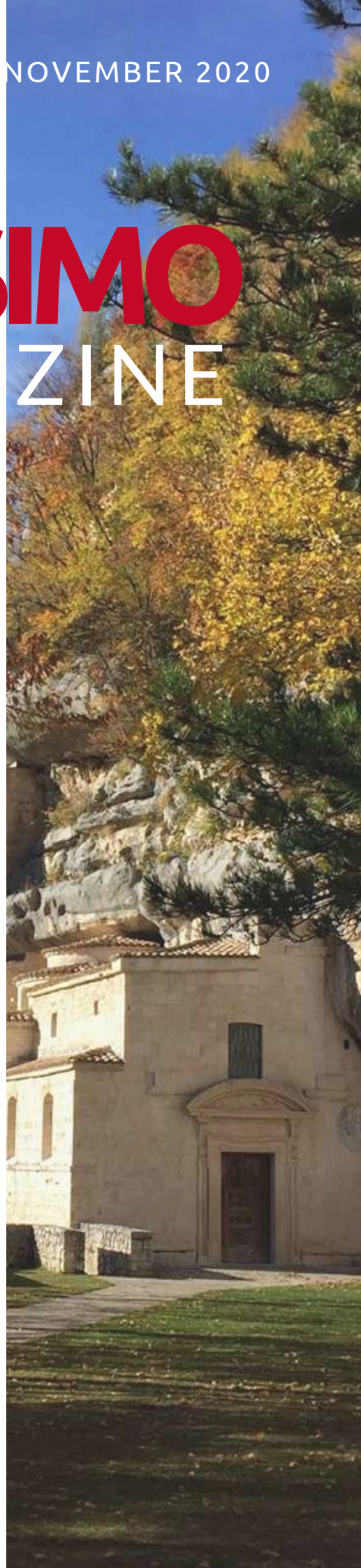


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ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD WINE

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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ABOVE:

The last shepherd,
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Magazine

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Ciao a tutti!

How fast time flies! It seems it was just yesterday that we sent out the first issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine, and it is already September and we are on our fifth instalment.

This month, we take you to the mountains of Fara San Martino to visit one of Abruzzo's last true shepherds, who spends most of the year tending his flock at a high altitude. We will tell you about the most beautiful waterfalls in the region, the centuries-old tradition of a flag-waving dance in Forcella, the first capital of Italia, Corfinium, and treat you to a beautiful photo essay about Sulmona.

Read on to find out who has won our competition. The winning story about the small town of Castiglione Messer Raimondo will surely warm your heart.

We have prepared a new contest for you with a great prize, so if you have some beautiful photos of Abruzzo, head to page 5 to see how you can enter.

In the previous issue, I mentioned that if you enjoy reading ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine you can give a small one-off or monthly donation to help us continue our work. We have already received a few donations, for which we are very grateful. ABRUZZISSIMO is a free publication but it takes more than 100 hours to produce each month. If you want to support us, please [click here](#) to donate.

I am curious to know what your connection to Abruzzo is and why you love this region. Do you have a story you want to share or an idea for a future article? Please email me at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

Stay safe and enjoy the latest issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine!

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

WHAT'S ON



CELANO GORGES REOPEN

One of the most beautiful canyons in Italy, Gole di Celano, reopens after a 10-year-long closure. Located between the towns of Celano, Aielli and Ovindoli, with an easy access from the motorway Rome-Pescara, it is one of the most spectacular places in Abruzzo. The gorges' walls are 200 metres high in some places with very narrow passages in between. The trail is well marked and passes the ruins of the San Marco alle Foci monastery, arriving to the plateau above Ovindoli. The itinerary is open in dry season, from late spring to mid-autumn. [Click here](#) to navigate to the start of the trail.

GIN FROM ABRUZZO

In addition to quality wines, Abruzzo now boasts an excellent small artisanal distillery producing gin. Two young entrepreneurs from L'Aquila, Riccardo Marino and Tommaso Ciuffetelli Totani, have opened 67/Cento (it is the postal code of the city and the name of the distillery) and make Botanical Gin and Foragad Gin using aromatic herbs from their own garden and mountain plants from the Majella National Park. In the coming weeks, the drinks will be available in selected bars in L'Aquila.

September this year is quieter than usual as many traditional festivals are not going ahead, but there are still some exciting things to do and see in Abruzzo. All links are clickable.

MODERN ART IN A GHOST VILLAGE

The small village of Buonanotte (CH) was abandoned in the 1970s due to continuous landslides. This month, from September 3, a group of architects and the town hall are launching an interesting project: *Buonanotte Contemporanea*, an open-air modern art exhibition. Three artists will take over the abandoned spaces to create installations. Picturesque ruins clinging to rocks, panoramic views over the Lake Bomba and Sangro Valley plus modern art – a spectacular combination worth exploring on a day trip to this forgotten medieval village. If you can't be there in person, check out the organisers' [Facebook page](#) for virtual visits.



BEACH FOR NUDISTS AND NATURISTS

There are many quality beaches in Abruzzo, but only one is for nudists and naturists. Lido Le Morge in Torino di Sangro is a 200-metre pebbly stretch of the seafront, which gets very busy in August as it is one of very few nudist beaches in Italy. The area is managed by a local [naturists association](#) that organises events for its small but active community. They are always happy to welcome new members; however, the beach is free and open to anyone who wants to try out soaking up the sun au naturel. The bathing season officially finishes on October 12, so there is still plenty of time to go for a dip, nude or in a swimsuit.

WHAT'S ON



VISIT CASTELLO DI BEFFI

The Castle of Beffi has seen better days. Today only a small part and a tower remain from what used to be a formidable fortress in the 11-12th centuries. From the top of the tower you can admire the Sirente-Velino mountains, Aterno Valley and, in autumn, listen to deer love songs so often heard in this part of Abruzzo.

A small group of young locals runs guided tours in the castle, during which you can learn about the history of this fascinating corner of the region. This month, they will also open a small bar where you can have an *aperitivo* and enjoy the views. Guided tours in English can be organised on request for small groups. Contact Serena via the Castello di Beffi's [Facebook page](#).

If you enjoy reading the magazine please consider giving a small one-off or monthly donation to help us continue our work. Every little bit helps!

[**CLICK HERE TO DONATE**](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

RAPHAEL IN ABRUZZO



Once upon a time, Abruzzo used to have a masterpiece by the famous Italian High Renaissance painter, Raphael. In 1517, he was commissioned by a nobleman from L'Aquila, Giovanni Branconio, to paint the Visitation. According to art historians, Raphael painted the scene depicting the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth, which was finished by one of his assistants. It was displayed in the Branconio family chapel inside the church of San Silvestro in the city of L'Aquila for over 100 years. The painting was taken by the Spanish occupation troops of Philip IV in 1655. Different versions of the event exist: some experts say it was acquired by the Spanish Royal Court; others insist it was plundered. Today, it is displayed in the Prado Museum in Madrid. Regional authorities have asked Spain to loan the masterpiece back to Abruzzo but, so far, their requests have fallen on deaf ears. Wouldn't it be great if the painting was returned to Abruzzo?!!

