

RUN
04

the walk
**Bagni di Montecatini -
Montecatini Alto Castle**

THE COUNTRYSIDE AND THE GARDEN CITY

INSTRUCTIONS

Trail difficulty level: Medium

Trail length: approx. 8 km

Minimum altitude: 50 m

Maximum altitude: 270 m

Total uphill: 2,5 km ca.

Total downhill: 3,5 km

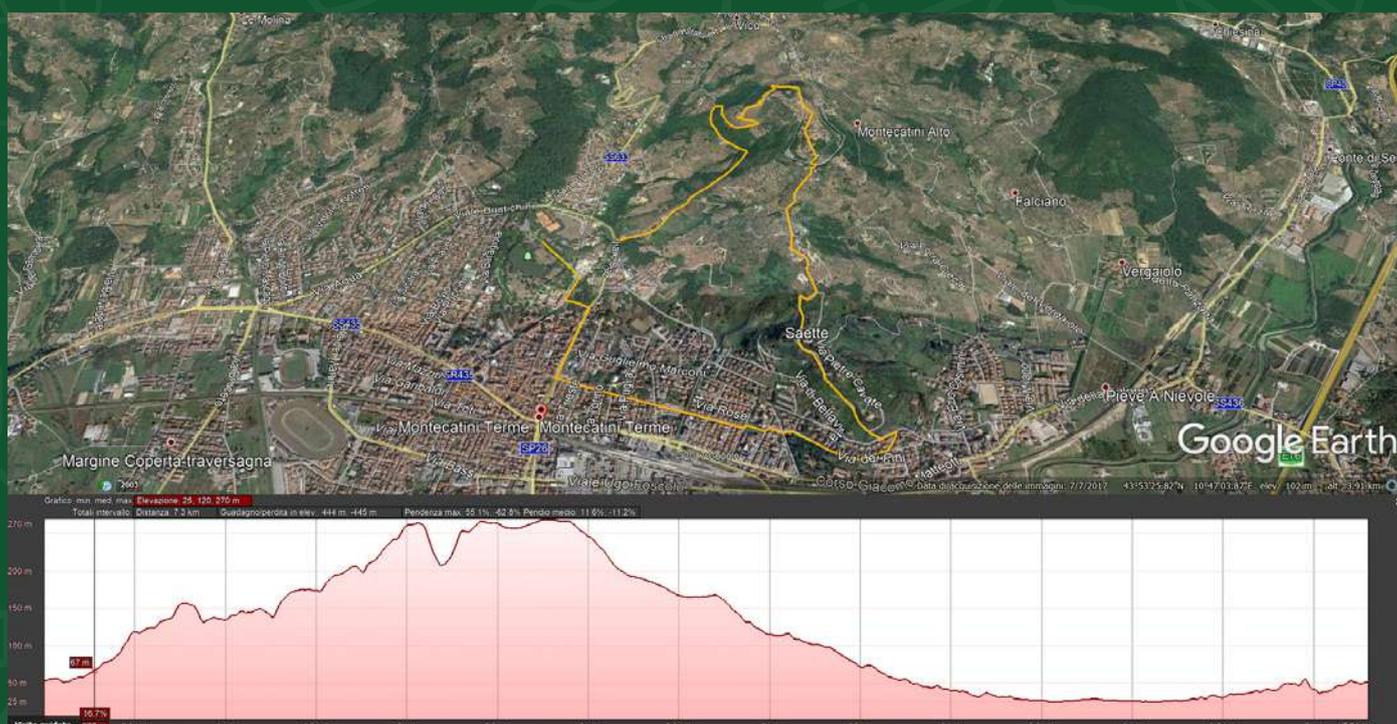
Surface: Asphalt road, stones, clay, grass.

Tips: Bring hiking shoes, water and energy bars. Be careful when crossing the Municipal Road.

Approx. time to complete track stops included is 2/3 hours (half day excursion).

