THE GIANTS' KETTLE OF MAIESSO

Four glaciations have affected the Alpine region in the last million year, as peaks of glaciers expansion have taken place over time.
During the last one, known as the "Würm Glaciation", encompassing the period from 75.000 to 8.300 years ago, the vast and 1.300mt-thick Toce Glacier spread out over the Antogorio and Formazza Valley, merging downstream with the glaciers creeping downwards from the other Ossola dales.
The ice layer was so thick that only the highest peaks could emerge. Such a mass of ice has played an essential role in "designing" the current landscape, since the glaciers carry out an important activity of erosion and shaping, as well as of sediment transport and deposition.
By observing the steep walls surrounding the village of Premia, it is possible to identify the typical, transversal "U" shape, quite different from that kind of valley formed through river erosion only, marked out by a "V"- shaped section instead.
Another unequivocal evidence of the existence of the ancient glacier is that both the rocky bastion and the stony step of Premia (on the map with the toponym "Sasso di Premia") have markedly been turned into smooth and round outer layer.
The rocks, as smoothed and streaked by the ice shaping activity, take the name of "sheepback rock".
In Maiesso settlement, walking the visit trail into the Gorges of Uriezzo, the iron bridge on the Toce River is a fantastic viewpoint overlooking the Giants' Kettles.
In this short stretch of valley, the impressive erosion and shaping activities glaciers and streams made in the past has gone so far as to go through the garnet mica schists the "step" of Premia is made of, digging out the underlying whitish and microcrystalline stone (granitoid gneiss) that creates colour contrast with the above brown-greyish mica schists.
The stone (easy to be seen from the Maiesso bridge) represents the deepest tectonic unit known so far in the entire Alpine edifice, the so called "Zero Element". All over the Alps chain, it emerges only, in a dome shape, where the Devero Valley merges with the Antigorio Valley, in Verampio area. As for that, it is also called the "Verampio Dome".
From the Maiesso Bridge it is possible to peer into the peculiar hemispheric and cylindrical caves engraved on the Toce rocky riverbed. The popular imagination named the huge formations, resembling enormous bowls, "Giants' Kettles".
They were formed, mainly during ice ages, by the erosive activity of streams running beneath the glacier surface (subglacial streams) at very high pressure.
Water flowing beneath a glacier at very high speed, even more than 200km(124mi)/h, can produce quick vortices, so that sand, thin loam, and debris, swirling and scratching the stone, deeply penetrate the smooth and round inner surface of the caves, like a drill.
Giant's Kettles are scattered all over the Antigorio Valley. Those visible from Maiesso are active forms still today, as crossed by the Toce River.
Other ones, originated by subglacial streams lost after the glaciers retreat, can be found away from the current streamflows.
An example of all this may be found by heading up the mule track from Verampio to Baceno, where the track itself crosses a huge semi-buried kettle, 10mt in diameter.
Although the magnificent pools of Maiesso invite to enjoy refreshing baths in summertime, it is highly recommended to overcome the temptation. Low temperature of the water, extremely slippery slopes, and whirlpools have regrettably caused deadly accidents.