ABRUZZO IN PHOTOS

WIN A COPY OF HISTORY AND ART GUIDE TO ABRUZZO

We are delighted to announce a new competition! To enter send us your best photos of Abruzzo with a caption explaining what the photo shows and your name. Over the next three months we will pick the best ones to publish in the magazine and on our Facebook page. The photo that receives the highest number of likes will win and its author will get the beautiful latest edition of Abruzzo History and Art Guide (in English) by Carsa Edizioni.

Submit photos to editor@abruzzissimo.com (max. size 1MB). Put "Photo contest" in the subject field.

Closing date: November 15



Sulphur springs in Parco Lavino.
By Maria Cordisco



Traditional threshing in Città Sant'Angelo.
By Andrey Knyazev



Sise delle monache cakes from Guardiagrele.
By Anna Swann



Castello di Bominaco.
By Linda McConnell

CORFINIO: A SMALL TOWN WITH A GREAT PAST

By Alessandro Antonucci

The small town of Corfinio sprawls in the middle of the Peligna Valley surrounded by majestic mountains. Very few know that this is where Corfinium, the first capital of Italy, once stood.



Corfinio with its San Pelino Cathedral. Photo by [gianni.centurione](#)

BIG CITY

The modern-day territory of Abruzzo and Molise used to be home to many Italic tribes: Picentini, Marrucini, Vestini, Paeligni, Samnites, altogether 10-12 tribes, which represented a great well-organised political and military force. For a long time, they provided Rome with brave soldiers and formidable generals. Located in the centre of the Italic lands, near the important road that connected Rome and the Adriatic coast, Corfinium made for a perfect location as the capital of a newly formed union which wanted to take on the Eternal City.

In the year 1BCE, Corfinium – the city of the Paeligni tribe – counted a population of 19,000 people. It was a very sophisticated metropolis with well-planned streets, a hydraulic system providing water for the houses, shops, temples, thermal baths, a theatre and, very likely, an amphitheatre.

The Paeligni worshipped Hercules and built a big sanctuary in the city dedicated to the god, which was active for over 400 years. Today, two levels are still visible: the wells and the sacred part. There is a shrine, as well as a system of small basins with the water from

the spring used for devotional rites. Many votive offerings and artefacts found around the sanctuary by archaeologists are displayed in the archaeological museum in Corfinio.

It is interesting that the Paeligni had celebrations in honour of Hercules on August 13, and the town's patron saints celebration is still held on the same day. Some echoes of the cult of Hercules were still in evidence as recently as the 1960s, when locals went to the sanctuary to put water in their ears because it was believed to cure earaches.

In 91BCE, Corfinium became the capital of the Italic Federation during the Social War against Rome. Here, for the first time ever, the name "Italia" was used on freshly minted coins to demonstrate the thirst for independence and political ambitions of the peoples united under one strong identity.

WAR OF THE ALLIES

For centuries, Italic tribes were allies of Rome but not citizens, which meant they had to pay high contributions and send their young as soldiers to fight the Empire's wars.

Italic people, unhappy with their social position, formed a federation, which was tasked with bringing a request of citizenship to Rome. However, the request was denied and the federation's representative, Marcus Livius Drusus, was assassinated by Roman political elite. In 91BCE, the angered Italic tribes united and started a war against Rome and its dominance in their lands.

In the first year, Italic people won every single battle, but Rome managed to reorganise and mobilise its forces and took the lead in the war from the second year. Eventually, Roman generals changed their tactics and started promising citizenship to those tribes who put down their weapons, which weakened the opposition. The bloody devastating war



The coin from Corfinium with "Italia" written on it

lasted three years, eventually fizzling out with many Italic tribes being granted Roman citizenship and the rights and privileges that came with it.

DECLINE

After the Social War, the Paeligni people became Roman citizens and Corfinium thrived. However, in 5CE the city, in parallel with the Roman Empire, started to decline and, eventually, disappeared. Very little remains from its glory today. Over the centuries, the impressive Roman structures were re-utilised: the monumental parts were dismantled to build houses, statues were put through a grind to make lime, bronze artefacts were melted. Stones from Corfinium can be seen incorporated into buildings in the towns around such as Vittorito, Raiano, and Popoli.

In our Archaeological Park in Piano San Giacomo, just outside Corfinio, you can admire the remains of a city quarter: ancient mosaics inside a dwelling with a garden and fountain, streets, shops and a thermal system.

We know that under some parts of Corfinio, foundations of Roman houses and neighbourhoods still exist. Under the main



Ruins of Corfinium. Photo by Giumas/AdobeStock

square, Piazza Teatro, lies the Roman theatre, fragments of which are visible in some wine cellars in the houses around it. There is a lot hidden underneath that can be excavated and studied. The latest archaeological digs under the San Pelino Cathedral revealed ancient workshops and the area (campus) where the troops of Julius Caesar were stationed during the siege of Corfinium.

MUSEUM

Today, Corfinio is home to a small archaeological museum (*Museo Civico Antonio De Nino*) which, together with the Archaeological Park (*Parco Archeologico Don Nicola Colella*), offers a glimpse into the town's glorious past. In the park some floor mosaics are still visible as well as fragments of the ancient Roman *domus*, city streets and colonnades. The museum preserves artefacts found in the area from the Italic period to the Middle Ages. You can learn

about life in the ancient city, as well as the traditions and beliefs of its people. The rare coin with *Italia* written on it is on display here.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Museo civico archeologico Antonio De Nino

Address: Piazza Corfinium.

Opening hours: on request.

The archaeological museum, the park and the Sanctuary of Hercules can be visited on request (tours in Italian only).

Contact Cooperativa La Mosca Bianca at info@cooplamoscabianca.org or call 0039 338 1118944, 0039 3293474760.

Alessandro Antonucci is a guide in the Corfinio Archaeological Park and a member of the Cooperativa La Mosca Bianca, which manages the museum and archaeological sites in Corfinio.

DANCING TO KEEP THE FAITH

By Anna Lebedeva

For many centuries, residents in the small village of Forcella, in the Province of Teramo, have celebrated their devotion to the Virgin Mary with a rhythmic flag-waving dance.



Forcella

Like many other religious celebrations in Abruzzo, the flag-waving dance of Forcella (*il ballo dell'insegna*) is a beautiful mix of the sacred and profane, a devotional ritual combined with elements of a military parade.

Every year, on September 23 and 24, the village of 500 people celebrates a Mass, after which a statue of the Virgin Mary is carried to the central square. The priest hands the white and yellow insignia flag with the image of the Virgin Mary to the designated person (*alfiere*). The flagbearer is flanked by two assistants (*valletti*), one with a sword, the other one with a stick, representing the organised militia and peasant forces who defended the ancient village from invasions. Two drummers (*suonatori*) accompany the procession with an energetic march beat.

