundry at one of the lavoirs, which is close to the arch that identifies this partial view of the road. The other person appearing in the photo is a boy on a bicycle with a large basket of bread: beside the arch, a bakery used the water from the fountain to make bread.

In around 1955 new buildings were constructed where the fountain stood.

Hidden fountain in Via Calcaussa

Entering from the portico near Via Calcaussa 23, you reach a yard where the Grotto family lived for a long time. There is a fountain there, which unfortunately no longer works but holds flowers.

The photo shows a girl sitting on the edge of one of the two basins of the fountain. Behind the wall it leans against, there is another fountain, also abandoned.

Fountain in Vicolo della Pignatella

The *Vicolo* (alley) takes its name from the fountain called *della Pignatella*, the ancient place name of the small valley. The fountain no longer exists.

The women would come here to wash their pots, called *pignàtte* (and from which the diminutive came). They used yellowish quartz-rich sandstone (called *soldamene*) that removed the dried-on food and made the metal shiny.

The sandstone came from mines on Mount Summano and was often sold by a pedlar, called *soldamaro*.

Fountain in Via Lesina

Località Lesina has always been one of the most populated districts in Santorso. This district had many fountains, both public and private, that were structured according to the different purposes: from basins that held drinking water for animals to taps of drinking water to take home. None exist



today, only a few traces remain.

The verbalised memories of Mr. Luigi Broccardo (gathered by the children from the primary schools) recall the points where they were installed, how they were used, and their important working, social and community roles. The text of the interview can be read on the dedicated page entitled "*Testimonianze sulle fontane della Lesina di un tempo*" (Memories of the fountains in Lesina from long ago).

The only photo we have from that period shows a fountain with a single, low basin that some pigs are drinking from.

Fountain in Via Summano

The fountain in Via Summano is still working today, but changed shape over the years.

It once had two basins: one where animals could drink and one for washing laundry. The water came from the *Fonte Bonifacia* (Bonifacia source), the same one that supplies the fountain and gardens of Villa Rossi.

Fountain in Località Crosara

At the fork of Località Crosara, near the road that goes up to Villa Miari, there is a fountain with two basins. As can be seen from old photographs, the interesting thing about this fountain is its roof, which is supported by two columns.

Fountain in Villa Luca

There is a rectangular, single-basin cement fountain with lavoir in the courtyard of Villa Luca (today a day hospital for the elderly and a kindergarten).

It can be reached from the gate facing the small church *chiesetta di San Carlo*.

Fountain in Contrada Grotti

Going along Via Prà della Tezza (the road taken by workers who, from the 17th century, went to work in Piovene), you pass through *Contrada Grotti*. A stone fountain, unused but with plants instead of water, can still be clearly seen there.



Fountains itinerary



imone
26

aviojo
11

ARSIERO
356 m slm

Pria
283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm

S. Giorgio

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

SANTORSO
240 m slm

4

4

17

19

18

14

12

13





TONEZZA DEL CIMONE

15 *The Contrade*

From a small Alpine village to a tourist destination: the story of Tonezza began a long time ago, winding through the centuries among stories and reconstructions, myths and legends.

Tonezza del Cimone extends over a gently sloping plateau at an altitude of 1000 metres. The area is, in fact, surrounded by the Astico Valley, a view of the peaks of Mounts Cimone and Spitz, and the Fiorentini Plateau in the distance.

The Origins

Some objects found in the town and on the Fiorentini Plateau showed that people had lived in the area since pre-history, but above all the discovery of some coins from the Roman era, with the effigy of Emperors Claudius and Alessandro Severo, demonstrated the existence of villages on the plateau 2000 years ago.

In 1292, during the High Middle Ages, Tonezza was mentioned in a document written by the Maltraversi Counts and in another one involving the election of the Parish priest; according to ancient sources, the inhabitants had named different areas of the town after themselves, so creating the *contrà* (*contrade*, districts), some of which still exist.

These *contrade* still remain in Tonezza:

Valle, Fontana, Grotti, Sella, Pettinà, Vallà, Canale, Campana, Costa, Via, Sarcello

The Medieval Legend

It is said that the small town was set up by seven bandits who took refuge on the Tonezza plateau to escape from the abuse of Ezzelino da Romano and search for freedom, so giving life to the first seven *contrade*:

Boscato, Campana, Canale, Dalla Via, Dellai, Pettinà, Sella

The first half of the 20th century

In the early years of the last century, Tonezza was already a tourist location where the Vicenza nobility, for example the Roi and Valmarana families, and above all the famous writer and poet Antonio Fogazzaro, would go on holiday. Fogazzaro dedicated the sixth chapter of his book *Piccolo Mondo Moderno* (Little Modern World) to Tonezza, defined by him as Vena di Fonte Alta (the Vein of Upper Spring).

Later on, even the aspect of the plateau and surrounding mountains was destroyed during World War I, in particular by the Austro-Hungarian Strafexpedition ('punitive expedition') against Italy. During World War II, the partisans battled fiercely against the Nazi-Fascist regime, just like in other areas of Italy.

Between one conflict and the next – more precisely in 1924 – Tonezza became a municipality, separating itself from Forni. It changed its name to the more complete Tonezza del Cimone in 1959.



Tonezza del Cimone, Ossuary

From the second half of the 20th century until today

The town changed greatly, both culturally and economically, in the 1950s when the road called the *Direttissima* was built. It connected Tonezza with Arsiero, the first town located below the plateau. The *Direttissima* was inaugurated by the then President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi, in 1961.



This smooth and fast connection with the underlying valley was a crucial element for the development of tourism and soon the Tonezza Plateau became a reference point – during both summer and winter – for mountain enthusiasts.

An additional support to Tonezza's tourism came at the end of 2018 with Provincial Road 136: what is called the *Strada della Vena* (the Vein Road) connects the Fiorentini Plateau to Folgaria in Trentino, and makes reaching the Alpe Cimbra Ski area much faster and easier. Alternatively, take the panoramic and suggestive Provincial Road 64, also called Fiorentini Road, but beware: it can be closed during the winter because of snow falls or landslides.

16 ***The Plateau landscape***

The thriving nature of the Tonezza Plateau, a truly unique landscape in the Veneto mountains.

The Tonezza Plateau is bordered to the west by the Rio Fredo valley, to the east by the Astico valley, and extends from the peak of Mount Cimone in the south to the Fiorentini Plateau in the north.

In ancient times this area formed a single plateau together with that of Asiago, but the flowing water of River Astico shaped the land over the millennia, separating it into two distinct areas.



Tonezza del Cimone, The Plateau landscape

The nature that can be seen on the Plateau is still splendid and generous, gifting unforgettable experiences to those who decide to visit.

Those who choose to walk along the Tonezza trails may be lucky enough to see and photograph typical mountain wildlife, for example roe deer, chamois, deer, squirrels, hares, falcons and eagles.

Even the flora in Tonezza is a sight to behold. After the terraces used for farming were abandoned by the local communities, the trees took back the land and the forest became very thick – even more than in the 20th century. Many different species of plant and tree can be found there, among which European hop-hornbeams, hazelnut trees, ash trees, Cornelian cherry trees, durmast trees, beech trees, European spruces, larch trees, maple trees, birch trees and, in the spring, cherry trees.

Unforgettable landscapes surround the town: in the background lie the mountainous outlines of Mount Caviojo and Quota Neutra, the Astico valley, Mount Cimoncello, the Posina valley, the Asiago Plateau with Mount Cengio and the ridge of Mount summano, Mount Novegno-Priaforà and the Pasubio massif.

Some excellent points for enjoying Tonezza's landscapes and nature are:

