

CAMPO FRANSCIA AND VAL BRUTTA

The locality of Campo Franscia (or more simply Franscia, as it appears in the official cartography) is located at the confluence of the Scerscen and Cormor streams, which flow here to form the Lanterna stream, in turn the largest tributary of the better-known Mallerio stream.

The Campo Franscia basin is dominated to the north east by the Sasso Moro (3108 m) and to the north west by the Monte delle Forbici (2910 m) and it is certainly one of the most popular and pleasant places in the Val Lanterna.

The term "Campo" was added to the toponym "Franscia", which probably derives from the local term "fratta" (meaning embankment, indicating a location near a stream), due to a transcription error in the construction project of barracks of the finance police. There, in fact, were to be built in Campomoro, but just before the final approvals the project changed and it was decided to erect the barracks in Franscia, where they were active until 1960. In the official documents only the term "Moro" was canceled and the toponym "Franscia" was added to "Campo".

The Campo Franscia basin owes its origin to the erosive action of the two glacier tongues, which during the Last Glacial Maximum (20,000 years ago) descended from the Scerscen basin to the west and from the Fellaria-Scalino basin to the east.

The prevalent rock that forms the sides of the basin is serpentinite, a rock derived from the transformation - in geologists' language, metamorphism - of peridotitic rocks from Earth's mantle; they were involved into alpine orogenetic events and deeply modified, then brought up to the surface, tightly implicated with the other rocks of the new alpine chain.

Its original color, dark green (in fact we speak of "green rocks"), is often replaced at the surface by a brown-red hue due to the alteration of the ferrous minerals it contains. The smoothing and incision by glaciers and streams has created a unique and evocative landscape, characterized by *roches moutonnées* and deep gorges.

In the past, the village of Franscia based its economy above all on pastoralism and on the extraction of serpentinite, soapstone, talc and asbestos. In the past, it was the women of Franscia who came down from the open quarries in the Scerscen Valley to the village, carrying heavy loads of minerals on their shoulders. In Franscia and along the Val Brutta, i.e. the stretch of valley closest to Franscia, where the Lanterna stream flows, numerous mills ground the local soapstone, "pietra ollare" in Italian, a rock particularly soft and easy to be carved, used for the production of the famous Italian *lavecc'*, the traditional stone containers, one of the most characteristic products of Valmalenco. Since ancient times, in fact, these stones have been used to manufacture pots, called precisely "olle", from where the Italian adjective "ollare" derived.

Today, no traces are left of the ancient mills, but numerous quarries from which asbestos was mined, as well as serpentine and talc, remain along the Val Brutta, testifying to the ancient mining activity.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the asbestos of Franscia also attracted English entrepreneurs and French engineers who concentrated their attention and their business here. The mining activity continued also for a good part of the twentieth century as demonstrated by the Ecomuseum of the Bagnada, set up near Campo Franscia, in correspondence with the talcum deposits of Bagnada, discovered in the late 1920s by the Anonymous Cave Company of Asbestos (later called Mineraria Valtellinese), and exploited until 1987.

The Bagnada quarry can now be visited by appointment and represents, with its very white rocky walls, an evocative place of great charm and interest. It is spread over nine levels, four of which can be visited, and allows you to observe various equipment such as carts and drills.

Extraction of asbestos ceased many time ago, so Franscia now has come back to the ancient quiet, between high mountains and wide grasslands.