On the piazza, everyone forms a circle and the *alfiere* performs *il ballo* first. He jumps and bends, waving the flag, turning it around his body. The dance lasts 10-15 seconds and then the flag is passed on to the next dancer. The most skilled performers wave the flag in such a way that the fabric never folds. "The insignia is a symbol of purity, and as such it can never touch the ground," explains Daniele Di Battista, the president of the volunteer, grass-roots organisation ProLoco Forcella. "Our flag wavers are very skilled, and nobody has ever dropped it on the ground. The insignia that we use today was made in the 18th century. We restored it and continue to use it every year."

There has been very little research done on the origins of the dance, but according to some historians it might have started in 1599

as part of the feast of Saint Anne. Others date it back to the mid-17th century when the diocese of Teramo was spared from the plague epidemic which devastated the surrounding areas. "The flag-waving dance might have existed in other surrounding towns, but only Forcella has managed to keep the tradition alive all these centuries," says Di Battista.

Locals start learning the moves when they are little kids and, as they grow, each adds little turns and twists that make everyone's performance unique. During the festive days every year, over two days, up to 50 people dance with the flag. "Anyone can participate in the *ballo dell'insegna*, but it requires a lot of strength and agility, so the majority of dancers are men," explains Di Battista. The dance is not a competition and there is no prize, but it is a matter of prestige, with the best performers getting respect from the villagers, admiring looks from local kids and a pat on the back from friends and family.

Unlike some other traditional celebrations across Italy, *il ballo dell'insegna* is kept local, without any pomp. Participants do not dress in historic costumes, but many wear a white shirt and a tie for the special occasion. However, the pride and excitement that comes with it can certainly outstrip any bigger, more famous event that attracts international visitors and gets write-ups in guidebooks and glossy travel magazines.

This year, in addition to their Sunday best, the dancers will have to wear face masks and gloves



A dancer performing the *ballo dell'insegna*

It might make the dance moves trickier, but it certainly won't dampen the villagers' spirits. You can see a video of Forcella's *ballo dell'insegna* on [YouTube here](#).

When: Every year on September 23 at 8pm, September 24 at 1pm and 8pm.

Where: Piazza della Caldaia, Forcella (TE) (not to be confused with the town of Forcella in the Province of L'Aquila!).

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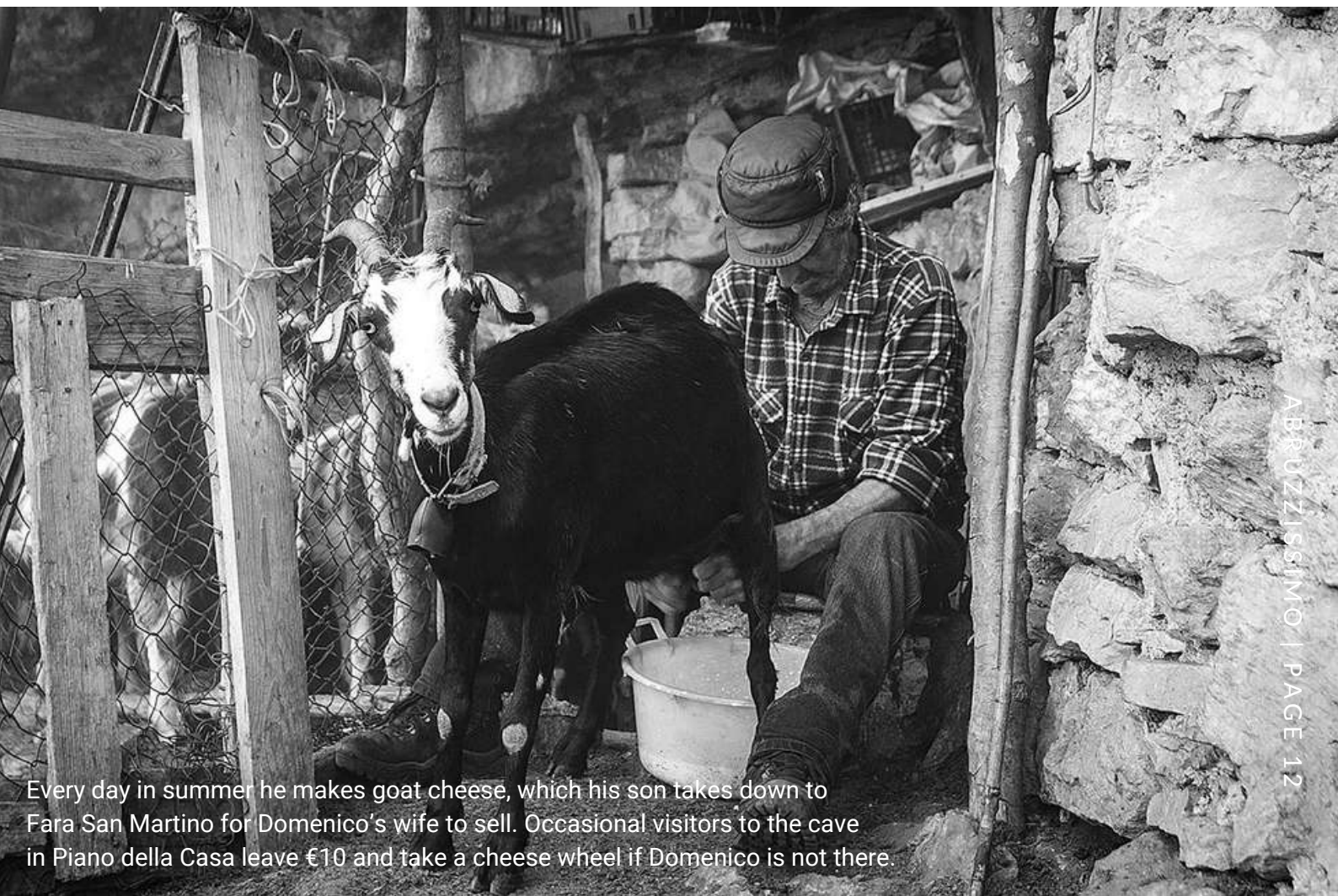
www.travelitalythewriteway.com

Email: linda@travelthewriteway.com





Domenico is one of the last true shepherds in Europe and, certainly, one of those who lives in the most difficult conditions in isolation, a custodian of forgotten caves and trails.



Every day in summer he makes goat cheese, which his son takes down to Fara San Martino for Domenico's wife to sell. Occasional visitors to the cave in Piano della Casa leave €10 and take a cheese wheel if Domenico is not there.



Domenico often says, "This is the last summer in the mountains! I'll finish after this one," but every year he returns to his cave to guard his goats and keep the pastoral tradition alive.



This photo essay has been awarded a special jury mention in the 2020 Banff Mountain Photo Essay Competition.