Mount Cimone (1226 m),
which can be reached from the Crosati trail

Mount Spitz (1694 m),
which can be reached from the Tronconi trail

Valle dei Ciliegi (Cherry Valley),
which can be reached from the Excalibur trail





Tonzza del Cimone, the old town at sunset

Montepiano

587 m slm

Spiz Tonezza
1694

**TONEZZA
DEL CIMONE**
1001 m slm

M.te Tormeno
1292

M.te Seluggio
1098

Sogli Bianchi
1005

Castana
415 m slm

M.te Cimone
1226

Pria
283 m slm

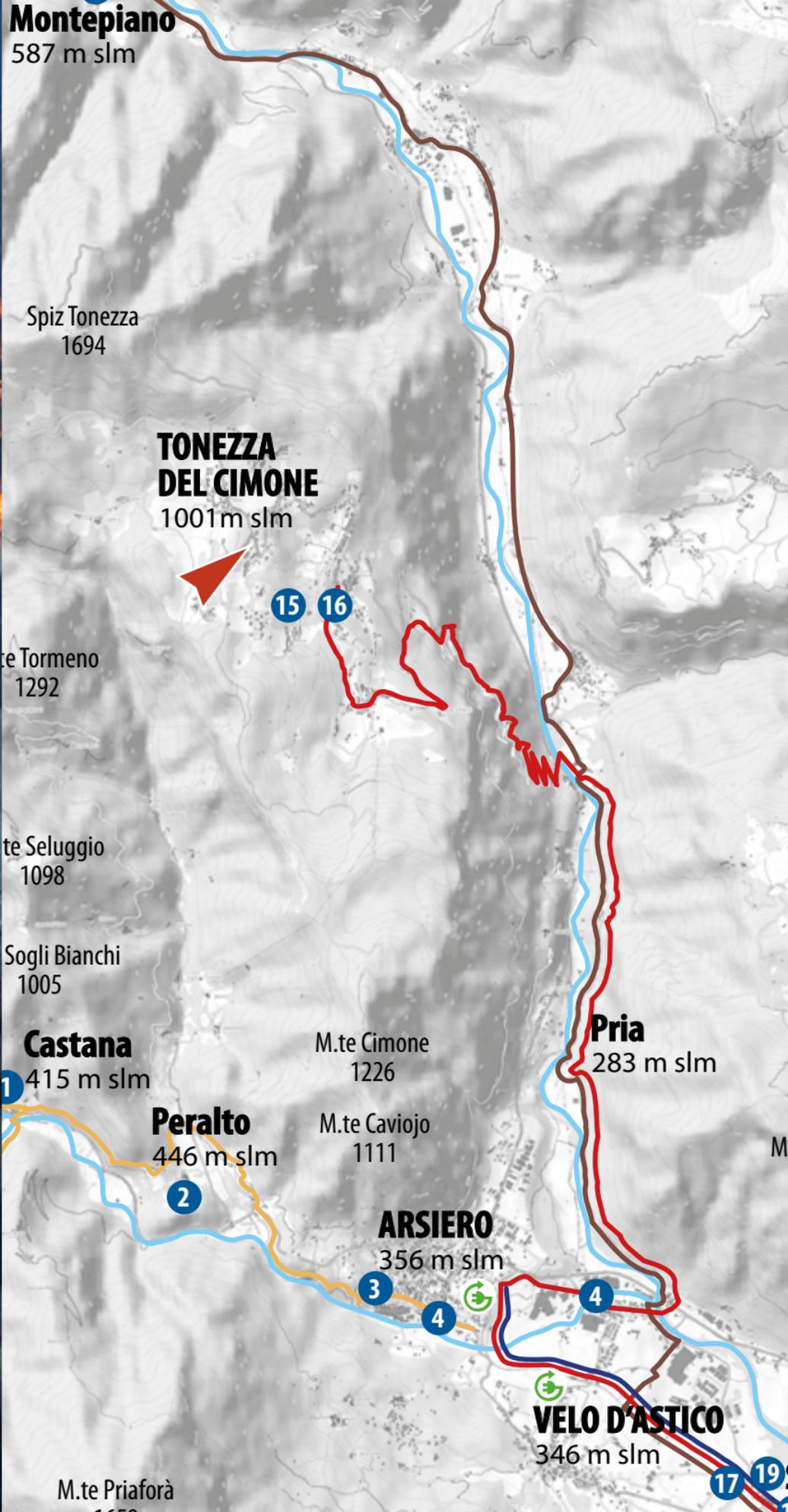
Peralto
446 m slm

M.te Cavojo
1111

ARSIERO
356 m slm

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm

M.te Priaforà





Arsiero, Velo d'Astico
The old railway



Lastebasse
Contra' Busatti



Santorso
Parco Rossi



Altopiano di Tonezza del Cimone
The *contrade* in Tonezza



Velo d'Astico
San Giorgio

VELO D'ASTICO

17 *The old railway*

The opening of the Vicenza-Schio railway line in 1876 was the start of a new era of transport for the Vicenza Prealps and pushed the valleys that led to the Schio basin towards the road to industrialisation that marked the most important changes for the local economy and society. The brothers Francesco and Gaetano Rossi were anxious to connect Schio with the factories along the River Astico, leading to the production of a first plan for a narrow-gauge railway line (0.70 m) already in 1880. In 1883, under the incentive of Francesco, a cooperative association called *Società Anonima Cooperativa di Schio per le Tranvie e Ferrovie nel Distretto* (Anonymous Cooperative Company of Schio for the District Tramways and Railways) was formed, probably the first organisation of this kind in Italy. The initial capital of this small cooperative was 12,300 Italian liras, paid by 11 pioneers; the number grew to 200 very quickly, and the capital rose to 126,000 ITL. The number of vehicles in the company depot also grew to include two special steam locomotives: made



Arsiero, Railway viaduct on Posina river, archive of F. Faccin



Velo d'Astico, railway in San Giorgio, archive of F. Faccin

by Henschel & Sohn in Germany, they carried service numbers 60 and 61 and the names of the main stations, Schio and Arsiero. The plan soon became much more ambitious than expected, and huge investments had to be made to build the Meda tunnels: the Province invested 5,394 ITL for 50 years, and the Government provided a subsidiary of 1,000 ITL per kilometre for 35 years. Even the chairman of Società Veneta, Mr. Breda, answered senator Rossi's call to support the company and provided financing for half a million in favour of the Schio railways. This led to the establishment, in 1884, of a new company called *Ferrovie Economiche di Schio* (Economic Railways of Schio), with a share capital of 1,000,000 ITL made up of shares of 100 ITL each.

After World War I, the railway came back to life with the new Rocchette-Arsiero stretch in 1933: the train started travelling again.

The new railway, 7.706 km long, ran alongside the Asiago line for the first 300 metres, then separated at the first kilometre and ran close to the old railway path, which was track-free and could only be used by vehicles. After travelling through three tunnels of length 110.25, 141.19 and 50.08 metres respectively, and over a brick viaduct with 4 arches,

the railway line continued to the station of Velo d'Astico, going further west than the previous one and whose path was further upstream. The most important structure of the whole line was built in the last section before Arsiero: the viaduct on River Posina with 6 arches and a 40-metre metal truss bridge in the centre.

18 *Villa Meunier*

Villa Meunier, today Villa Genovese, was built between 1897 and 1898 in a place known as Pavin. It was commissioned by Belgian Ettore Meunier, who managed Lanificio Rossi, a wool mill in Rocchette. Meunier wanted to build a holiday residence near a complex of country buildings that had existed since the 18th century, possibly before. Today, the villa still bears the traditional features of late 19th-century mountain architecture, although its appearance was changed by later work: the plaster, once red-and-white stripes, is now blue, and the original wood parapets are metal today. It recalls the traditional style of Swiss Alpine chalets, which is also used in other holiday residences in the Alto Vicentino (Northern Vicenza Province) area. Features include steep-sloping roofs and eaves with decorated cornice; less traditional is the façade, which is divided into two parts that run towards the southern side, making the design highly elaborate. When the surrounding wall was rebuilt and the grounds extended, the route of the original main road to Velo was changed; the old road to Seghe ran to the north-eastern part of the villa before being abandoned, but there is still a pedestrian entrance to the villa. Its elegant iron gate leads onto a small path lined with artificial rocks that rises to the villa's front lawn. The grounds are home to a cottage-like building used for storage purposes that was damaged extensively during World War I due to its proximity to the front. It was later restored to its original design.



19 *San Giorgio*

The *Pieve di San Giorgio* (Parish church of Saint George) is in the *località* (district) of the same name, away from the main centre of Velo d'Astico. Even though its architecture is typical of many churches from the late Middle Ages, it was modified somewhat, in particular during the 15th century. This small church played an important historical role for the area, especially because of its annexed cemetery where most of the Valley's dead were buried. The triangular entrance, which is quite imposing, certainly brings to mind certain Oriental gateways in sacred and profane locations or buildings.

Exquisite Roman frescoes from the 14th and 15th centuries can be found inside the church, together with the oldest fresco in the province of Vicenza which dates back to the 11th century. Ancient sculptures and refined artistic altarpieces complete the internal adornments. The bell tower is certainly from the 15th century, with its pinnacle and characteristic ogival double lancet opening in the belfry. The pronaos, open on three sides, is Renaissance style.

The carved sign on the stone architrave of the beautiful front door indicates the date on which the long and substantial work to restore the Church was completed (1470); the restoration work included erecting the current bell tower, renovating the roof and the pronaos, and increasing the size of the apse.



Velo d'Astico
Parish church of Saint
George



15 16

M.te Cimone
1226

Priia
283 m slm

Peralto
446 m slm

M.te Cavigio
1111

M.te Cengio
1354

2

ARSIERO
356 m slm

3

4

4

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm

17

S. Giorgio

18

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296



Panorama di Arsiero (Vicenza)



Arsiero, Villa of Roses, historical picture, archive of F. Faccin

"I derive my book, in part from other books, in part from the reality of things, in part from the depths of my soul: because this too is a sky full of shadows and stars which rise, set and rise again once more without stopping and there are abysses at its base which the inner eye cannot fathom." A. Fogazzaro

A Trail that passes through art and literature, retracing the literary footsteps of Antonio Fogazzaro, walks that families can take along the road of History. Which 19th century villa will we meet at?



Fogazzaro-Roi Trail,
Stage 4



Arsiero
La Pria



Santorso
Villa Rossi



Santorso, Velo d'Astico, Arsiero, Tonezza dC
Fogazzaro Trail



Velo d'Astico
Villa Montanina



Velo d'Astico
Villa Velo



ARSIERO

20 *La Pria*

Contrà Pria, in Arsiero, is a cool oasis of breathtaking natural beauty. For millennia, the waters of River Astico have been stirring, digging and smoothing its rock to form pools up to 8 or 9 metres deep, where visitors can swim to cool off or discover the shoals of trout and grayling on its bed. Leafy woods and pre-Alpine mountains are the backdrop to this corner of unspoiled nature that has stunned visitors for centuries. Fogazzaro, too, was bewitched by it, to the extent that he described it in his novel *Daniele Cortis* with these powerful, evocative words: *“At the Pria bridge, he pointed to the dwellings perched among the boulders, the gorge a sublime backdrop, and, further down, a gap where the powerful green water seeps, first finding itself trapped, then flowing down towards the meadows, clamouring and foaming as it goes.”*

Water is the undisputed star in this corner of untamed natural beauty, today a tourist attraction and a source of economic development.

In 1893, Mr. Rossi bought a well-established papermill in Pria di Cogollo where he started to produce mechanical wood pulp and plant-based cardboard. An ever-increasing need for water resources drove Mr. Rossi to buy up some of the valley's numerous hammer mills and watermills. In 1895, he acquired the Barbieri copper mill and the watermills belonging to Giovanni and Antonio Dalla Via in Pria, Arsiero.



Arsiero - Pria, Paper mill, archive of F. Faccin

21 *The Villino delle Rose (Small Villa of Roses)*

Antonio Fogazzaro was very familiar with Villa Franco and its surroundings, as it was owned by his niece Countess Giuseppina 'Ina' di Valmarana, wife of the notary Count Camillo Franco, who also plied his trade in Arsiero. Fogazzaro was invited by his niece to stay at the Villa for several months in 1907 while Villa Montanina was being built.

The Villa was vaguely inspired by the Liberty style, with a veranda supported by two slender cast iron columns. Its greatest charm was a rose garden that embellished a panoramic belvedere over the valley below, with its roses scaling the entire façade. The villa held both the notary's office and the Franco family's holiday accommodation. The garden, which was designed in the contemporary fashion, boasted an avenue of linden trees at the entrance and a large lawn with hedges and rose gardens to one side. Opposite was an iron pergola swathed in wisteria, which marked the start of a short path called *Vialino di Leila* (Leila's Way) that led to an unmade town road.

