

NATURE ITINERARIES IN THE PISTOIA MOUNTAINS

Destination: *The Pistoia Mountain Eco-museum: Le Piastre* - The Ice production Compartment of the Madonnina. **Pracchia** - The Didactic Ice Centre. **Sambuca Castello** - The village, the Via Francesca at Sambuca. **Pàvana** - The Didactic Stone Centre. *We also advise visits to:* **Pontepetri** - The Didactic Iron Centre and Garden. **Orsigna** - The Chestnut and Charcoal Itinerary. **Torri** - The Apotropaic Masks. **Doganaccia** - The Adventure Park. **Abetone** - The Forestry Botanical Gardens.

The Ice Production Compartment of the Madonnina (Le Piastre) and the Didactic Ice Production (Pracchia)



The Pistoia Mountain Eco-museum Ice Itinerary includes a tour of the ice production compartment. The route goes through the woods and allows the visitor to see the ice-houses and their relative hydraulic structures (small dams, ditches and millraces),

which, between the villages of Pracchia and Le Piastre in the Reno Valley, were used to deviate the waters of the river into small pools that were then allowed to freeze naturally and form ice from the late 18th to the mid 20th centuries. It was then sold throughout Tuscany in the spring-summer season. Didactic demonstrations on the production of ice are carried out in the winter even today. The Didactic Centre, arranged in the former middle school of Pracchia in 1998, was created with the idea of documenting this particular kind of work, which by then had disappeared. The exhibition arrangement displays equipment and scale models related to the production techniques and some photographic documentation.

The Via Francesca at Sambuca and the Stone Didactic Centre



The Via Francesca at Sambuca was once an alternative route to the main Via Francigena (the road connecting France with Rome) and linked Pistoia with Bologna, climbing up the Tuscan side of the ridge between the Brana and the Ombrone rivers. The path

is an easy walk that goes deep into the woods that starts out from Pàvana and goes as far as Sambuca Castello. The paving stones on the ancient Via Francesca help the visitor to imagine he is following in the footsteps of the pilgrims, the merchants, the warriors and the shepherds of the past while and at the same time, they are an important source of information on the use of stone and the techniques used to work it during the Middle Ages. On arrival in Sambuca Castello, visitors can stop and rest at the Pistoia Mountain Eco-museum Bivouac or refuge, which is always open and situated in the ancient walls surrounding the village. The Parish Church of Ss. Cristoforo e Jacopo stands in the square and is well known because it contains some particularly valuable art works, including the *Lament over the Dead Christ* attributed to the painter **Pietro**

How to get there:

by car, from the Pistoia motorway exit: take the left hand turning for the Tangenziale (bypass). Continue to the end of the bypass then take the exit with indications for Modena/Abetone. Continue along the Sr66 for about 8 km. The Ice Compartment can be found on the way, just past the village of Le Piastre. The Didactic Centre can be reached by continuing along the Via Modenese/Sr66 for about 5 km as far as Pontepetri. Turn left here onto the Sp632 to reach Pracchia. We advise you to park in the car park just past the Post Office on the right.

Info and reception:

Ice Production Compartment of the Madonnina - Sr66/Via Ximeniana - Le Piastre

Didactic Ice Production Centre - Via della Noce - Pracchia
tel. 0573 97461 (Province of Pistoia - Cultural Office)
ecomuseo@provincia.pistoia.it

Opening hours and prices:

Ice Compartment: always open - Winter hours: guided visits only on prior reservation - Summer hours: Jul guided visits Sun 5pm, Aug Fri Sat Sun 10am and 5pm (the tour takes about 2 hours)

Didactic Centre: from Apr to Jun and from Sept to Oct: Sat and Sun 4-7pm; Jul and Aug: daily 4-7pm (closed on Mon)
full tickets: € 2.00 - reduced tickets: € 1.00

Marchesini from Pistoia, who painted it in 1722-23, copying and re-elaborating the upper part of the altarpiece that Guido Reni carried out for the Church of the Mendicanti in Bologna. The Castle stands further on, famous for being the place where Selvaggia Vergiolesi, the woman beloved by the poet Cino da Pistoia, a friend of Dante, lived and died.

The Stone Didactic Centre is instead situated at Pàvana, at the beginning of the footpath that follows the ancient Via Francesca. Various laboratories are held here to learn stone carving techniques, while further details and information on this subject can be observed with the help of films, photos and other didactic documentation.

How to get there:

by car, from Pracchia: continue along the Sp632/Traversa di Pracchia for about 12 km as far as Ponte alla Venturina. Turn right here into the Ss64 and carry on for about 2 km following the directions for Pàvana. On arrival there take the path of the Via Francesca that starts out from the car park in the left hand side of the church. It is a path of medium difficulty that involves a walk of about 2 hours.

Info and reception: Province of Pistoia - Cultural Office
tel. 0573 97461- ecomuseo@provincia.pistoia.it

Opening hours and prices: as this is an open-air route it is advisable to visit these sites in fine weather and by day
entrance free

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We also advise visits to:

The entrance to the WWF affiliated oasis **Il cesto del Lupo** (private structure) can be found at Limestre along the Sr66. The oasis, composed of woods and pastures, is a very important reserve for the study of the fauna and offers several routes marked with theme placards. Guided visits, only on prior reservation, are carried (open from March 15th to October 31st, € 7.00 adults, € 3.00 children - tel. 340 1443395 or 0573 62171).

The **Iron Didactic Centre and Garden** has been set up at **Pontepetri**, between Le Piastre and Pracchia, with demonstrative reconstructions of a power hammer, a vertical wheel and a mill wheel, all powered by water.

This structure is part of the Pistoia Mountain Eco-Museum **Iron Itinerary** (Cultural Office - Province of Pistoia, tel. 0573 97461).



Various buildings, today patrimony of the Pistoia Mountain Eco-Museum (Cultural Office - Province of Pistoia, tel. 0573 97461), formerly used for transforming the prime materials from the woods, have been restored and put in working order in the **Orsigna Valley**, about 5 km from Pracchia. Some of the most interesting of these include a *drying shed*, a building used for drying chestnuts, and the *Giamba Mill*, where the sweet chestnut flour is pro-

duced. The ancient *Charcoal track* has also been recovered in this area.

The **Stone Track** (Cultural Office - Province of Pistoia, tel. 0573 97461) starts out from the ancient village of Torri, in the Borough of Sambuca pistoiese and leads to the largest stone quarries in the area that cover a wide area of the mountainside. Uninhabited villages can be found along this itinerary that preserve valuable carvings in stone, such as **Apotropaic Masks**.

An alternative walk is the sign-posted itinerary climbs up to Abetone from Pontepetri.

An *adventure park* composed of three suspended routes has been installed in some beech woods near the Refuge of the Viandante at **Doganaccia**. All three routes have different difficulty characteristics. The easy-Blue route is suitable for children over the age of 5, the medium-difficulty Green route is harder and can only be crossed after suitable preparation, while the third difficulty-Red route is only suitable for more expert users (private structure, tel. 0573 629391, cell. 333 5392487).

The **Forestry Botanical Gardens of Abetone** can be visited at the end of the itinerary. The garden hosts numerous species of mountain trees and moreover includes theme areas based on the typical species of altitude flora in the Pistoia Apennines (because of their position, the gardens are only open from mid-June to mid-September. Cultural Office - Province of Pistoia tel. 0573 97461).

