

Trekking Roccastrada

The "Trekking Roccastrada"(hiking Roccastrada) has eight well marked hiking trails (a total network of paths, mule-tracks, cart-roads of 146 km, 235 miles) winding through thick woods, rivers, hills and low mountains; the altitude of the territory varies from 110 and 800 metres above the sea level with a whole gradient of 10.000 metres. The trails are accessible to anyone throughout the year.

The hiking routes wind through the inland hills of Maremma that once surrounded the ancient lake Prile and goes as far as the river Farma valley, which separates the provinces of Grosseto and Siena. The paths touch very peculiar and interesting environments. The botanical aspect is various: near Montemassi there are some areas of garrigue (undergrowth of bushes of 1-1.5 metres tall, grown after forest destruction or degradation).

We then can find Mediterranean evergreen oak woods, mixed deciduous broad-leaved wood, chestnut wood and beech wood in Monte Alto (797 metres) Sassoforte and in the Farma valley, which became a natural reserve in 1996 thanks to its peculiarities: the yew tree and the Alpine newt that are the remains of cooler climates and of the Ice Age kept intact by a long isolation. Thanks to its integrity, this territory has a great number of wild animals: fallow deer, roe deer, wild boars, foxes, porcupines, kestrels, buzzards, together with the rarer wildcats and otters. The trails go through old paths where we can find medieval iron foundries along the Farma river, following its flow and then over high hill ridges, as far as the 800 meters of Monte Alto and Sassoforte. There are many panoramic views along the tracks, but the most spectacular and breathtaking is the one we can admire from the top of Sassoforte: we can see Siena, the Metalliferous Hills, the sea, the islands of Giglio, Elba and Corsica.

The Castle of Sassoforte, the one of Montemassi and the village of Roccatederighi, all situated at a short distance are all examples of fortified battlements which are not to be found anywhere else in the province.

Trails practicability

As already mentioned, the trails are practicable all year round as the hikers can find accommodation in the local farm houses(agriturismo) even in winter. Although in summer the heath can be a problem for the trails near Montemassi and Roccastrada, coming from the station, the other tracks are all in between the 500 and the 800 metres of Sassoforte and Monte Alto, the hiker can get some cool under the thick woods or in the fresh water of the Farma river. Spring and autumn are the best periods of the year to go hiking: nature is at its best, the variety of colours is extraordinary: various gradation of green, brown, yellow, red and brown in autumn. In spring all the flowers and plants are in blossom and their colours are simply gorgeous. Even in the middle of winter the trails have lots of attractions: the main one is the wonderful view we can get from many spots as the sky is clearer in those months. From a technical point there are not particular difficulties, however we must be aware that in winter the days are very short and there might be sudden drops in temperature and unforeseen storms. After heavy rain it will be difficult and therefore dangerous to cross the Farma(near Ferriera), in the trail "Belagaio-Torniella" and(near "La Pietra") in the other one "Torniella-Sassoforte" as at the moment there is not other way to cross the Farma river. But again, if we leave out these two cases, all the other tracks are accessible to all throughout the year.

How to read the itineraries

Along the paths there are indications to be followed to find our way.(Our book guide together with the map, can only give some sort of information)

These indications are white and red marks (usually stripes) painted on small stakes, stones or on the trunk of trees. Boards with the itinerary lengths and walking times are placed at the beginning of every itinerary.

We have chosen to use white and red colours as they have already been used in other itineraries in Tuscany: "Anello dell' Amiata", "Apuane Trekking", "Grande Escursione Appenninica", Garfagnana Trekking".

If the stakes are in both sides the road, just before a crossroad, it means that we have to carry on that road which has also stakes on both its sides.

The red and white marks on a stake, on the trunk of a tree, on a stone near a crossroad, it means that we have to walk on the side of the road where the stake is. Some boards are situated near crossroads from where there are more than one itinerary direction, they also and tell how to go to no marked paths. The red and white mark in a field or in chestnut wood where the path is not visible, confirms that we are on the right direction. At the beginning of every itinerary there is a board where there is a schematic map of our territory and our Trekking. Other boards on the paths give information on particular trees, rocks and medieval iron foundries.