In his room, which overlooked Velo and its villa, Fogazzaro wrote some verses, now carved on a stone plaque beside the service entrance: "Here, from my pen, was born a lady / With white locks and big brown eyes / who called the villa of roses her own / And thinks sadly as she smiles at the thorns."

In Leila, the lady in question is Donna Fedele Vayla di Brea, poetically named "*The White Lady of the Roses*", a courageous woman who was inspired by his cousin, Marchioness Angelina Mangilli Lampertico, who lived "...in the small villa, the tiny strawberry-red dwelling on the edge of Arsiero's plain, peering at Seghe [...] wrapped in roses to the roof", facing the thorns, i.e. life's difficulties, with her sweet smile. The Villa suffered severe bomb damage during World War I, and its refined interior furnishings and the flowers in its grounds were lost. Today, it is owned by Elisa Franco, the notary's granddaughter, who grows roses in the belvedere in the hope of restoring the long-lost charm of the flowers that once inspired Fogazzaro's prose.



Arsiero, Prialta, river Astico



Peralto
446 m slm

M.te Cimone
1226

M.te Cavigio
1111

20 Prialto
283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

ARSIERO
356 m slm **21**

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm **25**

S. Giorgio

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

24

27

26



SANTORSO

22 *Villa Rossi and the Cammino Fogazzaro-Roi*

Alessandro Rossi purchased this 16th century villa, called Bonifacio-Velo, and part of the surrounding land from the Prosdocimi family in 1865. His intention was to create a 'model farm' that would hold the most innovative farming systems in condensed form.

The area was restructured after an exchange of ideas between Senator Rossi and the architect Antonio Caregaro-Negrin. The monumental entrance to the villa is symbolically 'guarded' by two merino sheep, a species whose wool brought success to the Rossi family.

The picturesque exterior walls of the manor house and the adjacent colonnade are frescoed, the work of the painter Vincenzo Giacomelli (1814-1890) from Friuli. The Pompeian style of these frescoes was inspired by Roman art from the Imperial era, quite fashionable after the archaeological re-discovery of the ancient city.

Inside the property is the *chiesetta di Santo Spirito* (small church of the Holy Spirit - to the left, from the 16th century, renovated by the architect Caregaro-Negrin in 1866 in a Lombard-Byzantine style), and an underpass that directly connects the villa courtyard with the garden, so there is no need to cross the road.

A stretch of the *Cammino Fogazzaro-Roi* (Fogazzaro-Roi Trail) passes in front of the villa; this itinerary presents the places and villas that appear in the works of the Vicenza-born writer Antonio Fogazzaro, much loved by his great-nephew Giuseppe Roi, a 'diplomat' of the culture and beauty of the Veneto region worldwide.

The trail, 80 km long in total, is divided into four stretches: Montegalda-Vicenza; Vicenza-Marano Vicentino; Marano Vicentino-Velo d'Astico; Velo d'Astico-Tonezza del Cimone.

In Santorso, the trail goes up from Campo Romano district to Villa Rossi, skirts the Garden, then goes past the *chiesetta di San Carlo* (small church of Saint Charles) and heads towards Piovene Rocchette.



20 **Pria**
283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

0
km

21

26

VELO D'ASTICO

25 346 m slm

S. Giorgio

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

SANTORSO
240 m slm

22



TONEZZA DEL CIMONE

23 *Villa Roi and the Sentiero Fogazzariano*

The road with 24 hairpin bends that goes from Barcarola di Val d'Astico to Tonezza del Cimone was built at the end of the 19th century. It marked the arrival of elite tourists from Vicenza who flocked to an unexplored mountain environment.

Villa Roi, also called *Villino dei Faggi* (small villa of the beech trees) is now in ruins. At the beginning of the last century, however, when it was in its full glory and known as *Villa Alpina* (the Alpine villa), Antonio Fogazzaro's daughter Gina would holiday there with her husband, Count Giuseppe Roi, a hemp industrialist. It was a routine that had been continuing since 1892. The small villa became the home of Mrs. Cerri in chapter 6 of *Piccolo Mondo Moderno* (Little Modern World), a novel that plays out in Vena di Fonte Alta (Tonezza). Built towards the end of the 19th century in Liberty style, it was used for other purposes when no longer under



family ownership: as an Alpine holiday home, a hospitality training school, and now abandoned. A fire, probably arson, burned the ancient stables.

The Sentiero Fogazzariano (Fogazzaro's Trail), together with the Fontanelle Trail, is the itinerary described by Antonio Fogazzaro in his book *Little Modern World*.

The start after Villa Roi

After Tonezza church and soon after passing in front of the Marchesi Roi villa (called *villino dei Faggi* in Fogazzaro's novel) there is a trail that heads south, going down to the right as it cuts through meadows where beech trees and European spruces grow. Opposite, you can see the *Covile del Cinghiale* (Boar's Den) ravine and the *Pentola degli Stregoni* (Wizards' Cauldron), fantasy names created by the poet.

The Chiosco del Gigante (Giant's Hut)

The forest entrance is marked by stone slabs. Passing close to the former *Chiosco del Gigante*, continue left, going up until you cross an asphalt road.

From the votive shrine to Fontana dei Noci (Walnut Tree Fountain)

When you arrive at the votive shrine, continue along the



Walnut Tree Fountain along the Fogazzaro trail



trail that heads left and which soon takes you to *Fontana dei Noci*. Going up to the right, cross the road and pick up the trail on the other side; it rises to the Lain plain.

Arrival at the Belvedere panoramic point

At the hairpin bend the trail continues, rising straight to the apex of a crag. Go into the forest and turn left; there is a beautiful view of Mount Spitz - called *Picco Astore* in the novel - from the clearing between the trees. Continue forward and ultimately turn right, heading towards the Lasse quarry, until you reach the slab that projects from the abysses (today protected by a fence and where some benches have been placed). Fogazzaro enjoyed the panoramic view there so much that he 'allowed' the 2 lovers of his novel to see it, too!

Return

You can return along the same trail or choose one of the multiple tracks that connect the Sarcello and Pettinà *contrade* with the centre of Tonezza.



Tonezza del Cimone, paths along the Fogazzaro trail

Montepiano

587 m slm

Spiz Tonezza

1694

**TONEZZA
DEL CIMONE**

1001 m slm

23

M.te Tormeno

1292

M.te Seluggio

1098

M.te Sogli Bianchi

1005

Castana

415 m slm

Peralto

446 m slm

M.te Cimone

1226

M.te Cavojo

1111

20 **Pria**

283 m slm

ARSIERO

356 m slm

21

26

VELO D'ASTICO

346 m slm

25

24

27

Im



VELO D'ASTICO

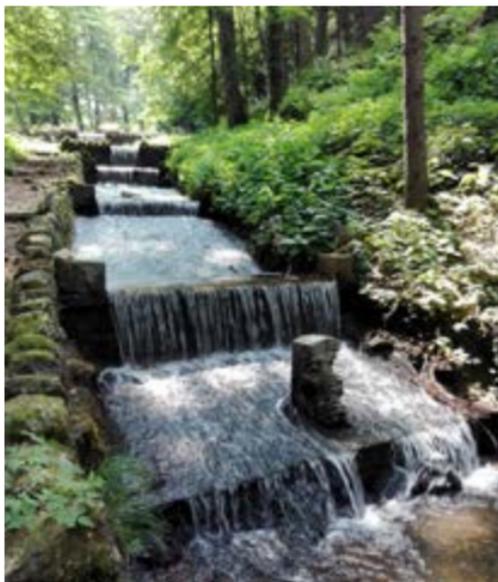
24 *Villa Montanina and the small church of Sancta Maria ad Montes*

Villa Montanina was built to a design by Mario Ceradini and completed in 1907. It is here that Fogazzaro set his final novel *Leila*. This unusually designed villa, built originally in pure Liberty style, sits inside vast grounds with two streams flowing through it: *Fonte Riderella* and *Fonte Modesta*.

Partly destroyed during World War I, Villa Montanina was rebuilt by Monsignor Francesco Galloni, the so called 'Angel of the Pasubio' (as he was known by his Alpine troops) and a pioneer of ecumenism. Although changes were made to the Villa and its outbuildings, the surrounding scenery has remained intact, pervaded by a high and fascinating form of romantic aestheticism.

As you walk down the avenue towards the hillside, you can still see the small church of *Sancta Maria ad Montes*, its small doorway serving as a pedestrian entrance. Its hallmark features are sharp, steep roofs, a 'sorrowful bell', arches, stone columns and narrow arched windows. In the atrium, 'an edelweiss frieze' has fallen from its 'stone drain' and the apse has lost its vineyard fresco and *Our Lady of Consolation* painting, the latter replaced by a beautiful mosaic of Our Lady of the Assumption; its windows were storied by Rodolfo Villani in 1939.

The small door next to it opens onto a view of the stunning natural scenery beyond, an inspiration and companion to Fogazzaro's poetry.



Villa La Montanina and its park

25 *Villa Velo*

The Villa was owned by the Velos, a powerful Nordic family that had been appointed to rule the fiefdom in the Middle Ages. A watercolour map dated 1673 provides testimony that the Villa was there at that time, when it was used as a Sunday residence by Count Scipione Vello from *Contrà Carpagnon* in Vicenza. The Villa underwent major renovation work in 1752 and the finished product is still on view today. It perches on the promontory overlooking the town of Velo d'Astico and lies opposite the hill upon which the 18th-century parish church of *Santi Martino e Giorgio* (Saint Martin and George) stands. Antonio Fogazzaro was very familiar with the Villa, calling it 'Villa Cortis' in his novel *Daniele Cortis*. The Villa includes the following buildings and spaces. The early 18th-century ***Cappella del Redentore*** (Chapel of the Redeemer) has a square plan, rounded vertices, an entrance door with a small but characteristic curvilinear front, and an interesting baroque altar inside. Above the door and its **stone surround** is a guardhouse, whose entrance sits at the top of a ladder that climbs up from a secret garden to the south. The solid-looking **Palazzo** with hipped roof was built by flattening the hill opposite the existing three-storey building. The 43-metre long **18th-century wing**, with the



Velo d'Astico, Villa Velo



palazzo on one side and a country-style portico on the other, has a large, solemn staircase in the middle and houses the reception rooms, with the central one entirely frescoed with scenes from the Napoleonic era. A 3,400 square metre **garden** covers the area south of the palazzo and is surrounded by sturdy walls; it features a perfectly oval miniature pond with a statue of Neptune in the centre that spouts a jet of water upwards. There is also a **rustic part**, with a tall dovecote tower, a large portico, a groundsman's house, a **park** (an 83,000 square metre forest of beeches, pines, firs, larches, hornbeams, chestnuts and alders) and a **lake**, known as 'the fishpond'. Particularly noteworthy is a broken marble **Egyptian column** which symbolises 'blue passion' in *Daniele Cortis*. Fogazzaro retained that it was a feeling to be experienced in a transcendental, ideal form, with no physical or earthly aspects.