Mauro Cironi is a mountain guide and an amateur photographer in love with the earth and nature. He is involved in the [Life Coornata project](#) for the protection of the Apennine chamois and the [Salviamo l'Orso](#) protecting the Marsican brown bear.

THE LITTLE COMMUNE THAT COULD

By Teresa Mastrobuono

This is the winning story in our competition where we asked the readers to tell us about their favourite places in Abruzzo.



Castiglione Messer Raimondo. Photo by Nicola De Camillis Baiocchi

June, 2009. I want to buy a house in Italy. The real estate agent takes me to Castiglione Messer Raimondo.

We round sharp, vertiginous curve after curve. Whoopy stomach! He points. I glance up. There's the rotunda of an imposing sandstone building, glowing in the sunset, flanked by a palace-sized bell tower: The magnificent church of San Donato. Two-foot thick brass bells appear – in /out, in /out. Gracefully streaming sound down the road, filling the car with resonance. My chest buzzes. My agent

nods in the direction of the bells.

"Il borgo! (The village!)."

The accelerated thumping of my heart fills my ears. The town is.....a fairy tale!

Parked along the *belvedere*, the scenic overlook, I see the Italian life I've been yearning for: Men in typical orange worker overalls filling water bottles at the fountain. Little girls, fathers breathlessly in tow, riding around the slate surface on pink bicycles. Several cats, slung low in the shadows of cars' tires, eye us. Three men, one with a tonsorial ring of graying hair, two with full

white heads, lean against the *belvedere* railing, staring out. Beyond, the Fino River Valley stretches green and gold, extending a wide embrace to peaks above it. I see the *calanchi* –erosion furrows – with their dramatically textured vertical ridges. The panorama is simultaneously sensuous, tranquilizing, soul-stretching. We approach the house. My heart's pounding accelerates. I want this town to be home! I ended up buying the house – right next to that church with its sonorous bells.

I've stayed there every summer except for this pandemic year. I got to know the ordinary secrets its tiny *vicoli* hold – a chapel with a 14th century fresco of Santa Lucia, accidentally uncovered during a renovation; the town *presepe* with hand-made figures; Bar *La Lanterna*, once a *frantoio*. Its owner shows me where oxen fed while farmers waited for olives to be pressed. I walk the *vicoli* with townspeople every August during the revered feast of San Donato Martire.

These people are the most striking aspect of the town. They wholly embody the Abruzzese nature "*gentile e forte*." During the pandemic's peak, Castiglione was the hardest hit area of Abruzzo. Its mayor tested positive for the virus. He kept working—arranging masks for every household, securing help for those devastated financially, having traditional large, hollow Easter eggs delivered to every child for their *Pasqua* celebration. He had the entire area declared a *zona rossa* to contain the virus' spread.



San Donato Martire Church

As I write this, the town has zero new virus cases. Every ill person has recovered. The church, earthquake damaged, is restored. So are the people. My neighbor Pasquale is out on his daily bicycle ride; my friend and hairdresser, Manola is back in her shop, creating *capolavori* with her clients' hair. Donatella's hearty, cheerful laugh again welcomes customers in her *ortofrutta*. They look a bit more wane, weary. But they believed they could be back. They worked to come back. They are back.

Teresa Mastrobuono has won a night's stay in a romantic geodome in Pianella at Cerchio del Desiderio.

WALKING THROUGH SULMONA

By Clare Lusher

Stroll along the streets of Sulmona, a historic city with a population of 24,000 people. Through its churches, palaces and piazzas you can trace the city's rich history.



A statue of the Roman poet Ovid, Sulmona's most famous resident. Sulmona was Ovid's birthplace and has a statue and street named after him (Corso Ovidio). Born into a wealthy family in Sulmona he became a renowned poet but was eventually banished by Augustus to what is now modern-day Romania.



A medieval aqueduct runs through the city of Sulmona and borders Piazza Garibaldi.





Complesso della Santissima Annunziata, completed in 1706 and declared a national monument in 1902. The church was originally founded in 1320 by the brotherhood of the Compenitenti, it was destroyed by earthquakes and rebuilt into its current Baroque façade.



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Detail of Fontana del Vecchio, a historic drinking water fountain near Piazza Garibaldi

One of the spectacular hardwood original doors found fronting many of the old houses in the city. These doors offer a perspective on a time past, when entrances were grand and well cared for and the size and condition of a door into a home might suggest the level of wealth the family possessed. Each door would be hand-made by local craftsmen.

FORGING A LIFE IN ABRUZZO, ONE HOUSE AT A TIME

By Linda Dini Jenkins

Steve and Lyn Attwell left their hometown of Manchester, in the northwest of England, and moved to Connemara, Ireland at the age of 18. If that sounds adventurous, just wait 'til you read the rest of the story!

The very first time they came to Abruzzo, Steve and Lyn Attwell bought a house. In 2005, they saw something online they really liked and went to Loreto Aprutino to have a look at it. They cancelled their other appointments and bought that house. And so began the first of several adventures on Italian soil.

While the Attwells had lived in Ireland for 18 years, rehabbing a stone farmhouse and later, the adjoining cow barn, they had only been to Italy once before. "We had a holiday in Puglia in 2004," says Steve. "We were thinking about buying a *trullo*, but couldn't find anything either suitable or big enough that wasn't already renovated. So we started researching the next regions to the north online." And found Abruzzo.

BUYING A RUIN

Once they found their house – with its faulty roof, no indoor plumbing, and a septic tank that overflowed when more than two people stayed there – they came to Loreto Aprutino on long working holidays every year. But they didn't move in until 2016 to work full-time for two years on the project. When they put the Loreto Aprutino house on the market, they had three serious



Lyn and Steve Attwell

inquiries and two offers. They sold the house within three months (quick for Abruzzo) for €200,000 – a fair price, considering all the work that went into it. There was simply nothing in the area built to the same standard, and with the unique ironwork features they include.

Nowadays they're resident in Abruzzo all year, apart from holidays and visits to family



Lyn and Steve's house before and after the renovation

and friends back in Ireland. As far as careers go, they'd always had to travel for their blacksmithing work, which was mostly large projects made on site in the UK, France and Spain. Oh, yes. Steve is also a blacksmith.

He was an apprentice back in Manchester and has been working in the field – with his “glamorous assistant, Lyn” – for more than 25 years now. While he used to take commissions for private clients, all of his metal work now goes into their restorations. He even has a forge and a big mechanical hammer onsite at the house they live in now.

DOING IT YOURSELF

Each restoration takes up to five years to complete, and they do every bit of it. There were rumors that they lived in a tent on the property while they worked, but that turns out to be a slight exaggeration. They actually live in the houses as they renovate. “We’ve probably slept in every room in the house while we’re doing these projects,” laughs Lyn. “Renovating is a bit like camping out at times, with the added bonus of dust.”