1st Itinerary Sticciano - Roccastrada

Development km 18,8 | Time 7.25' hours
Interests | Historical Architectural (La Civitella) | Naturalistic (Mediterranean evergreen Oak wood) | Landscape (La Civitella's area) | Cultural (plots of land traditionally run)

Practicability

This trail is a bit difficult just before getting to La Civitella, it runs through cartways, macchia and fields. We suggest covering the route when it is cool. We remind to take water with you as you can only fetch it at Roccastrada station.

From Sticciano it is possible to walk up as far as Monte Leoni (616 meters of altitude) even though the path is no marked: it is explained how to do the excursion following an alternative route: you arrive in Monte Leoni and from there you go as far as Stazione di Roccastrada (Roccastrada railway Station) and take a bus to Roccastrada from there.

On leaving Sticciano we find an environment characterised by a typical Mediterranean wood of cork trees. Bushes, heather, cistus and arbutus cover the emerging rocks; also turkey-oak trees and durmasts are easy to spot. We can see that wood has been a resource for ages: it has been cut for centuries and only a few strong plants are left for reproduction among those, the imposing holm oak tree (*Quercus ilex*) whose kernels are eaten by wild boar (once they were pigs' solely food) and its large leafage guests game. On the south slope of Monte Leoni we find the typical Mediterranean macchia(1) once again.

Following the path we come into a wood of maritime pine and we then get to Pian del Muro, a largely cultivated area and from there, following a gravel road, we arrive at the Stazione di Roccastrada (Roccastrada station). The path leads to the strada provinciale (main road), we cross it and we then take another gravel road which is next to a house. We first go through a forest of holm oak trees arbutus heather and cork trees, the wood thickens with turkey oak trees. We walk through a tiny valley, to find at the top of a calcareous hill a farm surrounded by shrubs, we go down the hill to a cultivated area characterized by small fields locally called "Cetine", where olive trees, vineyards and hedges nicely sketch the hills' sides. The small cottages are typical of our area: with some browsing sheep and goats, chickens, rabbits, a straw-stack: we can easily see the way these small proprieties were once run as they do not differ much from the past. These lands were part of large landed proprieties belonging to the marquise of the Patrizi-Chigi family of Paganico. The lands were once covered of thick forests which were cut down by the inhabitants under the Marquis permission: the land was first rented and then bought by local people. Turning left we have a great view of Roccastrada; we then get to "La Civitella", a medieval stronghold which has kept many of its original features. Above all a travertine pointed arch situated in the court-yard. Walking on the gravel road, we get near a mound where the castle of Fornoli once stood. Fornoli, together with the villages of Civitella Marittima and Pari, were part of the Ardengheschi county and it is mentioned in an act of the Sienese Republic's Mayor where it is defined the western and northern border of Grosseto's territory: " A GESSIS OF SASSOFORTE USQUE A FORNOLI ET A CIVITELLA USQUE A SAXUM...". We soon get to the main road where the hamlet of "Il Terzo" is, and from there to the village of Roccastrada.

Excursion to Monte Leoni

From Sticciano it is possible to go to Monteleoni (616 m) on a very pleasant excursion among fields and under wood of Mediterranean trees and plants such as the cork tree and durmast that grow on acid soils(Verrucano rocks).

This excursion is not marked, we therefore need to accurately follow these instructions. We start from the itinerary that leads to Roccastrada station, but as soon as we arrive at the cemetery, instead of following the marks, we carry on the unpaved road that bends right. After having walked up a bit, the road becomes flat. When it goes up again, on the right we find a private propriety surrounded by a wire-netting with two imposing maritime pines at the sides of the entrance. On the left we can see two roads 20 metres far one another (the first goes down, the second up) and we walk on to find Fonte Vecchia, the Old Fountain, one km far from the village. Ten metres before the wire-netting ends, there is a turning and we take the road on the left. At the next turning we take another road on the left which goes up to a steep slope. The opposite road is connected to this one further up: it is less steep but much longer. At the top of the slope there are two roads on the right: the second one rejoins the less steep and longer road. In this spot we get a great view of the plain as far as the sea, with Sticciano and Montemassi, the two ends of these itineraries. Walking for about 200 metres, on the left we find a gate, we walk for another km (on our left there is a barbed wire-netting).We turn left walking up, with the netting on our left, on a path that does not follow the road but orthogonally detours it. This is the boundary between the no-hunting zone and the Azienda Faunistica Venatoria "I Murali" as we can see from the signs.