26 **Villa Valmarana**

Villa Valmarana lies in the district of Seghe di Velo and was owned by the mother-in-law of novelist Antonio Fogazzaro. Under the name of 'Villa Carrè', it was where Fogazzaro set much of *Daniele Cortis*, an early novel published in 1885. The novelist was entranced by the beauty of *Val d'Astico* (Astico Valley) on his visits to the Villa, and its natural surroundings became the setting and soul of his tale, 'the very backdrop' for the novel's events and the complex romance between cousins Elena and Daniele, two of its characters. Daniele was a count and a member of parliament. Elena was the unhappy bride of a ruined baron, a boor and a compulsive gambler. The cousins' love was hampered by Elena's sense of marital duty and by Daniele's all-consuming passion for politics, which culminated in their estrangement and farewell. The setting for their strolls and secret rendezvous was the vast grounds surrounding Villa Valmarana, the River Astico (*Rovese* in the novel) that flows nearby, and the breathtaking amphitheatre of mounts Summano (*Rumano*), Colletti (*Passo Piccolo*), Priaforà (*Passo Grande*), Cengio (*Monte Barco*), Cavigio (*Corno Ducale*) and Cimone (*Simòn*). On their slopes perched the village and prairies of Velo (*Villascura*) and Casa Cortis (*Villa Velo*).

27 'A. Fogazzaro' permanent exhibition

A photography exhibition curated by Giorgio Lanza has been on display in a wing of a former primary school since 2001. Lanza, who is from Vicenza, spent years on his research to recount a cross-section of Fogazzaro's world, his life and his times with a range of photographs, both original and reproduced. Lanza's exhibition was originally displayed at the cloisters of Santa Corona in Vicenza in 1988, but due to its success and to a meeting with scholar Giovanni Matteo Filosofo, an enthusiast of Fogazzaro's work, an exhibition was set up in Velo in 1989. It was sponsored by the local tourist board *Tonezza e Valli dell'Astico e Posina*, and thousands of visitors, including a number of famous ones, flocked to see it. Mr. Filosofo then planned to make the exhibition permanent, adding letters, articles, paintings and a series of rare-edition novels in a bid to take a closer look at the surrounding landscape, which was the inspiration and backdrop for Fogazzaro's novels.

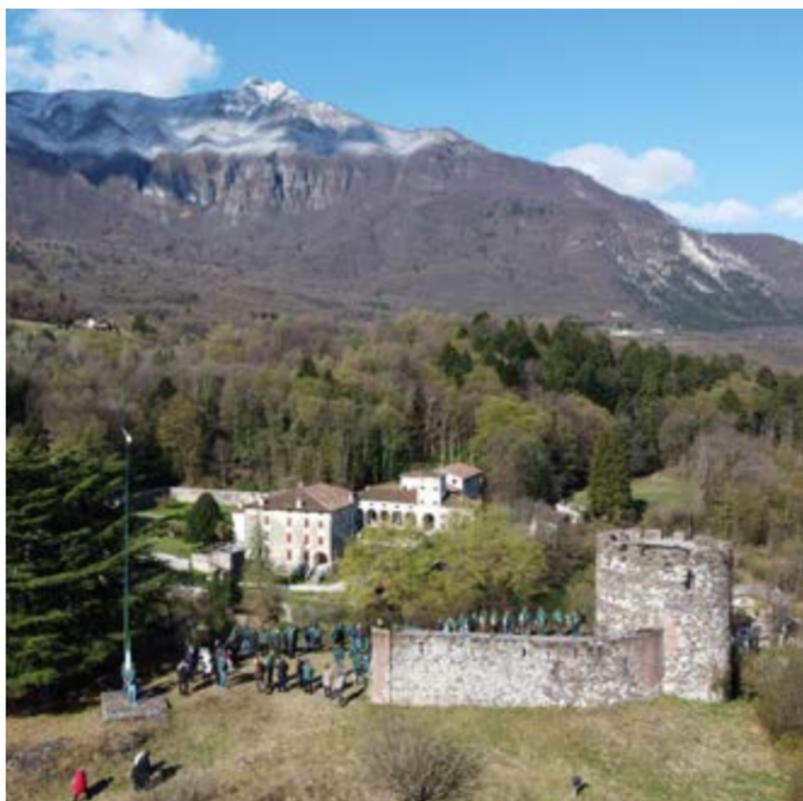
"When we were setting up the exhibition, we wanted to introduce a section dedicated entirely to Velo d'Astico, an aspect not covered sufficiently by Lanza's exhibition. It was our duty to include this black-and-white appendix," says Mr.



Velo d'Astico, Contrà Lago
Antonio Fogazzaro, permanent exhibition



Filosofo in his book “given that Velo d’Astico was such a major part of Fogazzaro’s life and work, with its fiery peaks in the clear blue sky, its shady parks and green grassy meadows on which stand noble villas, where the rivers Astico and Posina flow ceaselessly through the valley. This intensely poetic atmosphere has been rediscovered in photographs by Ugo Zanetti, Velo’s fondly remembered photographer (...). It was an attempt to capture a *belle époque*, one also experienced by Vicenza, that was swept away by the World War I, remaining a memory to call upon when revisiting, with love and pure eyes, the places and legends of Fogazzaro’s great little world.”



Velo d’Astico, Aerial view of Velo castle and Villa Velo

Fogazzaro-Roi Trail
Stage 3





M.te Cimone
1226

M.te Cavigio
1111

20 **Priia**
283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

ARSIERO
356 m slm

21



26

24

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm

27

25



S. Giorgio

Meda
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

22

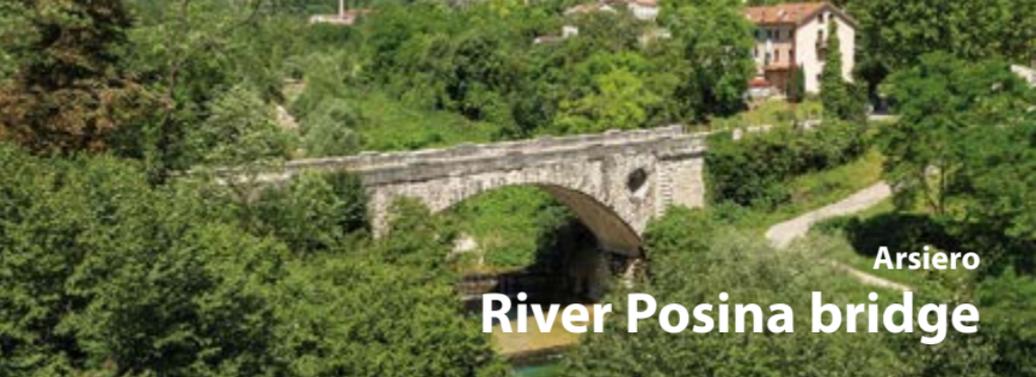
SANTORSO
240 m slm





1916, times darkened by war, waves of enemy infantry break the line of maximum resistance, a few things on a cart and refugees leaving overnight... today an open-air museum helps us remember that sacrifice along with the memories and traces left by the work of the soldiers.

After the Austro-Hungarians had retaken Mount Cimone, which stood in the Astico-Posina sector, they set up permanent defences on the Winterstellung (winter line). The line was dug from the eastern edge of the northern slope of Val d'Assa to the left slope of upper Val Posina, and its key positions, mounts Cimone, Seluggio and Maio, were believed to be impregnable. In autumn 1916, both the Austro-Hungarian and Italian armies began using their troops to further bolster their respective defences by digging numerous caverns and underground bunkers. During this time, Italy's Genio militare (military engineers) built a second line of defences (known as *la linea di massima resistenza*), completing them in spring 1917. The start of the line ran down the side of Mount Pasubio, then followed the ridges bordering the right face of Val Posina until it reached Mount Summano. From here, it descended towards the valley along Costa La Rancina, crossed River Astico in a north-easterly direction at Castello di Meda, crossed the Cogollo countryside and then ascended Mount Cengio, hooking up with Punta Corbin and continuing along the southern edge of Val d'Assa.