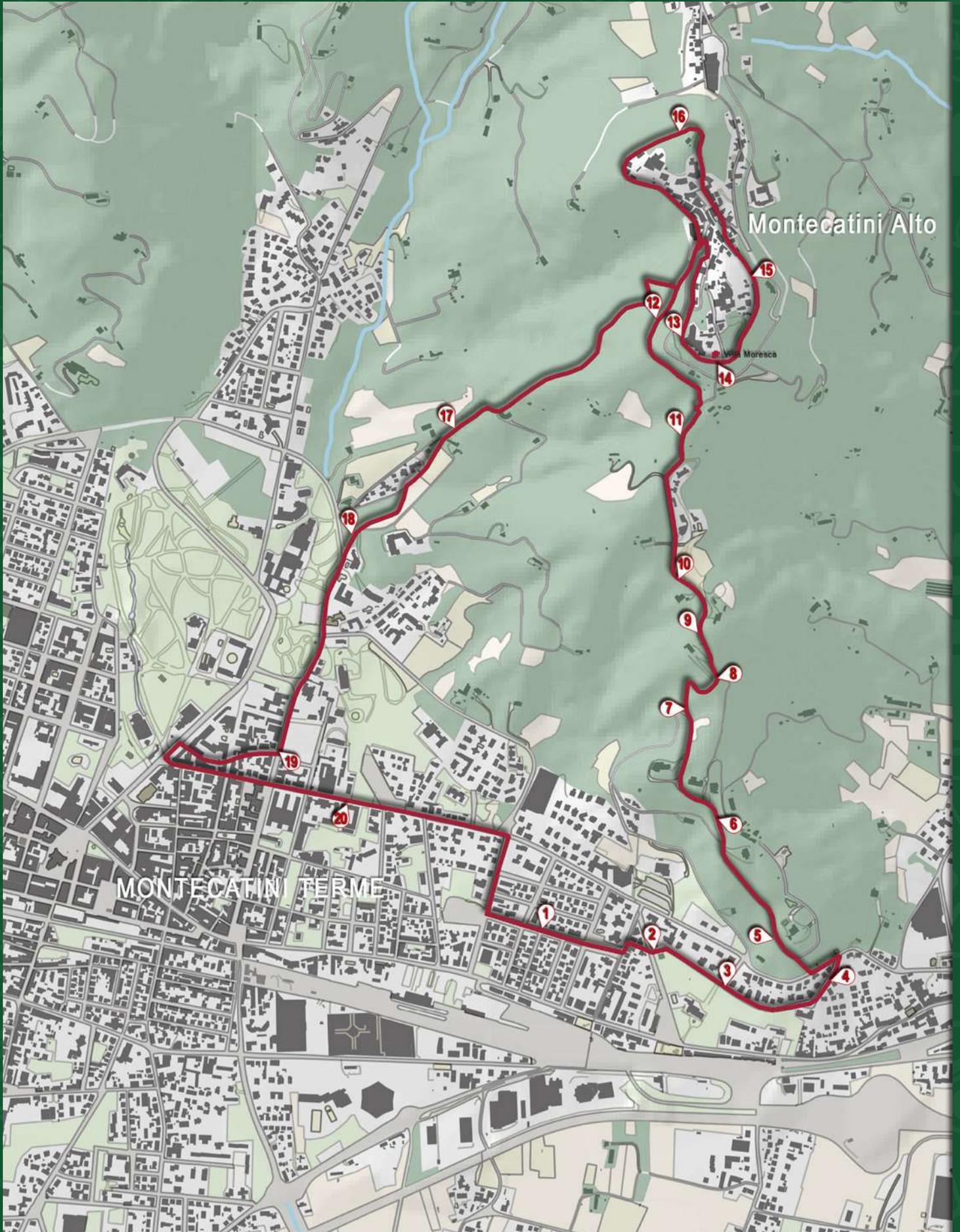
INTRODUCTION

To understand the size of the Garden City, the route winds between the city and the countryside, in an ideal red thread that connects the plain city with the hill town. Entering the countryside of olive trees, characterized by a stepped structure, the organization of the hilly territory, the urban history that is stratified between the Middle Ages and Liberty, are the key themes of a fun and simple journey. which will allow you to take full confidence with the spa town, giving space to one of the most beautiful medieval villages in the area, Montecatini Alto, the place of origin of the Montecatini community.