At the end of the slope , on the left, we can find a way through the netting, going up 200 metres we get to the top of Monte Leoni, topographic point of the Military Geographic Institute, which is marked with some stones. Just beyond the netting, we have to cross a chain of stones that encircles the top of the mount: these are the ruins of a pre-Etruscan settlement. We are in the middle of a striking wood of turkey oak trees with an under wood of heather and holly trees that are periodically cut.

In some periods of the year, on the top of the mount we can get a grand panoramic view :can admire the islands, the sea and inland, all the itineraries of our trekking.

2nd Itinerary Roccastrada - Belagaio Castle

Development: Km 14,6 | Time: 4.50 hours

Interests | Historical Architectural (Belagaio Castle) | Geological (outcrop of Rhyolite in the Pescine's area) | Botanical (durmast-cork-turkey wood on Lanzo torrent and monumental turkey trees on Belagaio road)

Practicability

It is a bit difficult only in the trail that from the Gretano torrent goes up the slope of Poggio al Sugherone, almost the entire itinerary runs on cartways, through fields and woods. half way to Roccastada we suggest covering the route when it is cool. Water can be fetched along the route.

This itinerary leads us to the Farma valley, a very interesting environment under both the ecological and the botanical aspect.

On the hill that goes down from Roccastrada to the Gretano torrent, we get through crops and Mediterranean macchia. It is a varied landscape divided into small fields which are very fertile thanks to the presence of Rhyolite rocks(that we can see emerging just beyond a farm called "Le Pescine"). We then find two springs: the first one is named "Fonte Forna", from which locals once fetched its pure waters.

On reaching the Gretano torrent, we cross the border between the two municipalities of Civitella Paganico and Roccastrada; we cross it all the way up. We then enter a wood of holm , cork , turkey oaks ,durmast and arbustus trees. The soil has also changed: we find Verrucano rock instead of rhyolite. Going down we come into a forest of impressive Turkey oaks that takes us as far as the gravel stone road of Belagaio: at its sides secular Turkey oaks give the road a solemn look. These oaks have been preciously kept by the Grottenelli family. We then arrive to the castle of Belagaio, which was built in the twelfth century but it has been entirely restored. The state bought it in 1969.The castle surrounded by lovely hills, fields and grazing Maremma horses , gives a suggestive and relaxing atmosphere.

3rd Itinerary Belagaio Castle - Torniella

Development: 17,2 Km | Time: 4,20 hours

Interests | Historical Architectural (Belagaio Castle - Iron foundries) | Geological (outcrop of Verrucano, Canaloni) | Botanical (Durmast-Maple-Lime-Riparian Vegetation | Faunal (Hawks-Wild boar-Roe deer)

Practicability

Easy trail, winding through woods fields and pastures and occasionally on cartways it can be practicable in every season. Possibility of bathing in the Farma river (remarkable are the Canaloni). Water can be fetched along the route.

This is the "Ferriere" (iron foundries)itinerary. It is interesting for its botanical aspect: from the castle to the torrent Farma we find many species of trees such as the durmast, the lime and the maple. The "Poggio alle Macine" slope has a series of vertical bents where vegetation grows. The dominant species are: homl oak, arbutus, heather, going down to the small valleys we find durmasts, turkey oaks; poplar and ash trees along creeks.

Just after having crossed the Farma, we find the ruins of the first iron foundry, we then walk near some fine poplars and then next to the dyke which was once a barrier for the water used for the foundry.

Keep on walking along the torrent bank (which is on our left), we get to the "Canaloni", a place where the torrent has dug out some pools on the rocks: in summer we can have cooling baths and sunbathe on the stones or on tiny sandy beaches.