There is so much to this work: tiling, plastering, roofing, plumbing, framing, and much more. How did they learn to do everything? “We had a *Reader’s Digest* Do-It-Yourself Manual and a

lot of friends who we watched as we worked alongside them in the UK,” says Lyn. “We didn’t even know how to mix cement when we started.”

“Necessity is the mother of invention,” Steve adds, “You learn different things as you go, and are always improving. And of course, there’s the internet.” On a recent trip back to Ireland, they even re-did part of a project, applying the improved methods they’d since learned to the converted cow shed that their daughter lives in. And they’re planning an addition, eventually.

Steve says the locals love that this non-Italian couple does all the work themselves and don’t rely on outside help. In fact, there’s a chap who comes around often to the house where they live (and work) now in Montebello Di Bertona – it was his wife’s family’s house in the 1930s – to critique their work and bring friends around to see what they’re doing. The house was built around 1900, and its claim to fame is that a former owner flew a Communist flag out the window and called it the “*Zona Sovietica!*”

EASY-GOING LIFESTYLE

The Montebello house was in better shape than the Loreto house when they bought it. They looked for price, as well as original



Steve's ironwork

features, like vaulted ceilings and arches, and are building special interest from there with their craftsmanship and ironwork.

Steve and Lyn enjoy the Abruzzese people and the region's easy-going lifestyle, including growing their own food. "It's like Connemara in the West of Ireland," jokes Steve. "But with sunshine."

When they first came on holiday, they had no Italian whatsoever. They quickly learnt construction terminology and built on that. They still aren't fluent but know enough to be self-sufficient. Adapting to the community was a bit slow in the outskirts of Loreto Aprutino, mostly because they had no neighbours and were always working at the house. But they got to know the builder's merchants quite well and, gradually, a few other people.

"Since moving to Montebello Di Bertona, it's been almost instantaneous because it's a much smaller community and we have

neighbours," says Steve. "Italians are very sociable and interested in people."

Steve worked as a metalworker in a factory in the UK, but found it to be extremely boring after a while, so he decided to branch out into blacksmithing and design. He and Lyn made a conscious plan to incorporate the metalwork into the renovations to make the houses unique and let Steve run riot with his imagination. The work speaks for itself: his staircases, bed frames, chairs, and gates are nothing short of remarkable.

His advice for anyone planning a move to Abruzzo? "Learn as much of the language as you can. And don't be put off by people who might have had negative experiences, because everyone is different and no two experiences are alike." Spoken like a builder of more than houses.

Linda Dini Jenkins leads small tours to Italy and blogs about travel at www.travelitalythewriteway.com.

RESTORING A NOBLE PALACE: IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

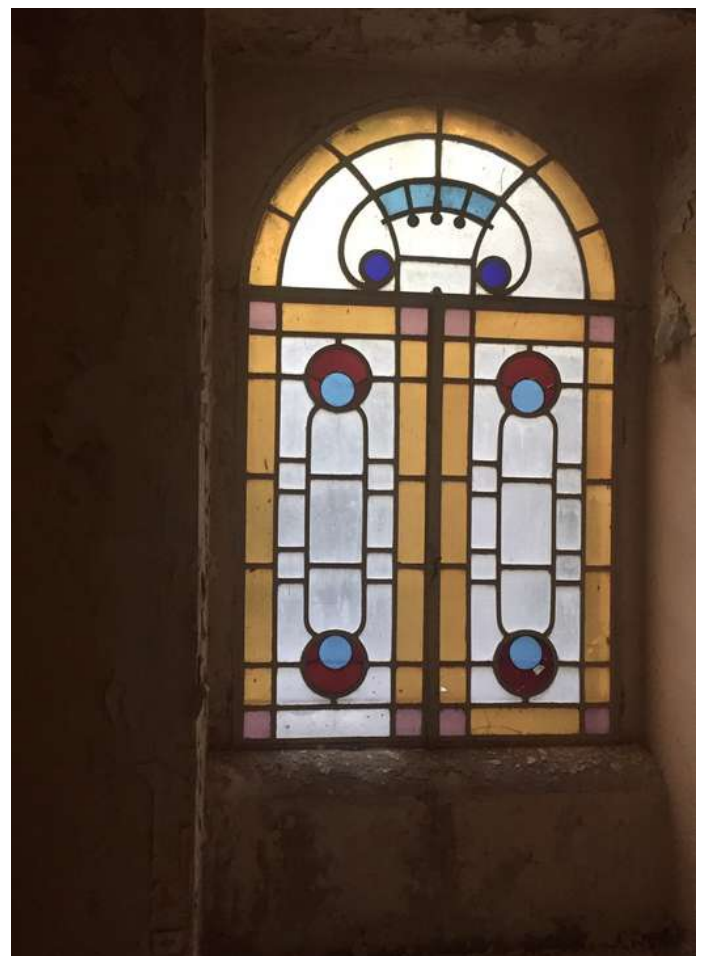
By Bimbi Bellhouse

A group of friends bought a crumbling noble palace in Casoli to convert into luxurious residences. ABRUZZISSIMO continues its series of articles about their dream renovation, with all its ups and downs.

It took almost 20 years for Palazzo Ricci to find its new owners. Now that the sales contracts have finally been signed, we have the keys to the noble pile and can savour every special detail of the palace. The renovation hasn't started yet, but we go there often to get to know the building better, to admire the beauty that time and decades of neglect have damaged, but not destroyed. There are so many remarkable features that make this palace special: stained-glass windows, elegant banisters, ancient pebble floors, and a grand double staircase leading down into the garden.

Palazzo Ricci evolved organically over 500 years from a small, terraced cottage, to become gradually larger and ever more imposing. It shares many characteristics with other noble palaces of the Chieti province, having been built in the Neapolitan Baroque (*barocco napoletano*) style, with other features added later. Every time I go to visit the palace, I marvel at the elegant façades with their dignified windows and the intricately carved stone decoration both around them and under the roof overhang. No expense was spared in later years to elevate the building to a suitably noble palace!

