

## **MONTE SAN GIORGIO**

We are in a natural site recognized as a Unesco World Heritage Site since 2010!

This mountain, between Italy and Switzerland, has a beautiful pyramid shape and is considered by experts from all over the world to be the best fossiliferous sequence to understand and describe marine life in the Middle Triassic, that is 245-230 million years ago!

From the fossils found here we know that in that time there was a tropical lagoon inhabited by marine reptiles, fishes, bivalve mollusks, ammonites, crustaceans, and echinoderms. The lagoon was close to the land and so also marine reptiles, insects and terrestrial plants are present among the organisms that over time have deposited on the seabed and have fossilized thus giving us the opportunity of knowing the past by analyzing them!!

Monte San Giorgio was famous since the Middle Ages for ichthyol which was extracted from oily fossil organic material and was used as a dermatological drug. In the 1800s, excavations began in this area to look for fossil fuels; the excavations did not lead to great results for exploitation for energy purposes but allowed to find the first very interesting fossils that ignited the enthusiasm and curiosity of the scientists of the time. Among these is Abbot Stoppani, author of the famous work "Il Bel Paese", a volume published at the end of the 19th century that describes all the naturalistic and landscape wonders of Italy. Stoppani promoted an excavation to search for fossils in this area and the research led to the discovery of many fossils and made clear to the entire scientific community the key role of this area for studying and understanding the Middle Triassic.

The peculiarity of Monte San Giorgio as a fossil deposit is the fact that at least 5 different fossil levels have been found here, each of which may contain more than one fossil association. This aspect allows the evolutionary study of certain groups of organisms referring to the same environment over a very wide time interval, of several million years. Over 20,000 fossils have been extracted from the 5 levels of Monte San Giorgio, which have allowed us to describe 25 species of reptiles, 50 species of fish and over a hundred species of invertebrates as well as many plant species!