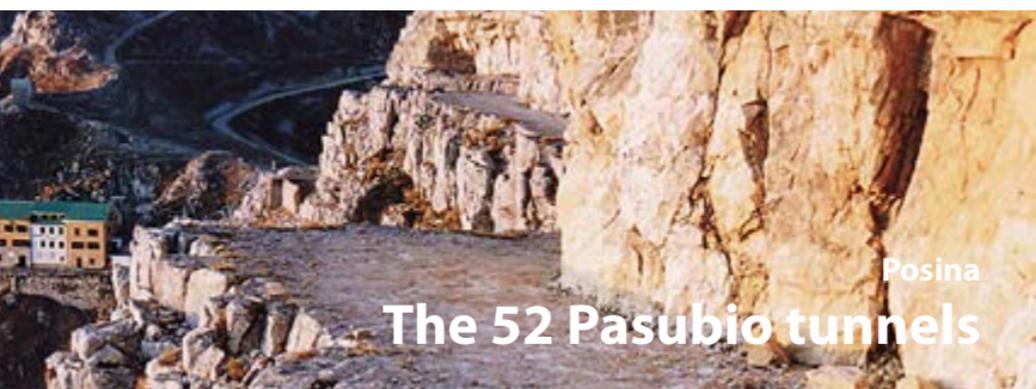
Arsiero

River Posina bridge



Meda

view of Ponteposta



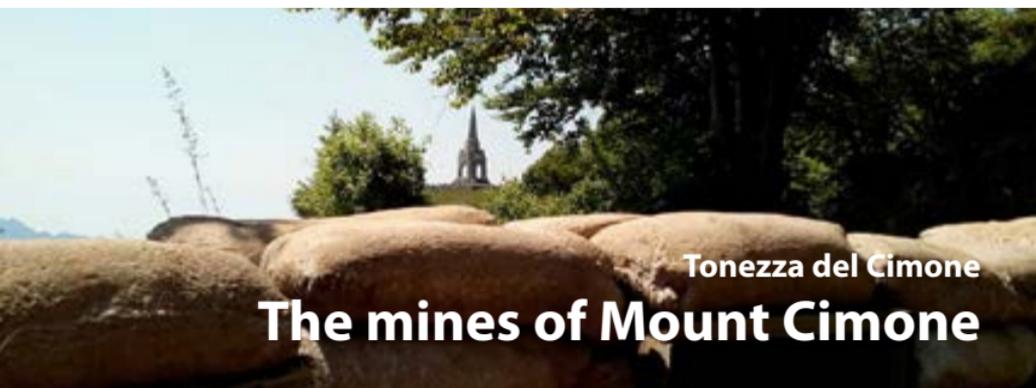
Posina

The 52 Pasubio tunnels



Santorso

Campo Jolanda cistern



Tonezza del Cimone

The mines of Mount Cimone



ARSIERO

28 *Strafexpedition*

While Arsiero was recording its industrial growth and social progress – the result of Francesco Rossi’s factory-community model that created a network of welfare and institutions for the workers – on the pages of local history, the Great War was adding its sad contribution to the annals of the whole country and Europe.

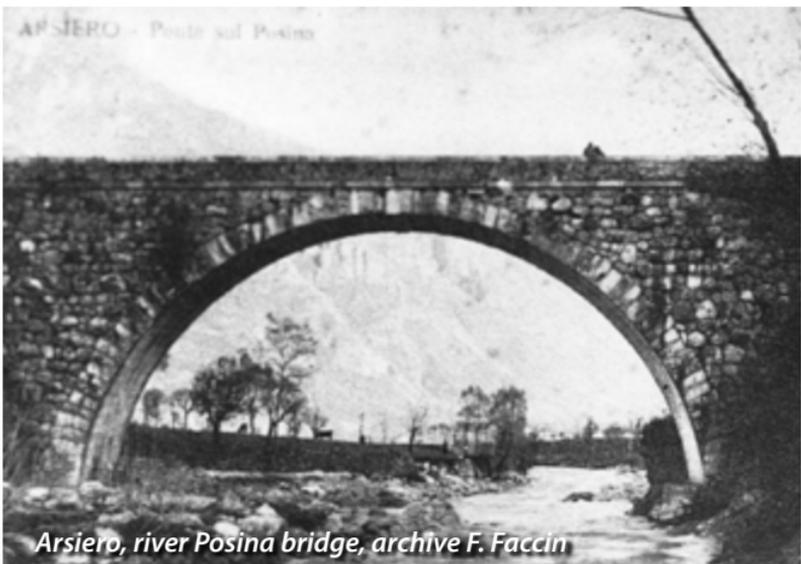
The Austrians managed to break the front line at the Astico and Posina rivers during Strafexpedition, securing the plateaus of Tonezza and Asiago. Arsiero, which was occupied by the Austrians for 29 days (28 May-25 June 1916), remained a strategic military outpost throughout the whole war. It was extremely important for the logistical support of the troops at the front, in particular because of its railway that transported soldiers, military material and food supplies. Family stories of exodus and refugees tell of the scars left behind by the war, as do two structures that are now monuments: fort Campomolon (which remained unfinished) and the Monumental Military Cemetery, which holds the remains of 403 Italians and 726 unknown Austrians. The cemetery also houses the bodies from the two war cemeteries on Mount Cavojo; the biggest was cleaned recently, so visitors can visit and pay their respects to the fallen.



Arsiero, aerial view from Pria Forà mount

29 *The River Posina Bridge*

Second Lieutenant Brandolini was the Kingdom of Italy's only member of parliament to die on the front during World War I. For his sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Silver Medal for Military Valour. While Italy was neutral, Count Brandolini expressed his approval of entering the war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in his speeches at rallies and by participating in interventionist demonstrations. He enlisted as a volunteer in the National Corps of Volunteer Cyclists and Motorists (VCA) in May 1915. The volunteer motorists were awarded the rank of second lieutenant and served at the rear; only rarely were they forced to approach the front. In 1915, Count Brandolini was 37 years old and therefore still required to do compulsory military service, as eligibility stopped at the age of 39. However, his position as an MP and being able to drive a car allowed him to decide how he would perform his military service. When the volunteer corps was dissolved at the end of 1915, Brandolini enlisted in the 209th infantry regiment of the *Bisagno* brigade, again as a driver. In 1916, the Austro-Hungarians launched their Strafexpedition and, on 16 June, the divisions of the *Bisagno* brigade deployed on Colletti di Velo were ordered to Meda to protect the rear line of Poggio Curegno – Costa della Rancina – Mount Summano, Italy's last defences before the Vicenza plain. Late afternoon the same day, the



Arsiero, river Posina bridge, archive F. Faccin



Austro-Hungarian troops received orders to suspend their offensive, maintain the positions they had taken, and arm the defences on the *Winterstellung* (winter position). On June 26, Brandolino Brandolini d'Adda was near the Posina bridge when he was hit by enemy artillery fire that was trying to prevent Italian soldiers from building a walkway across the two ends of the bridge arch. The centre of the bridge had been blown up by the *Bisagno* brigade bomb squad to prevent the enemy from attacking them from behind. Brandolini was rushed to Field Hospital No. 08 of the 10th Army Corps in Santorso. He underwent surgery but died two days later from his wounds. Parliament was notified of his death that very day.



Velo d'Astico, Schiri bridge, Luce archive



35

M.te Cimone
1226

M.te Cavojo
1111

Peralto

446 m slm

Pria

283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

ARSIERO

356 m slm

29



VELO D'ASTICO

346 m slm

S. Giorgio

38

37

Meda 39

312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296



LAGHI

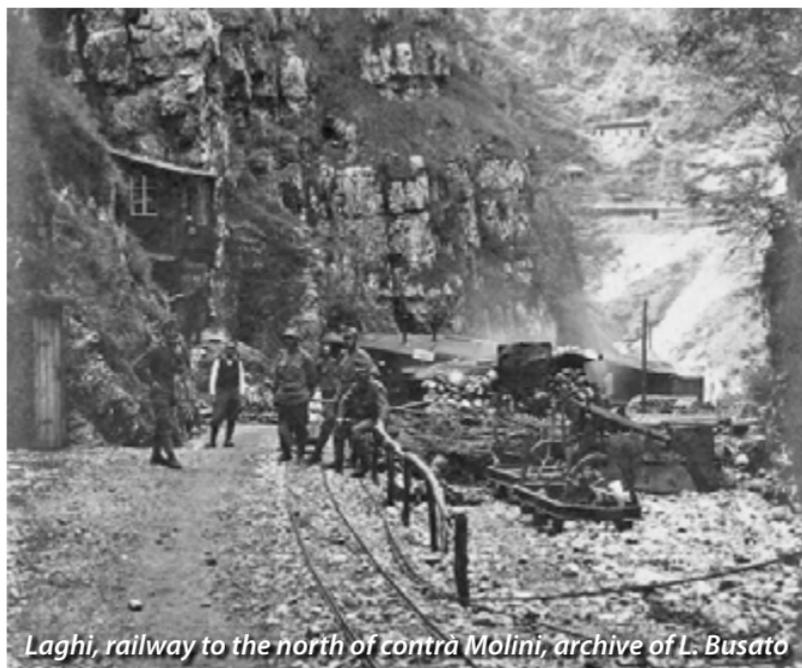
30 *The hospital and the railway*

In 1915 the area of Laghi was close to the border between the provinces of Trento and Vicenza. After Strafexpedition in May 1916, the whole valley was occupied down to Arsiero. In June, the Italian soldiers launched a counterattack, beating back the Austrian-Hungarian troops and causing Laghi to become the new front: the Italians held Mount Gamonda, the Austrians Mounts Majo and Maggio.

At that time, the Austrian rear was in *Val del Laghetto* (Small Lake Valley). A triangular plaque set in the rock commemorates the presence in the area of the *Kaisjaeger*, the Austrian mountain troops similar to the Italian *Alpini*.

There were no roads to connect area where the Austrian soldiers were camped with Trentino, so the only way to receive supplies was on the backs of path-following donkeys, or by cableway from Mount Maggio. This led to the introduction of a railway, a Decauville-type track with narrow gauge, perfect for small carriages.

There was an old field hospital not too far away, close to a grotto and protected by a rock.



Laghi, railway to the north of contrà Molini, archive of L. Busato





LASTEBASSE

31 *Ponteposta and Charles of Habsburg*

The etymology of Ponteposta stems from the bridge (*ponte*) that connected *Scalzeri* (an Austrian town until 1918), with the district of *Pòsta*, in Lastebasse. The bridge was known locally as *Pònteposta*, i.e. 'Bridge for Pòsta'. It is a curious, but common example of a name that originally meant one place (the bridge) but ended up meaning another as time passed and its usage became common in spoken language. In this case, it no longer referred to the bridge alone, but to an entire district. The name *alla Pòsta* or *Pòsta*, on the other hand, referred to the '*posta del legname*', i.e. lumber stacked along River Astico before being transported. It is not a reference to the postal service, as is sometimes believed.