One of the palazzo's most striking features



One of palazzo's stained-glass windows

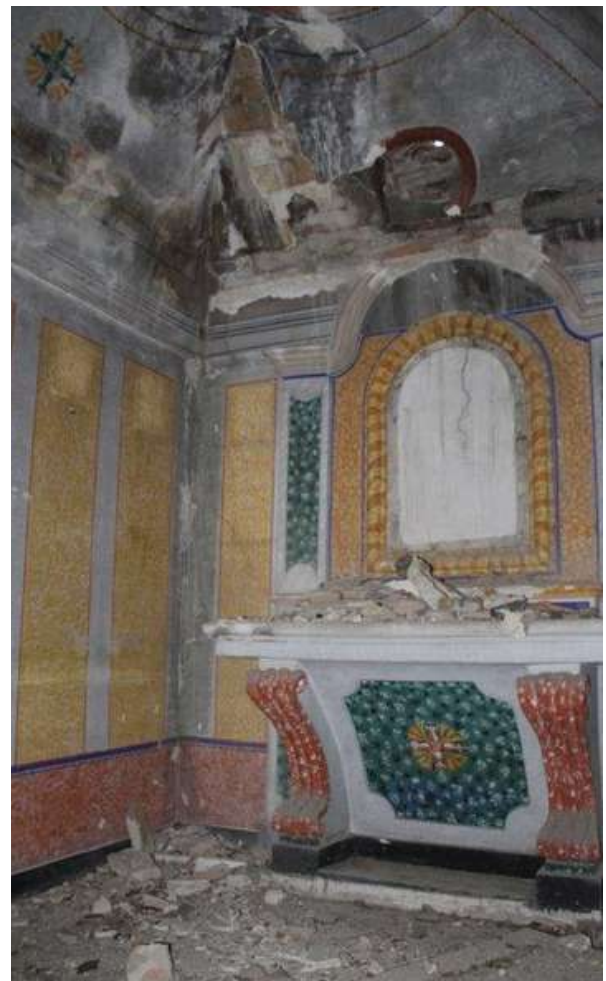
is the entrance hall and atrium, and it was this aspect of the palazzo that impressed us the most when we first saw it. An atrium is an open-roofed entrance hall or central courtyard at the heart of the house that used to be a feature of most ancient Roman noble houses. As you enter the palace, you step into the atrium that was covered over in the early 20th century with a beautiful stained-glass skylight in the Liberty style (the Italian variant of Art Nouveau).



Metal skylight frame which used to have stained glass inserts

The intricate metal structure of the rooflight is still intact, and we are planning to restore the glass inserts in their original colours. A striking lateral staircase, complete with vaulting and original 18th-century delicate iron banisters leads up to the residential floors of the building. Liberty style was especially admired by Gabriele D'Annunzio, the famous Abruzzese poet and a frequent visitor to Palazzo Ricci. We think that the skylight and matching arched stained-glass windows were put in place around the time that the Ricci family were formally elevated to the nobility in 1910.

Another area of the palace which we found extraordinarily full of character was the *seminterrato* or basement floor. The ceilings are constructed in part of soaring



The family chapel

brick 'cruciform' vaulting and *putrelle e tavelle*, traditional shaped beams and tiles dating back to the 1600s. The floor is in large part *a ciottoli* – pebbles laid in patterns within wooden 'sets.' This ancient flooring is also found outside in the garden in front of the cottage. We were so excited to see that all these elements were in surprisingly good order and can be restored.

Amongst the detritus of many centuries (this area was used for agricultural purposes and as a cellar for the storage of wine, grain, olive oil, tools and the like) we found some huge wooden barrels which we will refurbish. Sadly, a lot of the beautiful artefacts we found here proved to be riddled with woodworm and too far gone to save. In one of the rooms we

The library room



discovered an ancient olive press that will be also restored, along with other ancient machinery, to provide an insight into the life of the palazzo in years gone by. I was amused to hear from an elderly resident of Casoli that he could remember Barone Ricci riding his horse into the palace stables, which were part of this area – well before the Second World War.

Another characteristic part of the palazzo is the small family chapel on the top floor. There are no records as to when it was constructed, but we think it was in the 1800s, when the top floor of the main building was added. The chapel was painstakingly painted using costly techniques fashionable at that time. When we entered the chapel for the first time, it took our breath away: the prayer books and candles were still there, intact. Unfortunately, the stunning vaulted ceiling had collapsed onto the altar. We will of course be restoring the 'pavilion' vaulting as well as recreating those exquisite paint effects.

It will certainly be a long, meticulous process to restore all these precious special details, but they are the heart and soul of Palazzo Ricci – and the part of the project that I am most excited about, for the uniqueness and authenticity that they will bring to these luxury residences.

<https://palazzoricci.club>

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WATERFALLS IN ABRUZZO

By Stuart Haines

Take a few hours to discover some of the region's beautiful waterfalls – from gentle chutes hidden away in secret valleys to the highest falls in Italy!



Cascata Del Verde. Photo via Cascatadelverde.it

Abruzzo is a mountainous and fractured land; rocks of varying hardness have been cracked, contorted and thrust against each other to form cliffs and chasms and leaving resistant bands within softer layers. In the winter, the high ground is covered deeply in snow that runs off in the spring thaw whilst the waves of summer heat are punctuated by intense and drenching thunderstorms. Mix these things together and you have perfect waterfall country!

We are blessed with many. They provide sights and sounds to enchant us and moments of cool tranquility where the outside world seems a long way off. It's a delight

to spend a half day to explore one; to discover another corner of this grand region and to feel at peace with murmuring, falling water in a sun-dappled glade or on an open mountainside.

There are waterfalls of all shapes and sizes in every part of Abruzzo. Each has its particular charms and mood, some are well-known and others hardly ever visited, a few are easily accessible, but most need some effort to reach. And they vary considerably in themselves, usually depending on the time of year – a gentle shower in August may be a roaring torrent in February.

CASCATA DI SAN GIOVANNI – BOCCA DI VALLE (CH)

The Majella massif has our greatest concentration of cascades, particularly along the southeast margin. The steep mountainside is incised by deep valleys that channel rain and snowmelt swiftly to the Adriatic. In places where the porous limestone abuts bands of impermeable but softer sandstone, magic happens! Water comes to the surface; precipices are carved out and a waterfall is born.

The most celebrated is the Cascata di San Giovanni in the Vesola Valley, 3km upstream from the road at Bocca di Valle, a part of the comune of Guardiagrele. The river drops 35m from a hard limestone lip, initially down a slippery runnel, but then falls free before splattering onto rocks and into the pool below, filling the air with a fine cooling mist. It's a very pretty sight, immersed in the trees that fill the tight valley through which you climbed.

The path is good, but steep in places, and you will need walking boots or shoes. It takes about an hour and a half from the road, gradually ascending 600m in the process – follow the well-waymarked path, F2. You can reverse your steps to the road, but I recommend completing the circuit of path F2 which returns to Bocca di Valle through marvelous beech forests and down the crest of the hillside – a perfect 7km round trip! The waterfall is well-known and, at times, quite busy with visitors – avoiding summer weekends and holidays is wise, if you can.

At the time of writing, the authorities are concerned about a boulder at the top of the falls, lest it fall. You may find that you are advised to keep your distance from the cascade itself. The circuit of path F2 is unaffected.



Cascata di San Giovanni

CENTO FONTI – CESACASTINA (TE)

This beautiful area of waterfalls lies on open mountainside in the heart of the less-frequented Monti della Laga, north of the Gran Sasso. It is quite different from the other three, lying at the tree line, with a wide and airy aspect in a site that feels far from civilisation. It's a wonderful place that rewards the effort of getting to – a fine day in the mountains!

As the name suggests (*cento fonti* means “one hundred springs”). It is not a spectacular single plunge, but rather a series of descending steps, the highest perhaps 4m, spread out over 1km.