FONTE: Google Earth

RUN 04 ROUTE



01

VIA MONTEBELLO

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

READING THE CITY

We are in a residential area of the city that dates back to the Seventies/Eighties of last century: the small villas we see here reflect the Art Nouveau style of the single-storey villa of the beginning of the XX century (called “viareggina”) and reinterpret it in plastered buildings of different colours and varied shapes and architectures. Next to these, you will not miss a multiform building with a central turret that clearly recalls Medieval or Neo-Gothic architectures that are found elsewhere in the city, which characterizes the 19th century old part of the city.

A few buildings belonging to this specific architectural style have already been found along other trails, but this is an aspect that shows us how this city has varied architectures.

The city is characterized by a mix of neoclassical architecture and modern buildings that are distributed randomly and dispersed throughout the municipal territory.

There are also many private gardens that contain interesting botanical species and peculiar plant combinations. For example, along the route we find a specimen of *Cordyline Australis* or cabbage tree, a classic plant that grows in dry climates, next to the birch, which is a typical tree of the Italian Prealps, or a beautiful specimen of oval-leaved privet, an ornamental shrub that was much used in the 1990s, with ornamental reeds at the base, a rhizomatous species with intensely coloured yellow/pink/orange flowers.

Curiously, trees always mark the path of routes and roads, as can be seen in the rows of linden trees that alternate with swamp oaks along this city route that goes towards the hill.

NOTE: PATH INDICATION

The route we are describing was traced in February 2019. At the end of Via Montebello, Viale Fanciullacci can be reached by walking through a lawn that borders a private plot of land fenced off from the road.

02

VIA FANCIULLACCI - VIALE DEI PINI

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

This urban stretch goes along the borders of the city of Montecatini and then enters the neighbouring town of Pieve a Nievole Today called Viale Fanciullacci, this avenue was traditionally called Viale dei Pini (Pine Avenue), due to the widespread use of this species in the past. A few years ago the avenue was extensively requalified with a reduction of the number of pine trees and the introduction of new tree and shrub species. Of the (approx.) 90 original pine trees of the time, only 14 have remained today. The transformation of

03

THE STONE PINE ROAD

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

You are now crossing a secondary municipal road that goes towards the countryside. The sign that marks the fact that you are approaching the countryside is the row of manor houses you can see along the road. It is almost natural to make a visual comparison with the classical setting of farmhouses (extensively visible along Run #03).

These manor houses have large gardens and the main building is usually facing north and south, and surrounded by a rich scenery consisting of small and large balconies, loggias and square windows.

The prevalent south-facing exposure is designed to capture the heat during the warmest hours of the day, in order to achieve optimal dwelling temperatures.

The architectural shapes of these houses are varied, going from stone to plaster walls; while plaster is typical of the area, the brick-red colour recalls the memory of certain traditional families of the local Renaissance countryside.

04

FINAL PART OF PINE VENUE

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Continuing in this direction, the road slightly climbs uphill and, to the right, above the roofs, you may see the shapes of two Medioeval villages. One is Monsummano Alto, marked by a quarry, no longer used today, with terraces planted with cypress trees. You can see the Guard Tower, which can be visited in a tour along a stretch of the Medieval walls and the remains of the Central Castle, today occupied by a small urban centre and a small central church.

Following the panoramic view, going down from Monsummano Alto with your eyes, on the right you can see the village of Montevettolini, a beautiful Medieval village characterised by the presence of a 17th century Medici villa in its eastern part (mentioned in Run 03 - Padule di Fucecchio).