On the first pastoral visit in 1647, documents spoke of '*Chiesa alla Posta di Lastebasse*'; it was built in 1625 and described as a 'country church', namely a chapel for worshippers who lived in remote places, such as Montepiano, far away from the parish of Brancafora. Also remember that Brancafora was, at the time, under the Principality of Trento, thus the



Lastebasse, Archduke Charles of Habsburg sitting in front of Ponteposta church

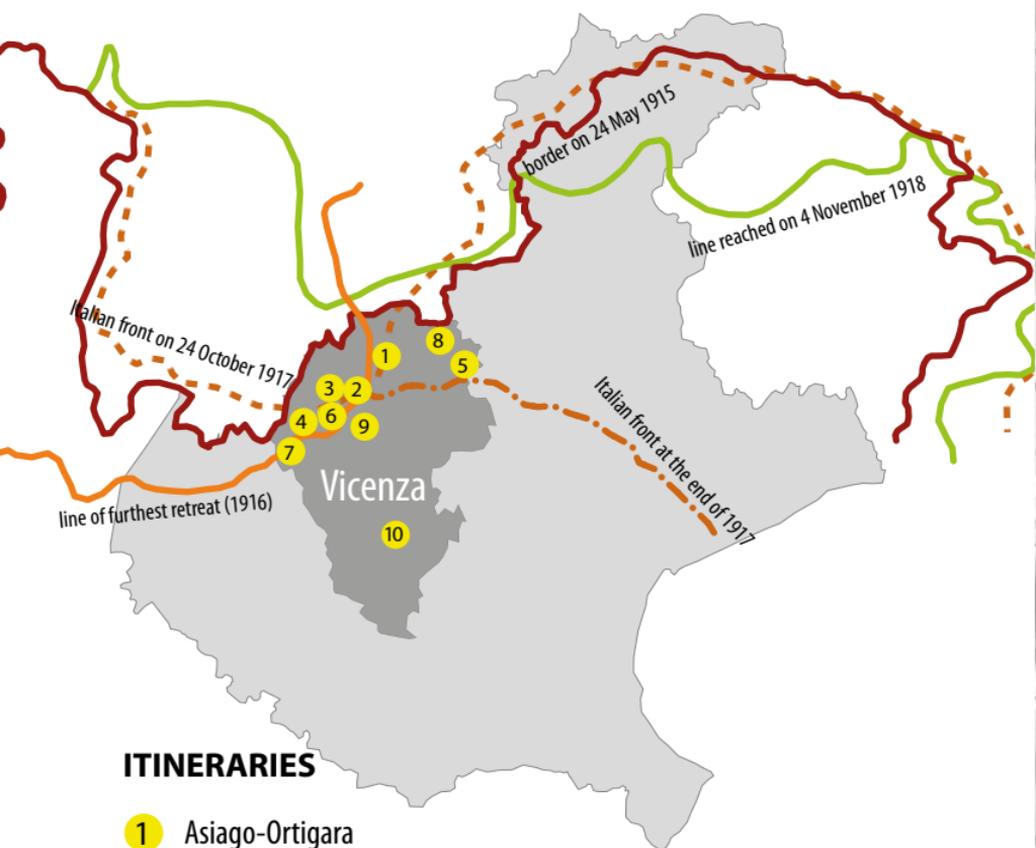
rivers Astico and Tora acted as a state border, dividing it from the domains of the Republic of Venice where the new church had been built.

Originally dedicated to Saint Vincent, the chapel was later named after the founder of the church of Padua, Saint Prosdocimus. It was a poor church with a stone altar, above which was an image of Our Lady of the Assumption. Nor did it have any vestments, which were brought by chaplains and parish priests from Brancafora when they came for religious celebrations.

Archduke Charles of Habsburg, nephew of Franz Joseph, is immortalised sitting in front of Ponteposta church where he had stopped to pray on 24 June 1916. At the archduke's side was his brother-in-law, Prince René of Parma, second lieutenant of the 15th Dragoons Regiment. The two were driving back to Folgaria after visiting commanders of the Austrian division in *Val d'Astico* (Astico Valley). The initial momentum of Austria's May offensive had petered out and attempts to take the Veneto plain were suffering their first setbacks. Charles I of Austria was beatified by Pope John Paul II for his profound faith in St. Peter's Square in Rome in 2004.



Lastebasse, View of Ponteposta



ITINERARIES

- 1 Asiago-Ortigara
- 2 Cengio-Linea dei Forti
- 3 Cimone-Tonezza-Arsiero-Val Posina
- 4 Pasubio-Val Leogra
- 5 Bassano-Monte Grappa
- 6 Novegno massif
- 7 Recoaro Terme-Alpe di Campogrosso
- 8 Melette-Lisser
- 9 Velo d'Astico - Arsiero
- 10 Vicenza-Colli Berici

-  Veneto region border
-  Vicenza province border
-  border on 24 May 1915
-  Italian front on 24 October 1917
-  Italian front at the end of 1917
-  line reached on 4 November 1918
-  line of furthest retreat (1916)



LASTEVASSE

585 m slm

31

Ponteposta

447m slm

Montepiano

587 m slm

M.te Campomolon
1853

Spiz Tonezza
1694

**TONEZZA
DEL CIMONE**

1001m slm

M.te Toraro
1897

M.te Tormeno
1292

Cimone dei Laghi
1480
Castellone
1291

M.te Seluggio
1098

LAGHI
570 m slm

M.te Calgari
926.4

M.te Sogli Bianchi
1005

Castana
415 m slm

M.te Pelle

Peralto
446 m slm



POSINA

32 ***The Road of 52 tunnels on Mount Pasubio***

The flight of civilians and roar of artillery were not the only events to rock the villages and their mountains. Mount Pasubio echoed with the rumble of explosions and hammering by Italy's 33rd Miners Company as it began work on *La Strada delle Gallerie* (The Tunnel Road) in January 1917, a masterpiece of history-making engineering. The idea of making such a road was ambitious from the outset, as it was risky and there were no guarantees it would succeed. The situation was complicated by an impossibility to plan, as the harsh mountain terrain of sheer rock faces, spires and narrow gullies could not be surveyed. The procedure, therefore, was to begin a route and then decide its direction as it was being built. The mule track started from Bocchetta Campiglia, passed through Fontana d'Oro, and led to *Porte del Pasubio* just behind the front. It was designed both to protect troops in all seasons and weather and to ensure that communication routes were out of the enemy artillery's range for the areas of Posina and Pasubio. The hundreds of soldiers who worked the mountainside in 1917 created an engineering marvel whose daring and success far outshone any of the other extraordinary feats by Europe's military engineers.



Valli del Pasubio, entrance to the 52 Tunnels road



Excursions and itineraries

33 *The Great War and refugees*

The first permanent settlements in *Val Posina* (Posina Valley) date back to the Late Middle Ages, when woodcutters, miners and their families migrated from Bavaria, Franconia and Hartz to the border mountain areas with the blessing of the bishops. Life in this inhospitable valley was never easy, with Posina failing to become prosperous under the rule of Verona and Milan, and even as part of the Republic of Venice. Testimony of this came in 1417, when the doge temporarily exempted the peoples of Posina from paying taxes, as their living conditions were so poor: *"...a large part of its people sleep on straw, most of them live on grass without bread, and the better-off live on sorghum bread"*. At the same time, the plains saw their agriculture and industry boom, with them experiencing a period of prosperity that lasted until the late 16th century. Their new-found wealth, however, did not reach these pre-Alpine areas, as they attracted no investment and were afflicted by wars and continuous unrest over the Borcola and Pian delle Fugazze passes. Although Posina was not directly involved in the war between Venice and Milan's Visconti family, or in the Rovereto war, these events, plus the ferocity of interminable border disputes over pastures waged by Austro-Hungarian feudal lords, meant troops were a constant presence in the area. This disrupted the lives of the mountain dwellers, undermined an already precarious economic situation, and foreshadowed