Each hop down by the river Acero is where a fault in the sandstone has dropped the downstream side. Between each step, the waters shoot in sheets down the gently dipping beds of rock, like a giant mountain sluice. It's a lovely spot and, with the wide grassy banks of the river, a delightful contrast to the enclosed, hidden feel of many of Abruzzo's cascades.

The top of the falls lies at a notable 1,750m, but you walk up on excellent paths from the high village of Cesacastina, with 600m to be ascended gradually over 4.6km, mostly through beautiful shady forest. Follow the waymarked path 3001, the Sentiero Italia (SI), out of the village. Allow an hour and three-quarters to get to the Stazzo Cento Fonti and wear walking boots or shoes. At the junction of the SI and track 354, go right along 354 to

Cento Fonti



leave the forest and reach the river. Take the map of the Monti della Laga if you can and watch the weather — this is mountain country.

Return is by reversing the way there. If you prefer a more varied round trip, though, I recommend Walk 21 in my book *Walking in Abruzzo* (Cicerone Press), which provides a full description of various options. A word of warning: don't step onto the damp rocks in and near the river, which are very slippery. There have been accidents. Be sensible, stay safe and enjoy this Abruzzo gem.

CASCATA DELLE CALLARELLE – PETTORANO SUL GIZIO (AQ)

From the well-known and the remote to the small and virtually unheard of. The Cascata delle Callarelle is hidden away in a little enclosed valley just outside the village of Pettorano sul Gizio at the southern end of the Sulmona Valley. Indeed, finding it is half the fun!

The spring that feeds the waterfall is not far above, and the volume of water that swishes smoothly down the 10m high slab of rock into the small pool at its foot is never great, but the charm of the place lies in its understated delicacy and particular atmosphere. It's a cool and secret hideaway. Hardly anyone comes here (you're as likely to see a deer as another person) and the sun rarely penetrates the short, dark canyon that leads to the fall. The result is an almost eerie sense of solitude and quiet (although you haven't had to walk far to get there).

Access is along an ancient mule track that runs into the lush valley. There are yellow paint marks with *cascata* occasionally written upon them to reassure you that you are headed the right way.

The final section descends quite steeply to the little riverbed but, by taking care, you will be fine with good walking shoes. Continue upstream alongside the trickle of water for about 80m until the fall reveals itself at the last moment.

I recommend walking from Bar Il Chiosco next to the football pitch below the old centre of Pettorano and between it and the S.S. 17 main road. Head south from the bar to pass below the railway arch and then fork left (sign to Callarelle) to follow a small road which becomes a track past vegetable gardens and into the valley. It's 2.3km to the waterfall and you climb about 200m. You can, though, drive to a small parking space at the end of the track, reducing the walk to a very comfortable 800m – ideal for a quick visit.

There are dozens of similar small cascades throughout the Abruzzo mountains, so the Callarelle stands here as a fine example of these characteristic features of our landscape.

CASCATE DEL VERDE – BORRELLO (CH)

The Cascate del Verde, just outside the village of Borrello on the southern slopes of the Sangro Valley, are the highest in Italy with the streaming torrent dropping over 200m in three distinct steps. The Verde is not a big river, but its waters tumbling down the large blocks of limestone are impressive, falling repeatedly from ledge to pool in descending the cliff face. The ledges and microclimate have provided a foothold for small trees and bushes, kept damp by the spray, thus providing a delightful vista of the abraded white river pouring down and swirling amongst the brownish rocks all immersed in the lush green woodland. It's a pretty scene.

This is a great and easy place to visit. The falls are famous but are unlikely to be crowded (except on August weekends) and... there are facilities! It may be the nearest thing to a developed tourist destination in Southern Abruzzo. The area has been protected in the [Cascate del Verde Nature Reserve](#). There is a car park, an education room, picnic and kids' play facilities and two bars offering snacks and drinks. There is also a small souvenir shop where you pay your €2 entry fee. Site development has resulted in good paths and steps leading to three main viewpoints. The best views are from the second and third viewpoints which are lower and closer – but lower means steps. The third and closest platform involves



Cascata delle Callarelle

descending 170 steps which must be re-climbed – but it's worth it!

The area above the falls is where the main bar is. A little further on is a *belvedere* with a panoramic view over the Sangro Valley (but you can't see the falls, which are below you). This is about 1.1km from the carpark – an easy walk along an unsealed road. On the way, you cross the pretty Verde river, passing an area where a crayfish reintroduction project is taking place.

Hopefully, by now you are inspired! Refresh your spirits, cool your tired feet and discover still more of beautiful Abruzzo – the land of tumbling water!

Stuart Haines is based in the Sulmona Valley. He is the author of [Walking in Abruzzo](#) and one of the creators of the [Anello della Valle Peligna](#) long-distance footpath. He also curates the walkers' website [Sulmona Valley Walks](#). Photos by Stuart Haines.

BRODETTO WARS

By Anna Swann

Once a humble dish of poor fishermen, the *brodetto*, a thick rich fish soup, is served in some of the best restaurants in Abruzzo. In the old days, the *brodetto* was cooked with smaller discarded fish and scraps that could not be sold. Purists insist that the true, old-style *brodetto* must have at least nine or ten types of fish such as rockfish, tub gurnard, weever, dogfish, red mullet, cuttlefish and some other, smaller kinds, which can be cooked whole. Over the years, the traditional recipe has been adjusted to meet the changing tastes and, nowadays, prawns, clams, mussels and monkfish are often added – but still never a fish with dark meat (e.g. mackerel, sardines).

There is a long-standing rivalry between Pescara, Giulianova, San Vito Chietino and Vasto, as each city insists that its version of *brodetto* is the purest, most authentic and superior to any other. The recipe varies in each location. For instance, in Vasto, the onions are added without being sautéed and the soup is cooked in a terracotta dish called *tijelle* without being stirred, while in Giulianova it is prepared in a large metal pot. Which one is better? You have to try them all to decide.

The days when the *brodetto* was a dish of the poor are long gone. In fact, today it is often the most expensive

item on the menu, with prices varying from €25 to €40. However, a portion is normally gargantuan, and you might want to share it. The fish soup is always served with slices of toasted bread to be dipped in the juices.

WHERE TO FIND THE BEST ABRUZZESE-STYLE BRODETTO

The prices below are per single portion.