From this position, you can see the walls surrounding the village, which are worthwhile visiting for their numerous small and colourful private gardens filled with different tree and shrub species. Once you reach the west side of the village, you can enjoy a splendid view over the Padule (wetlands) of Fucecchio.



Borgo medievale di Monsummano Alto



La Torre del castello di Monsummano Alto

05

START FROM VIA DELLO SCHIAVO

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY + TRAIL INDICATIONS

The name of this street - Slave Road - certainly recalls some historical event of which we have no memory. It is a municipal road that winds up the olive grove countryside. The hill is arranged in terraces, with crosswise stretches along slopes that are not supported by and covered with stones, but with grasslands. The presence of grass on the slopes indicates that this area has an adequate amount of water, so we easily find grassland both under the olive trees and on the steepest slopes. We find many tall olive trees and some stumps with 3 or 4 wooden axes left after a part of the foliage has been dried by frost. Many trees have been pruned with the traditional method used in the Valdinievole (the valley of the River Nievole), which leaves the branches that fall towards the external sides of the plant, curved down towards the soil, so as to facilitate the harvest and a greater production of olives. according to the local traditional pruning method that facilitates the harvesting of the olives.



Ulivi in Via dello Schiavo

06

VIA DELLO SCHIAVO, long route

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Going up the hill, you will now start seeing the town of Montecatini Alto, amidst olive trees and oaks. Olive trees here are grown as trees because it is the best technique to adapt the species to the persistent winter cold and high summer temperatures. The effects of the cold winter weather can be seen in the signs of scabs, a sort of tumoral bump caused by bacteria that form as a consequence of wounds, explaining the spreading of the bumps along the branches.

But why are we dwelling on the shape of trees? Because, curiously enough, both the olive tree, which is an agricultural species, and the oak, a forest species, have a single trunk and a globular foliage.

Looking at the shape of the trees, we can understand that we are in the presence of an extensive "forest", where oak trees alternate with olive trees, which is a cornerstone of the agricultural landscape of the Tuscan hills.

For over two centuries in history, olive groves have generally replaced the forest in the most fertile and best exposed stretches of land.

Looking at some oak specimens, you can notice the peculiarity of the axe cut, a practice that takes us back to the time when woods were cut with an axe and a crosscut saw. This is shown by the position of some stumps, that are slightly raised from the ground and have two apparently twin trees, grown together, starting from the base. These are two branches of the same tree that has been pollarded to raise the cutting point and facilitate the removal of timber. The new turions were cut every 14-15 years to obtain new firewood or timber.

07

VIA DELLO SCHIAVO, long route

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Going up Via dello Schiavo (Slave road), you cannot fail to notice the compluvium lines, where rainwater is captured and domestic reeds thrive. The reeds have always been used in the peasant tradition to fence the vegetable garden or create a support for sarmentous plants like peas, but also to consolidate rows of vines.

Some may think that blackberry bushes are a sign of abandonment, but others grow it for its berries and because it regenerates the fertility of the soil.

The blackberry bush is a very difficult plant formation to cross, as a result of an evolution of the species that has strengthened its defence from the bite of wild animals with abundant thorns.

08

PANORAMIC VIEW

PIETRE CAVATE (literally “stones extracted from a quarry”, named after the quarry that was once in this area).

From the position reached, if you look westward (towards the sea), you can see the shape of the “great ruler” - the motorway.

After WW2, this motorway called Autostrada del Sole (Highway of the Sun) connected the city of Florence with the coast (Mareggio). For the Valdinievole area, this road was important because it helped develop trade and local connections, since all the houses, business activities and crafts were distributed and organized along “the ruler”.

Recognizing the motorway is also useful to spot Mount Serra, beyond which there is the city of Pisa (the feeling is that the mountains is almost hit by the motorway).

Along the left-hand southern side of the motorway you can see the great plain that continues up to the wetland of Fucecchio.

From this position, you can see the shape of the town of Fucecchio in the distance and, on its right, that of San Miniato, which lie in the territories of the provinces of Florence and Pisa, respectively.

