

## **MOUNT MARTICA**

We are observing Mount Martica, a 1032 m high mountain inserted in the Varese Prealps group, in the territory of the municipalities of Brinzio, Induno Olona, Valganna and Varese, in the province of Varese.

We are facing a site where naturalistic interests embrace historical ones!

Mount Martica dominates the western side of the Valganna and represents a site well known to history buffs as here there are the remains of uncovered artillery staking, made within the Northern Frontier. The term "Northern Frontier" refers to the Italian defensive system at the Northern Border towards Switzerland, also known as the "Cadorna Line" in memory of the Chief of Staff of the Kingdom of Italy Luigi Cadorna. Cadorna completed an ambitious project to defend the Italian territory conceived since 1882, and between 1915 and 1916 he directed the construction of a complex of permanent defense works to protect the Po Valley and its main economic and productive poles: Turin, Milan and Brescia.

The system was designed with the declared purpose of protecting the Italian territory from a possible attack from beyond the Alps, conducted by France, Germany or Austria-Hungary, violating the neutrality of the Swiss territory, and also from a possible invasion of the Po Valley by the Swiss Confederation.

To protect Italy, Cadorna ordered to set up an impressive, fortified line extending from the Ossola valleys to the Orobic passes. It includes many roads, mule tracks, paths, trenches, artillery posts, observatories, field hospitals, command centers and logistic structures, all built at high altitudes from 600 to over 2000 meters. The line extended for 72 km of trenches, it had 88 artillery positions (11 in the cavern), and it included 296 km of roads and 398 km of mule tracks. The work was completed in 1916 but was never used. At the beginning of the war, the fortifications were garrisoned but soon, and after the defeat of Caporetto, the line was abandoned. Today only some sections of it remain visible and can be visited, including those of Mount Martica.

The top of Mount Martica is flat and surrounded by woods, and on both the eastern and western sectors of the top there are the remains of the uncovered artillery posts made within the Cadorna line. At the center of the summit area, there is a small rock spur with a suggestive view of the Valganna, which houses a small cross. Below it, on the southern side of the massif, there is the so-called Motta Rossa quarry, a vast extraction site for porphyry that has been abandoned since 1993. In this area there were not only quarries but also mines: the Castellera Valley, until the 1970s, housed a silver galena mine with an adjoining flotation system and a line of mineral transport trolleys. Currently this activity has ceased and has left some ruins on the spot consisting of the washing area, the buildings that housed the offices of the mine and the mining galleries, mostly closed. Below the Alpe del Cuseglio village, a small inhabited center dating back to the 60s of the last century, there is also an enigmatic artificial cavity, in the Servino sandstone, probably the site of an ancient mine that some sources hypothesize it was of siderite.

This area was recognized in 1995 as a Site of Community Importance (SCI), called "Mount Martica" or in Italian "Monte Martica". The SCI is almost entirely included in the Campo dei Fiori Regional Park and is identified by the code IT2010005. The boundaries of the Site reach at south the Fredda Valley, which also partly coincides with the limit of distribution of the carbonate rocks making up the contiguous Mount Chiusarella massif, going up the left bank up to the saddle between this valley and the contiguous Castellera Valley, to go down again and follow the Rio Castellera until you reach the edges of the Oriented Nature Reserve of Ganna Lake. The area includes the entire territory of the Oriented Nature Reserve of Paù Majur, equipped with a management plan, and part of the Oriented Nature Reserve of Mount Martica Chiusarella (basin of the Castellera Torrent and eastern slope of Mount Martica, up to the Valganna valley floor).

There are numerous geomorphological evidences of the Site, among which the residual reliefs in Permian porphyrites of the eastern side of Mount Martica and the manifestations of pseudocarsism, always set on Permian porphyrites, present in and on the edge of the Paù Majur Reserve. The latter appear as flat-bottomed circular depressions, a few tens of meters in diameter, which closely resemble karst sinkholes.

In addition to being SCI for the fauna and flora present, this area is also identified as a SAC, or Special Area of Conservation. In this territory there are, in fact, important acidophilic oak forests with the presence of *Quercus pubescens* and summit grasslands in *Molinia caerulea* on an acid substrate, both examples of vegetation of great particularity and uniqueness. From the point of view of fauna, the site is characterized by some species of community interest such as the honey buzzard, the black kite, which breeds here, and the short-toed eagle, which is migratory.