Keep on walking for other 600 metres, where the path detours on the right on leaving the torrent, we get near two water springs and after having covered part of a gravel road we get to the other iron foundry's dyke. (If we find it difficult to cross the dyke we can easily arrive in Torniella covering all the gravel road as far as the no 73 road, Senese-Aretina).We carry on, walking through very pleasant fields, particularly beautiful in spring with various kind of wild orchids in blossom. After a while we can see the second iron foundry: it is a stone building, recently restored. We then walk under a chestnut tree wood to find a very peculiar engraved fountain with a stone chair by its side and we arrive in Torniella.

4th Itinerary Torniella - Sassofortino or Roccatederighi

Development: km 19,8 | Time 7.35 hours

Interests | Archaeological (Sassoforte Castle) | Geological (La Pietra-Outcrop of Rhyolite in Sassoforte) | Botanical (Chestnut wood-Turkey wood-riparian vegetation along the Bardellone Torrent-Beech trees in Sassoforte) | Faunal (Wild boar-Roe deer-Hawks) | Landscape (on the top of Sassoforte-La Pietra)

Practicability

Difficult because of its length and the part that goes up to Sassoforte, it runs for almost its entire length along paths through forest and chestnut wood. It is practicable in every season and water can be fetched along the trail.

On leaving Torniella, after having gone through a chestnut tree wood we get to an old farm called "La Pieve". Walking on the road that goes down through a turkey oaks wood, we reach the Farma and we have to cross. If it has recently rained and the water level is too high, we can walk along the fields' edges and through a hundred metres of wood and then get to the bridge of the road no 73, Senese-Aretina. To get back to our itinerary, left the bridge we walk on for about 1 km where we turn left on a unpaved road; on the right there is a farm called Santa Sicutera. After about 300 metres the road wades the Farmulla torrent and after other 300 hundred metres, we find the path, fording height, at the opposite side of the torrent's bank. Keeping left, walking on the unpaved road, we get to a small disused jasper quarry, just below a rock spur called "La Pietra", which gives the name to a small Natural Reserve between the Farma and Farmulla torrents, from here we get a wonderful view of the Bardellone valley and Monte Alto. We can admire a large wooded area, which gives the best of itself in autumn thanks to the colours of the leaves: it is a vast area characterised by heterogeneous coppice wood, thick and intricate under wood of shrubs, a perfect environment for wild boar, which is widely hunted here. Hunting is practised during winter. Sometimes hunters get involved in shooting accidents but dogs are more at risk: they very often get attacked by wild animals and get seriously wounded.

Just before getting to the Farma, we find a spring, once surrounded by secular alders.

We walk on, crossing the Farma by the Bardellone bank, for a long way. It is a pleasant environment, in spring it is full of flowers such as primroses and violets that embellish a wood of poplars, alders, maples, turkey oaks, hornbeams, and beeches. We walk near the ruins of an old mill and some spring waters called "Le Vene".

We get to a pond named "Pozzo alle Pecore", we keep on walking through "Poggio del Castagno" to get to Sassoforte. We take the road that starts from a farm (called Poggio al Castagno itself) and we then get to another road that can be a short cut (if taken eastward) to arrive in Sassoforte (2 km) without following the marked indications. We then enter the chestnut wood of Sassoforte with its secular trees, among huge rocks and striking sheer walls. And after the final ascent, we find ourselves on a plateau where imposing beech trees grow. Here there are the ruins of Sassoforte Castle, an impressive strong hold destroyed by the Republic of Siena in the fifteen century. We then walk down on a path which goes through a coppiced wood and part of a chestnut wood, as far as the panoramic road of San Martino to find the indication of our Trekking: turning right we arrive in Roccatederighi, turning left, in Sassofortino.

5th Itinerary Piloni - Sassofortino or Roccatederighi

Development km 15,7 | Time 7.5' hours

Interests | Archaeological (Sassoforte Castle) | Geological (Outcrop of Rhyolite in Sassoforte) | Botanical (Beech trees in Monte Alto and Sassoforte - Yew trees in Monte Alto and along the Seguentina Torrent)

Practicability

If it is covered throughout its length, this route can be difficult. It runs through paths, woods, and it is practicable in every season. Water can be fetched along the route.