These are Medieval landscapes, historically connected with the Montecatini area.

09

VIA DELLO SCHIAVO, ABOVE THE PIETRE CAVATE AREA

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

You have reached the “saddle point”, where the uphill section of the road ends and there is a small plateau.

Here the landscape is dominated by olive grove terraces and rural houses alternating with city buildings. The contact area between the rural and the urban world is also marked by the vegetation, where, for example, you find invasive mimosa, a domestic ornamental species that is spreading spontaneously between olive trees and Turkey oaks.

The terraces are useful as lines to understand the horizon and follow their development along the valley in front of you. Through this view, you may appreciate the countryside entering the “Garden City” of Montecatini, with a dispersion of farm and manor houses going gradually up the hill.

Historically, the noble level (the most comfortable from an environmental point of view) of the territory is the hill, while the most uncomfortable level, close to the still waters of the wetland, is the level of the plain.

The farmhouse you see on the right offers a few curious aspects of rural architecture, like the large rosemary placed at the entrance - a domestic plant gone wild, actually back to its natural state: rosemary defends itself by generating new plants and curving towards the ground, until the basal branches depart with new roots from the mother plant.

This hill house is a noble house, as shown by the brick bow and stone columns well visible on the plaster. The position of the cellar (today probably converted to other uses) is towards the north wind, showing how past generations paid great care to the distribution of living spaces and accessories from a bioclimatic point of view and used means to defend themselves from cold and heat.



10

PINE TREES ALONG VIA DELLO SCHIAVO - FLAT STRETCH

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

As we have already said for other trails, the stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) is the element we should follow to understand the landscape of the city of Montecatini and the surrounding territory.

Here we find it distribute in the hill trees and, looking towards Montecatini Alto, we find pine tree lines as the element characterizing the green architecture of the city.

In the countryside, we also find some isolated cypress trees, which are typical of the Medioeval landscape because they are historically associated with the roads leading to the villages on top of the ridges, but the stone pine is the element characterizing the 19th and 20th centuries, as it contributed to the construction of the city and its expansion in the territory.

11

A PATH TO MONTECATINI ALTO

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Take one of the old paths that lead to Montecatini Alto through the countryside, called redole*. Walking on stones mixed with layers of emerged rocks you will penetrate a landscape of olive groves called "Conca d'oro della Valdinievole", the golden valley of the River Nievole. These olive trees are very old and show more and less extensive rot areas in the stems, while some younger plants have grown after the great frost of 1985.

Among the Tuscan olive varieties, we easily find the Leccino, with bark and leaves similar to the holm oak, an evergreen oak species. Next to the olive trees we find oaks, with the characteristics of both the oak and the Roverella (*Quercus pubescens*). These plants have hybrid features and the presence of acorns relates to the widespread presence of wild boars, who leave clear signs of their passage on the ground (acorns were once also used as food for pigs). Sections of dry-stone walls, at the sides of the redola, reveal the presence of countryside gardens in olive groves, where it is not difficult to see violets, cyclamen, aromatic plants (thyme, oregano), muskgrass (*Soleirolia*) and myrtle. The spontaneous growth of myrtle proves that you are in the middle of a large Mediterranean garden.

* In the Tuscan dialect, a redola is a footpath going through the countryside.

12

APPROACHING MONTECATINI ALTO

NOTE DI STORIA, ECOLOGIA E GEOGRAFIA

Now you have almost reached Montecatini Alto, as proved by the typical “postcard picture” you see in front of you: the picturesque village stretching as an arch between two hills, one with the Rocca di Castello Vecchio (Old Castle) or Tramontana, the St. Peter's church and the bell tower, the other with the Torre del Castel Nuovo (New Castle Tower) or dell'Orologio (Clock Tower) and the Chiesa del Carmine (Church of the Order of the Carmelites) at the saddle point between the two hills, where you will find the main square with important buildings such as that of the Podestà, of Justice, the Risorti Theatre, and the Cappellina di Piazza (small Square Chapel). It is interesting to note how this Medieval village had been built on terraces, both inside and outside the city walls, with olive trees growing among the houses as well, then

gradually descending down to the Montecatini spa area (Bagni di Montecatini).