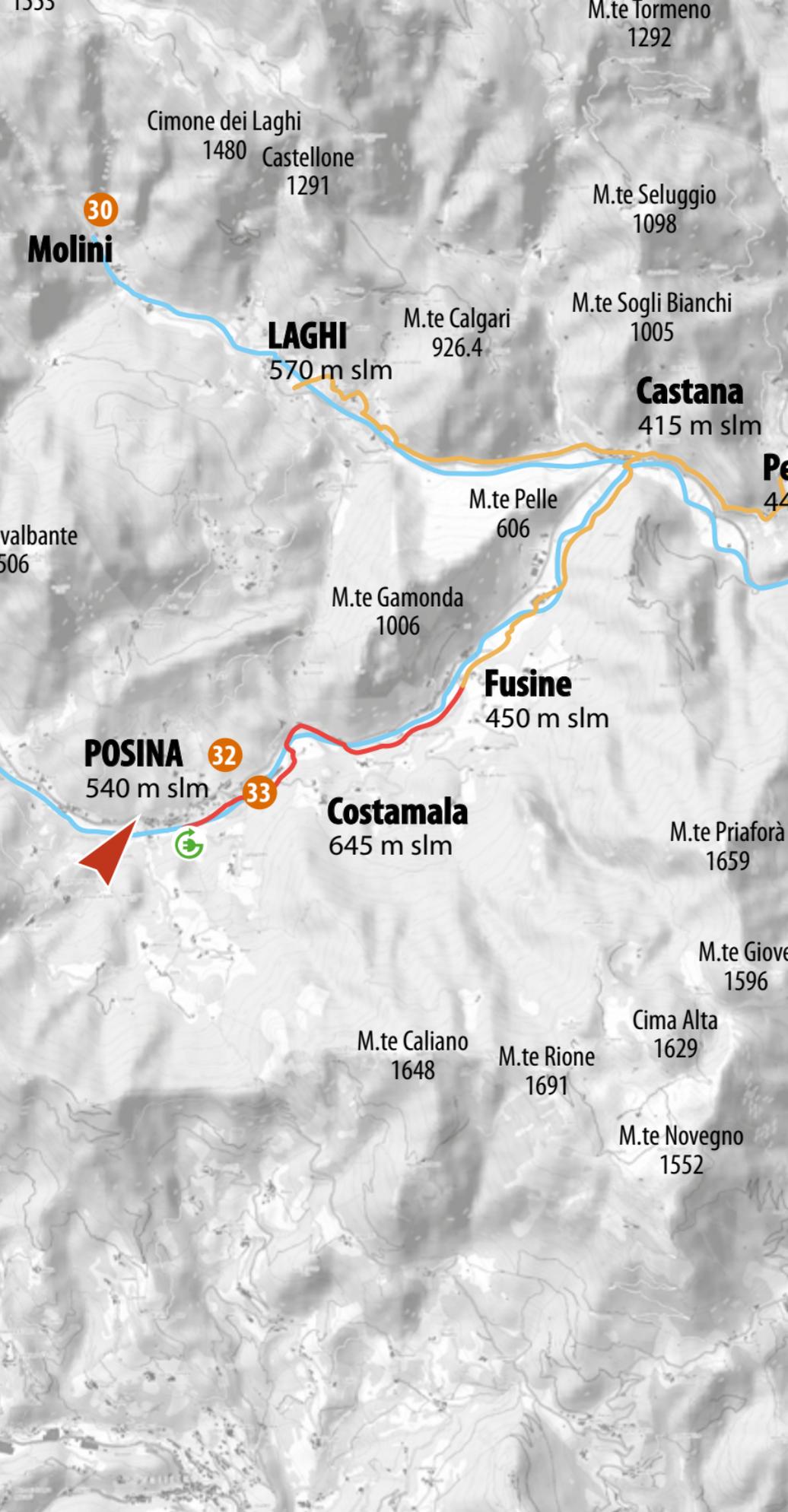
Posina, Main watermill



the War of the League of Cambrai. In 1701, during the War of the Spanish Succession, *Val Posina* had to endure the disaster wrought by a new Austro-Hungarian invasion, which led to its passes being closed and the forts in the Griso, Doppio and Lambre districts being re-manned. During World War I, these districts were the first areas to be evacuated as they were highly exposed to enemy artillery. The displaced civilians gathered in the centre of the village, but overcrowding and poor sanitation led to a severe typhoid epidemic that killed hundreds. After the launch of the Strafexpedition, the Posina valley was evacuated on 18 May 1916, with the military authorities promising that it would only be for a few days. A mass of confused, frightened refugees huddled in Posina's narrow streets to descend towards the plain where they met troops coming towards them on their way to the front.



Posina, refugees of the Great War, archive of S. Battistello





SANTORSO

34 *The Campo Jolanda cistern*

During World War I there was a real military citadel here, next to the border with Piovene Rocchette.

Campo Jolanda is where soldiers would assemble to find comfort before and after fighting in battles, or to drill (the area was also equipped with some trenches for training).

Two fountains and a cement cistern were built there to supply the troops with water. Unfortunately, only the remains of one of the two fountains can still be seen today, standing against the dry stone wall on the side of the field that is opposite the road.



Santorso, fountain in campo Jolanda, archive of L. Bille



Santorso, campo Jolanda, archive of L. Chiappin

imone
26

Caviojo
11

ARSIERO
356 m slm



29

VELO D'ASTICO
346 m slm



Pria
283 m slm

M.te Cengio
1354

S. Giorgio

38

37

Meda 39
312 m slm

Cima Summano
1296

34

SANTORSO
240 m slm





TONEZZA DEL CIMONE

35 *The mines of Mount Cimone*

Strafexpedition

After the bombing in 1915, the Austrian-Hungarian forces launched Strafexpedition in May 1916. The offensive turned the area, which had been fought over step by step, into the last boundary where the enemy could be stopped before breaking through the Vicenza plain. Attacks and counterattacks, attempts at escape from a terrifying nightmare, towns razed to the ground, human lives destroyed: those were the effects of a war that would never be forgotten by those who fought in it and those who lived it.

When silence returned to the mountain peaks and valleys, confident believers erected votive memorials against future wars, while grief for the often nameless victims was expressed by lovingly burying the fallen, all brothers in death.

Cimone

Cimone, a sacred place of memories, can be reached from the mountain town. The forests of broadleaved trees do not fully conceal the old paths, trenches, or well-structured network of tunnels. The crater, formed by an Austrian mine that exploded on 23 September 1916, is surmounted by the bold pinnacle of the ossuary that holds the remains of many fallen soldiers.

The panorama shows horizons where war is now just a memory: the *corno ducale* (ducal horn shape) of Mount Caviojo and the *Cima Neutra* with its characteristic spiral tunnel, the majestic Mount Priaforà with its rock caves. They all seem to watch over the valleys, speckled with timeless towns and *contrade* where only memories can bring the events and tales from the past back to life.

The War Memorial on Mount Cimone

Mount Cimone is the extreme southern extension of the Tonezza plateau, to which it is connected by a narrow flat ridge that extends southwards from the highest point of its edge to below the peak, which rises above it by a few

meters and is largely surrounded by sheer rock walls on the eastern and southern slopes.

It became part of the story of World War I on 25 May 1916 when the Third Infantry Division Edelweiß of Linz broke through the Italian defensive line that crossed the plateau, about ten days after Strafexpedition had started.

The Val Leogra Alpini battalion and the Second Battalion of the 154th Infantry Regiment of the Novara Brigade were able to win back the summit of Cimone on 23 July.

In consequence, the commander of the Third division Edelweiß ordered it to be blown up with a powerful mine, selecting Lieutenant Albin Mlaker of the 14th Sapper battalion for the task. The assigned platoon of 64 men were able to dig a tunnel that was 28 metres long in 23 days, ending with three mine chambers dug under the Italian trench, where 14,200 kg of explosive were being stowed. They used a double ignition circuit, electric and fuse, to ignite the material.

The mine, which was triggered on 23 September 1916, swept away three companies of the First Battalion of the 219th Infantry Regiment of the Sele Brigade and the 136th company of the Second Sapper Regiment. The survivors, isolated on the summit, resisted another hour of attack by the First Battalion of the 59th Rainer before being forced to surrender. Ten years after the end of the war, a Sacellum – Ossuary was erected on the southern edge of the mine crater. Inaugurated in 1929 in the presence of the crown prince Umberto of Savoy, it holds the remains of 1,210 unknown soldiers that were found on the battlefield or exhumed from temporary graves.

36 The Great War Museum

The Great War Museum (*Museo della Grande Guerra*) in Tonzezza is one of the sites of the *Ecomuseo della Grande Guerra delle Prealpi Vicentine* (Great War Ecomuseum of the Vicenza Pre-Alps). It teaches about and promotes the historical patrimony of the Great War that was fought on Mount Cimone, and increases people's perception and knowledge of the



changes that took place in Tonezza during the most dramatic phases of World War I.

The history of Mount Cimone is made of sacrifices and the courage of the many soldiers who fought there, transforming it into a tragic part of one of the most painful historical events of the whole front at Trento.

If you visit the museum you can:

see some reproductions of trenches and barracks, complete with mobile camp beds, that the soldiers arduously lived in during the war

observe some objects that were used by the Italian, Austrian and Hungarian soldiers that fought in Tonezza

see photos and the extensive correspondence from the front, which give an insight into the Tonezza war refugees who were forced to migrate in order to escape from the imminent arrival of the Austrian-Hungarian soldiers

study the places where the war was fought, the trenches and main placements, thanks to a raised-relief map that presents the situation during World War I very precisely.



Museum

Montepiano

587 m slm

Spiz Tonezza

1694

**TONEZZA
DEL CIMONE**

1001 m slm

36

M.te Tormeno

1292

M.te Seluggio

1098

M. Sogli Bianchi

1005

Castana

415 m slm

35

M.te Cimone

1226

M.te Cavojo

1111

Pria

283 m slm

Peralto

446 m slm

ARSIERO

356 m slm



29

VELO D'ASTICO

346 m slm

M.te Priaforà



VELO D'ASTICO

37 *The Great War building sites*

Work at the Meda building site was in full swing during the first months of 1917 and, given the large number of civilian workers (about 400) and officers present, essential needs had to be provided for. As a result, a washing structure for the officers and troops was constructed near the site. The building had showers and latrines, with a tank on the roof to collect water that was transported by iron piping. A burner heated the water used for washing.

[...] the water piping that would supply water to the latrine-shower built at this site has almost been completed.

[...]

The work at the site consisted of dealing with all the pieces needed for covering the hut where the compressor motor was located, preparing the tunnel frames, the washing structure windows and doors, an iron truss to support the motor crane, a burner for heating the water for the washing structure, and other pertinent work.

Captain De Cecco

38 *Curegno, merloni and Antonio Trua*

The second line of resistance that interoperates with the M. Elbele line passes through Poggio Curegno, runs along the section of slope below the houses in the *contrada* and heads down to Meda. It supports the first line in the main area of resistance, and strengthens defence capabilities in the event of frontal attacks from the Astico or Posina Valley, and flank attacks if the enemy manages to take the north-western sides of Mount Cengio (alt. 1332 m) or Mount Pria Forà. An interesting thing along this defensive stretch is the trenches with *merloni* (concrete reinforcing elements) connected by underground tunnels, 0.80 m wide and 2 m high, with armoured shelters to protect the soldiers while bombs

are being launched. Entry to the underground shelters is down a vertical shaft that runs 4 metres into the ground. Immediately after the end of the war, new houses, stables and haylofts were built in *contrada* Curegno, increasing its development. The new buildings were made using the materials - including the concrete *merloni* - that had been left behind or recovered from when the trenches were removed. The *merloni* can still be seen in some of the unplastered walls of the *contrada*.

In 1916, during the springtime Austrian-Hungarian Offensive, Captain Antonio Trua was defending the Astico Valley with his battery which was spread over Poggio Curegno. On 12 June, an enemy battery positioned at nearby Arsiero caused enormous losses among the Italian troops, leading Trua to move away from his observation post and go personally to aim the weapons. He silenced the enemy battery, but in doing so lost his life. This act of bravery that led to him being posthumously awarded the Gold Medal of Military Valour under the *Decreto Luogotenenziale* (pre-Republican monarchic law) of 19 April 1917:

"During animated action, with the telephone communication between observation post and battery having been interrupted, dismissive of the danger, he left the observation post and, completely exposed, ran to the weapons, aiming them one by one at a threatening enemy battery that had started enfilade firing against our infantry. He quickly reduced it to silence. Struck by an enemy bullet, he gloriously left his life behind on the battlefield.

Poggio Curegno, 12 June 1916"



Velo d'Astico, reconstruction of the top part of the trench using pieces found in old buildings



39 **Castello di Meda and the fountain**

Although *Castello di Meda* (the Meda Castle) contains the word *castello* (castle), there are no traces of fortifications on the hilltop. The site was definitely occupied in the Bronze Age to keep watch over the important transit route between the Trentino highlands and the upper Vicenza plain. It is most likely that the hill was first fortified in the Late Roman period (3rd-4th century AD). There are, however, much clearer traces from the Middle Ages, when the valleys were dotted with fortifications.