We leave the hamlet of Piloni walking towards the old kaolin quarries and then through a abandoned chestnut wood which was once the solely sustain of the local economy. We arrive to Monte Alto (797 metres above the sea level), the highest mount of Roccastrada district. Atop we can notice a small tower built to sight fires. Between the northern and the southern side of Monte Alto there is sharp change in vegetation: chestnut and beech trees give way to turkey oak trees. We walk on to find a spring called "La Polla", towered by enormous beech trees, summer stopover for those who want to have a rest and drink its fresh water. The Seguentina torrent has its source here. Along these steep slopes, thanks to the peculiar climate of this narrow valley, grow a colony of yew trees. On the map there is an optional route that follows the torrent, we then see a ditch on the right and in the middle of an open space, a beautiful yew majestically stands. To go back to the itinerary, we go up the ditch, and then we turn left when we get to the road. Walking to the right we pass "Poggio ai Tuoni" and under a high voltage trellis. We walk through a wood of chestnut trees as far as a carriage way and from there to a gravel stone road, which is a short cut to Sassofortino (2 km). However, if we follow the trail, we get to the Bardellone torrent and then to the "Pozzo alle Pecore" pond: we are on the itinerary no 5, Regoni - Sassofortino.

6th Itinerary Sassofortino - Montemassi

Development: 15,8 Km | Time: 5,00 hours

Interests | Historical Architectural (Pieve di Caminino) | Geological (Calcareous Fossils) | Botanical (Lavender and Cistus near Montemassi) | Landscape (Pagiano-Road on the way to the Asina's dyke-Poggio Colombo)

Practicability

Medium difficulty. It runs through paths and cartways, fields and woods. We suggest covering this route when it is cool. Possibility of fetching water along the trail.

We leave Sassofortino walking through small crops, Macchia, vineyards and pastures, an area rich in calcareous fossils where it is easy to find imprints of bivalves and gasteropoda where the fields are ploughed. In the whole area, especially on the highest part of the hill, huge oaks stand out on the fields. They were once very common, kept for their acorns and also for the precious shade they gave to the ploughmen when they rested. These oaks are nowadays cut down to give space to the work of tractors. We keep on walking through crops and woods of cork trees, to find ourselves in the "Pagiano" area where chestnut trees easily grow thanks to the presence of a plate of rhyolite, we then find holm trees and we get to the "Pieve of Caminino". By the asphalted road there is the Oratory of Saint Feriolo, where it is said the Saint was martyred. Pilgrimage to this place only ended a few decades ago: people came in spring to pray that they would have plenty of water for their crops. Pilgrims would put a herring on the Saint painting, near his mouth so that it might recall him the idea of the refreshing water. We carry on crossing the asphalted road that leads to Sassofortino; we go through an under wood of cistus and lavender together with arbutus heather and huge cork trees. Going down to the dyke of the torrent Asina, we find the itinerary that comes from Roccatederighi, through "Poggio Colombo" we arrive in Montemassi.

7th Itinerary Roccatederighi - Montemassi

Development: 8,3 Km | Time: 3 hours

Interests | Naturalistic (Chestnut wood-evergreen Mediterranean Oak wood) | Landscape (Road on the way to the Asina's dyke - Poggio Colombo)

Practicability

This route is not very difficult. It runs on cartways through field or woods, we suggest covering it when it is cool. Remember to bring water with you as it is not possible to get water along the trails.

The first part of this itinerary goes through chestnut trees woods and crops going round the Rhyolitic spur on which Roccatederighi was built. In this part of the paths there is a botanical curiosity: the prickly broom (*Ulex europaeus*), which is not to be found anywhere else in our Municipality. Crops and olive trees becomes now predominant: they divide the land into small proprieties, giving the territory its characteristic aspect. We carry on towards the valley: behind us Roccatederighi's church and the bell tower are easily spotted among the Rhyolitic rock spurs.

We then get to the dyke of the torrent Asina and we take the gravel road leading to Montemassi. There are no more crops but woods of turkey oak, arbutus, heather and cystisus. Further up we can enjoy a wonderful view from two panoramic spots: the upper part of the road we are on from which we can see the village of Roccatederighi with the side of the mound sketched with edges, rows of olive trees surrounded by woods. The other spot is Poggio Colombo from which we can get a 360° view.