Curiously, a part of the external walls shows the urban growth of the Art Nouveau period, with plastered buildings, iron and concrete maintained in the façades, and the outer architectures much appreciated by the fashion of the time - which prove an urban development that has consolidated in modern times. As we often invited you to do, it is useful to compare buildings with the green architecture of the village, as here pine and cypress trees grow along the roads with linden trees and horse chestnuts introduced in the 19th century.

Another item that brings us back to the splendour of the Art Nouveau period is the funicular of Montecatini Alto, a historical infrastructure built at end of the 19th century, opened exactly on June 4, 1898, that goes up and down the hill along a linear track. Its picturesque little red cars cover the stretch in a few minutes, transferring passengers from the hill to the plain and vice versa, with a great emotional impact.

From the cars of this little train you can enjoy a unique view over the surrounding landscape. In addition to that, a funicular is a very environment-friendly means of transport, as it has very low CO2 emissions. The funicular has been an important innovation for the local community, as it allowed a direct connection between the Castle and the baths.

Still much used today, this short railway line was designed by three engineers from Genoa: Ferretti, Barbano, and Giovannetti.



Borgo Montevettolini visto da Monsummano Alto

13

THE VERDI VIEW

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Montecatini Alto, the part of the city that lies at an altitude of over 260 metres above sea level, is a perfect balcony over the surrounding landscape, as you will easily recognise starting your walk from the departure station at 20-30 m asl.

This scenic walk had even been described by Giuseppe Verdi (the opera composer) as an ideal place from which to admire the landscape, because it allows viewers to appreciate how the baths of Montecatini had been conceived as a “fun city”.

In front of you runs Viale Verdi (Verdi Ave.), the axis of the city development between the 19th and the 20th centuries, with 4 of the 5 local thermal establishments at the head. The avenue ends in the city park, called Pineta di Montecatini (stone pine wood), the core of the historical city.

The park also contains the tennis courts of the historic Torretta Circle, which confirms how sports and nature have traditionally been the signature of this city. Like every "fun city", Montecatini has its own large sports venues, such as the horse racing track, the football stadium and the sports hall for team games, all located at the periphery of the urban structure.

From here, you can notice how the hilltop countryside is closely connected with the city through the penetration of the terraces in the urban agglomerations. The geological landscape of the area is also well visible thanks to a harmonious descent of the hill ridges and slopes towards the valley, showing the geological features of sedimentary rock (hard sandstone rock) and non-overhanging slopes.

One of the most significant parts of the geological history of this territory is the Maona Cave (Grotta Maona), a large cavity originated from a limestone dolina placed within hard sandstone. The cave has huge underground vents that can be visited with a guide.

Looking at the ridges and slopes to the north of the built city, you will see the old Medieval villages at an altitude of ca. 200-300 m asl.

These are distinguished by the presence of towers and bell towers: three is Montecarlo, belonging to the province of Lucca; Buggiano and Colle di Buggiano, the Castle of Cozzile, opposite to the towers of Montecatini Alto (which were 24 originally, only a few of which have remained today, at a good distance from one another).

These vertical structures in the territory remind us of the surveillance system of the old times, the so-called "fire system", where the bell towers had the function of providing a visual signal to the soldiers placed on guard by igniting fires. These are the emblems of Medieval life in the territory, a life that is still recalled today by the subdivision of Montecatini Alto into five districts: Carmine (Clock Tower and Carmine Church), San Pietro, Porta di Borgo (the only city gate left of the ancient wall circle), with the recent addition of the neighbourhoods of Casina Rossa and Poggetto; all of which take proudly part today in an evocative palio (a horse race and parade in traditional Medieval costumes) dedicated to the local history.