In 1223, *Castello di Meda* was elected the 'penitential retreat' of Ezzelino II. Once he had divided his estate between his two sons, he settled in Meda, probably to watch over his family's domains, as the stronghold was in a strategic position that afforded a formidable observation point over the entrance to *Val d'Astico* (Astico Valley).

It was only during World War I that *Castello di Meda*, along with Poggio Curegno, became a strategic military outpost. A major construction site was based at the former, while the latter was a maze of trenches connecting armoured bunkers that protected artillery batteries and soldiers from enemy bombs as they defended the Italian front line.

Water was extremely important for construction site logistics and organisation; it was needed to prepare concrete products but also for the hygiene and sustenance of the many civilian workers who laboured to build the defence works.

The only source of water between Poggio Curegno and *Castello di Meda* is the thousand-year-old spring called *della Fontana* (of the fountain), the origin of the stream of the same name which, after running for a short distance, meets up with River Astico.

When work began in 1917, there was a stone drinking trough and wash house. Both were probably damaged by the bombs that fell in 1916.



35

M.te Cimone
1226

Pria

283 m slm

Peralto

446 m slm

M.te Cavojo
1111

M.te Cengio
1354

ARSIERO

356 m slm



29



VELO D'ASTICO

346 m slm



S. Giorgio

38

37

Meda

39

312 m slm

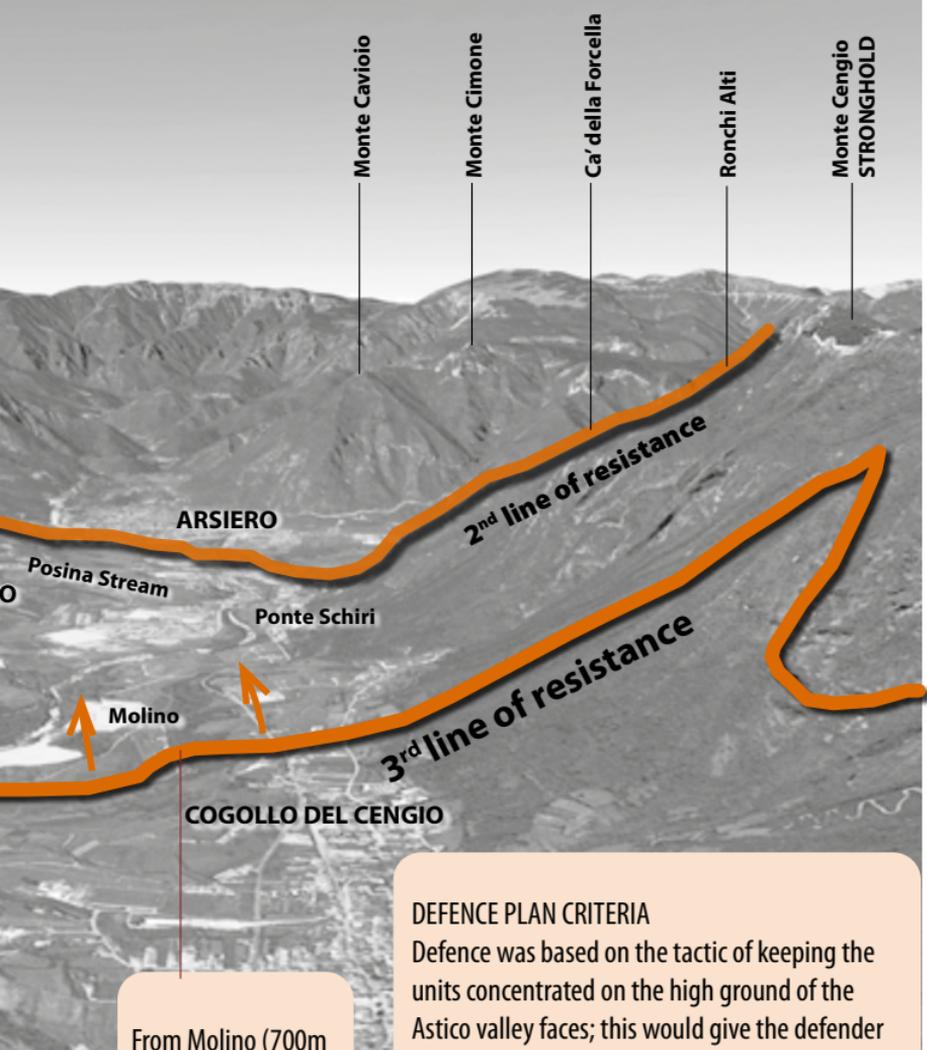
Cima Summano
1296

SANTORSO

240 m slm



Astico Valley, Graphic layout of the lines of resistance in 1917, by AVVI s.a.



From Molino (700m ASL), the land rises gently towards farmed terraces, then becomes much steeper until it finally transforms into rocky summits (Monte Cengio 1363m ASL).

DEFENCE PLAN CRITERIA

Defence was based on the tactic of keeping the units concentrated on the high ground of the Astico valley faces; this would give the defender room to make a counterattack, pouncing from above on the flanks of the enemy, which was heading towards the centre of the area.

THE DEFENCE-STRATEGY PLAN CRITERIA:

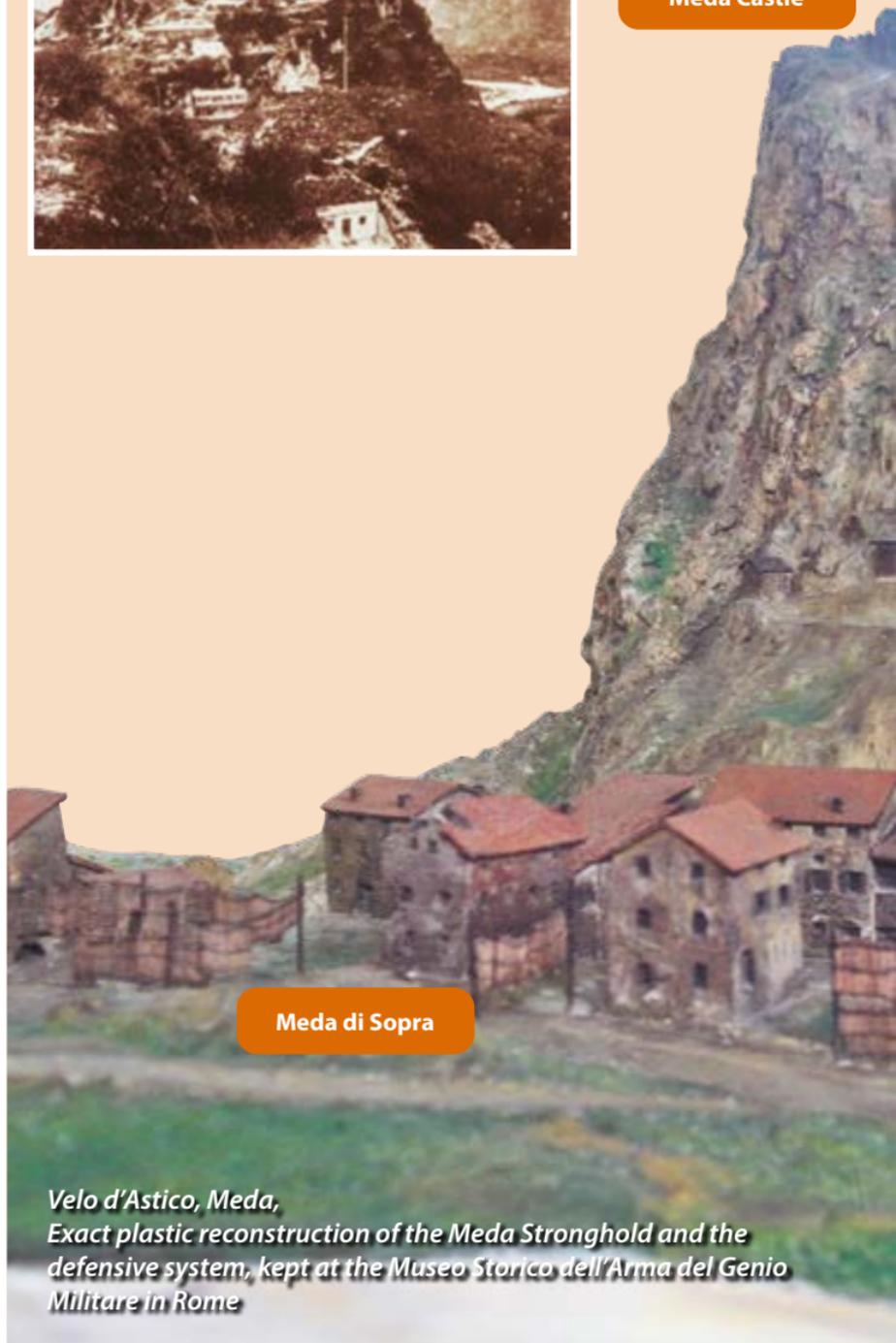
A pincer movement was undertaken, with the vertex at Meda. The right flank of the formation supported M.Cengio and the Val Canaglia blockade, while the left flank defended Monte Priaforà.



THE MEDA BUILDING SITE: THE STRONGHOLD



Meda Castle



Meda di Sopra

*Velo d'Astico, Meda,
Exact plastic reconstruction of the Meda Stronghold and the
defensive system, kept at the Museo Storico dell'Arma del Genio
Militare in Rome*



Tunnels

Military Camps

Cableway

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Tel. 0445 749500 - info@tonezza.it

How to reach Val d'Astico and Val Posina

By car: A31 motorway, Piovene Rocchette exit, following the indications for Velo d'Astico

By bus: For information on routes www.svt.vi.it.

By train: Vicenza-Schio railway line, then take a bus from Thiene or Schio station. Information on lines www.trenitalia.it (train) and www.svt.vi.it (bus).

By aeroplane: From Venice Marco Polo Airport, which is about a hundred kilometres away. By car: take the A57, A4 and A31 motorways, exit at Piovene Rocchette.

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