Curiosities: Montecatini presumably owes its name to Catiline, a Roman refugee who built a fortress here (later destroyed).

14

VILLA MORESCA

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Along the Verdian promenade rises "Villa la Moresca", a villa-style building with a side tower and interesting finishes with Arabic traits, that can be traced back to the Art Nouveau (in Italy called "Liberty") period.

The villa has square-arched windows, triple lancet windows in the tower, a porch with a balcony roof covered by a floral creeper, and a sloping roof used as a protective structure for the windows. The garden presents signs of the fashion of the early 20th century, with a splendid wisteria that submerges the gate of the perimetral enclosure and two wonderful specimens of Calocedrus that seem to have been placed there on guard, to protect the garden.

The Calocedrus, also known as Californian incense-cedar, is an American conifer that testifies here how the history of Montecatini's green architecture is connected to the presence of conifers. A few steps further you will find Quisisana pinewood park, a green area around an old residential healthcare facility (not in use today), where you can clearly see how plants with needles and pine nuts have played an important role in the construction of green spaces.

ROUTE INDICATIONS

Continuing the walk along Via Livi Leone, you will border the perimeter wall of the Quisisana pinewood park, where you will notice a plaque dated 8 September 1944, which recalls the liberation of Pistoia from the Nazi occupation.

This date is the symbol of a period that brings to our mind the feverish days of the liberation of the Valdinievole area from the Germans troops.

In the summer of 1944, the Padule di Fucecchio massacre took place, where 174 civilians were killed by German troops.

The inscription on the plaque, dedicated to Master Lazzero and his son Piergiorgio, is very touching.

That tragedy also hit the peasants who used to hide in the most unusual places to escape German troops, as many tales passed on from grandparents to grandchildren tell.

The liberation from the German invasion was celebrated with great joy by the local population, as many events in memory of the fallen still prove today.

15

VIA CASTEL LEMMI

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Walking along the old town centre will allow you to appreciate both the ancient pavement and the stretches of rural land in the urban context, enjoying the sensations and atmospheres of a well-preserved Medieval urban landscape.

Continuing along Via Castel Lemmi, you will reach the top of the hill called New Castle, where the Carmine Tower rises with its mechanical clock that still preserves the old system marking the time every 6 hours, whose stroke still echoes throughout the countryside. An old parish church lies besides the tower: together they were once part of the New Castle settlement, a structure (later destroyed) which was opposed to the Old Castle, located at the northern extremity of Montecatini Alto. Along this road you will find the traces of the ancient towers (originally 24), which were destroyed during the siege ordered by Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici in 1554. Along this road you will perceive the historical signs of the place, such as the façade ornaments and the coats of arms that inform us about the noble families and local rulers (podestà or Seigneurs) that succeeded in the control of the territory over time.

The heraldic symbols that represent a tangible sign of time include lions, deer and the lily of Florence.

Continuing along the old paved road you will reach Piazza Giusti, where you will find more recent architectures, such as the theatre (Teatro delle Maschere), built in a style that can be related to the Modernist Catalan movement, and effigies on the façade that act as a rival attraction to the other architectures of the Medieval period.

This is a clear testimony that two historical periods have contributed to the construction of the urban form of the city: the Art Nouveau period of the villas and palaces, and the Medieval period that left us churches, castles, towers, and "sdruciolli" (old stone paved roads).

16

THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

In the variety of architectural styles offered by the “Fun City” both in Montecatini Terme and in Montecatini Alto, there is an interesting example that can be attributed to the so-called Romantic House that we usually find in mountain areas and in Mitteleuropean settings.

This is a clear reference to the Biedermeier style, that is to say a house characterized by steep roof pitches that cover the front windows, exposed lintels and wooden balconies - all elements that

differentiate the building from the rest of the urban view.

17

ROUTE INDICATIONS

Going back down towards the valley, you will cross an ancient path of the local countryside called Via Corta or Via Crucis, so called for the positioning of religious tabernacles in sequence depicting the passion of Christ along its route. Paths representing the Passion of Christ are particularly common along the Alps, but there are specimens in Tuscany, too.

This path in the Montecatini Terme area offers great panoramic views more than particularly precious tabernacles or stations along the trail, which mostly consist of simple niches.

Along the descent you may admire the Maona Cave mentioned above (Stop #13) and appreciate how the olive grove countryside enters the city in the Casina Rossa district.

In this part of the countryside you can appreciate the dispersed farmhouses inherited from the 18th and 19th century sharecropping system, but also of the sparse presence of noble countryside mansions. These noble palaces were introduced between the 19th and the 20th century, as suggested by their style, inspired by Neo-Gothic architecture and representing the dawn of modern architecture. This style would later evolve in the Art Nouveau style characterized by rich decorations on the buildings and extended gardens. Villa Odette, located on the right side of the route, is worthwhile visiting, while on the left you may admire the Querceta Castle, one of the first specimens of Neo-Gothic architecture that recalls a Medieval castle.

This building was used as an accommodation facility, as proved by the spacious reception halls inside; today it has become the headquarters of the local Hotel, Wine & Food School.



Affresco religioso in edicola posta alle porte di montecatini alto

18

JASPER

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Montecatini is characterized by the presence of thermal waters (spas), therefore it has an interesting geological crust, consisting of the typical Tuscan hard sandstone, a sedimentary rock that meets with volcanic rocks.

Here we find layers of jasper, a particularly hard and compact red sedimentary rock, rich in quartz, topped by a vegetation that does not penetrate the rock due to its hardness.

19

THE HOTELS STREET

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

The route will now enter the city, between Viale Bicchierai and Vicolo dell'Angiolo, until you reach Viale Verdi, a stretch characterized by the presence of small and large hotels.

The heart of the Fun City was exactly by the area containing the city park and the thermal establishments, and that is why the most prestigious hotels have been built in their vicinity.

Along the western and eastern sides of the park, in fact, we find 6/7-storey buildings used as accommodation facilities, curiously erected side by side with Art Nouveau villas of all sizes, which today are partly used as B&B homes.

The main business activities of the city are hospitality and catering, as also witnessed by the visible layers of the urban growth. Montecatini has over 16,000 beds available for guests, which proves its essential hospitality and accommodation vocation. You may observe how the city skyline shows two main altitudes, that of the finest palaces and that of the small villas, with the urban space characterised and designed as the connection between the two, to create harmony between these two extreme forms.

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THE LARGE TREE-LINED AVENUES

NOTES ON HISTORY, ECOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Hospitality and accommodation are also embodied by the very nature of Garden City of Montecatini, as well as in the great attention paid to walking, both for the extension and identification of paths that favour its crossing.

The city of Montecatini is characterized by the presence of great and very long tree-lined avenues, with stretches that often exceed the kilometer. The route you are currently walking (Viale Marconi) is an avenue lined by stone pines, some of which of a considerable age, that stretches for over 500 metres.

This is an avenue designed to capture infinity, as you may well appreciate by observing all its length in perspective, and one thought to protect the walker as well as the houses under the height of the foliage.



Passeggio alberato di viale Verdi con dettaglio del doppio filare di alberi di olmo e lecci disposti ai lati del viale (inizi Novecento)

And here we have just recalled one of the guiding principles of Le Corbusier's idea and notion of Garden City of the beginning of the 20th century, where the foliage of trees represented the summit point under which all the buildings had been built.



Immagine di Montecatini Alto dalla funicolare

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the realization of this project we thank the city of Montecatini, which thanks to its architectural and botanical riches has allowed the structuring of this interesting route.

This project has deal not only with the history of the place, but also with its geological, faunal and floristic characteristics.

We also thank all the collaborators who have participated in the realization of this project, with a special thanks to Dr. Maddalena Boni, a geologist who took care of the parts related to her study subject.

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