OSTERIA LA STRACCIAVOCC

Via Trieste, 159, Giulianova

Here you can taste *il brodetto alla giuliese*, cooked with sautéed onions and garlic in a large aluminium pot. €25

RISTORANTE IL PALMIZIO

Viale G. Marcone, 160, Alba Adriatica

This family-run restaurant prides itself on using an old traditional recipe for its *brodetto* made with at least 10 types of fresh seasonal fish and seafood daily. They also use a typical Abruzzese tomato variety, *pera abruzzese*, for the soup, which adds a lovely sweet note. €28

TRATTORIA DA FERRI

Via Osca, 82, Vasto

A simplified version of *Il brodetto alla vastese* with fewer fish types, but still tasty. They also offer a plate of pasta that you can eat with the remaining juices from the soup. It is a very busy restaurant, so booking is essential. €35

RISTORANTE LO SCUDO

Corso G. Garibaldi, 39, Vasto

Excellent *il brodetto alla vastese* made with tomatoes and olive oil from the restaurant's farm. €29

TRATTORIA LA KANTINA

Via Feltrino, 8, San Vito Chietino

A small family-run restaurant that fills up quickly on weekends. The *brodetto* is cooked in *tijelle* with 4-5 types of fish, clams, mussels and prawns. €30



EAT YOUR HEART OUT, CHAMPAGNE

By Anna Swann

France has champagne, Italy has *metodo classico*. The Italian-style bubbly is made exactly the same way as its pricey French cousins – using the *champanoise* method – but because European Union regulations prohibit producers outside the Champagne region in France from using the term, Italian winemakers came up with the name “*metodo classico*”, or classic method.

After the first fermentation in tanks, wine is bottled with added yeast and sugar for a second fermentation, during which time yeast reacts with sugar creating alcohol and bubbles of carbon dioxide. The bottles with now-sparkling wine are rotated daily with the neck tilted down, so the yeast cells (called “lees”) gather near the seal. The rotation continues for about eight weeks and many producers prefer doing it manually (which, obviously, will be reflected on the price tag!). To remove the lees, the bottle neck is frozen, so when the seal is opened, the small blob of ice with sediment is pushed out by the accumulated pressure. Then a dose of sugar and wine or a sweet wine variety is added and the bottle is corked. This step, called dosage, determines the sweetness of the final product, which can vary from *Extra Brut* (extra dry) to *Doux* (very sweet). On some bottles of Italian bubbly you will see the term “*Pas Dosé*” or “*Dosaggio Zero*” – which means zero dosage, no sugar was added and the wine is naturally dry.

In Abruzzo, *metodo classico* has become very popular among producers, with some of them giving bigger, better-known winemakers elsewhere a good run for their money. What I like about *metodo classico* wines from Abruzzo is that many of them are made from native grape varieties rather than the conventional Chardonnay and Pinot Noir used in the north of Italy and in France. As it turns out, our indigenous grapes such as Pecorino, Cococciola, Montonico and Passerina make superb bottle-fermented sparklers that have been winning awards and the hearts of wine lovers from across the globe in the last few years.



These are my top picks for those who want to try the Abruzzese bubbly:

SPUMANTE BRUT CARMINE FESTA MILLESIMATO (EREDY LEGOZIANO)

A blend of Pecorino and Trebbiano grapes. Vintages vary but the minimum bottle fermentation time is 48 months (also available at 60, 72 and 84 months). Delicate creamy bubbles with lovely pear and bread crust nuances. Price from €20.

Buy directly from the [winery](#).



DOSAGGIO ZERO, METODO CLASSICO (TENUTA ULISSE)

100% Pecorino grapes. 18 months in bottle. Zesty lemony notes with bright acidity and a dry finish. Drink as an aperitivo or with raw fish and seafood dishes. Price €21.

Buy from the [winery](#) or on [Abruzzowine.it](#).



D'EUS ROSÉ SPUMANTE BRUT (CHIUSA GRANDE)

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Pecorino and Chardonnay. A pretty blush-coloured bubbly with elegant fruity notes, a hint of cherry and a delicate fizz. Price €19.

Buy from [Chiusagrande.com](#).

CROSTATATA PIE WITH RICOTTA AND GRAPE JAM

By Emanuela Trotta

For us Italians, *crostata* pie means home comfort. It is one of the most popular desserts on Italian tables, because it can be made with simple ingredients that everyone has in their pantry. Abruzzo has many traditional versions of *crostata* with custard, jam or ricotta cheese.

I personally have always loved it, because inside a simple crunchy buttery shell there is a soft delicious filling.

Crostata with ricotta is often called *pizza di ricotta* in dialect in some areas of Abruzzo because, just like pizza, it is traditionally round. I like making rectangular *crostata* but feel free to use a round pie tin if that is what you prefer. This pie is typical for Easter holiday menus and other special occasions. Simple ricotta filling can be enriched with chocolate chips, sour cherries in syrup or jam.

In my recipe, I combine sheep ricotta cheese from our mountains with Montepulciano grape jam as a tribute to the harvest that our local wine growers are about to begin. A handful of chopped walnuts in the pastry gives it an extra crunch and flavour.

INGREDIENTS

For the shortcrust pastry:

240 g white flour, 25 g finely chopped walnuts, 90 g butter, 90 g sugar, 1 egg, 1/2 teaspoon baking powder

For the filling:

250 g sheep ricotta cheese, 4 tablespoons icing sugar, 1/2 lemon zest, 1 egg, 5 tablespoons Montepulciano grape jam.

In addition:

icing sugar and walnut kernels to decorate



PREPARATION

Start by mixing all the ingredients for the shortcrust pastry to make a homogeneous dough. Leave it to rest in the fridge for 30 minutes. In the meantime, work the ricotta cheese with sugar, lemon and egg to get a smooth cream.

Roll out 2/3 of your pastry in a 5mm thick rectangular shape. Grease a pie tin with butter, dust it with flour and line it with the pastry. Spread the ricotta onto the pastry then top with jam.

Roll out the remaining pastry on a lightly floured surface to 5mm thick. Cut the dough into wide strips. To lattice the pastry, place a pastry strip horizontally on top of the pie, then lay a strip vertically, repeating to create the traditional woven *crostata* pie pattern.

Bake in the oven at 180° for about 25 minutes, remove from the tray and let the pie cool before sprinkling with icing sugar.

Emanuela Trotta is an Abruzzo-based food writer and food stylist who works with various Italian magazines.

FIGS IN SYRUP

By Connie De Vincentis

In the previous issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine I shared an old family recipe for savoury green figs in oil, which can accompany roasts and stews. Since then figs have ripened and there are plenty of them around in Tocco Da Casauria where I live.

In my family, figs in syrup are called “fake figs in oil” because the sweet sugary liquid looks like olive oil. Pick smaller figs for this recipe, so they sit snugly in jars.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg figs
- 500 g sugar
- 1 l water
- Juice of 3 lemons
- 200 ml dark rum (optional)

PREPARATION

If possible, pick the figs yourself, taking care not to break the skin. The best time of year to pick figs for this recipe is August and September, making sure that the figs you choose are firm.

Infuse figs in the water-sugar-lemon mixture for 24 hours. After 24 hours, boil them for one hour and leave in the infusion for another 24 hours. Then boil again for one hour. At the end, you can add the rum for an extra, boozy flavour.

While still hot place the figs in sterilized hot jars, filling the gaps with the liquid they have been cooked and infused in and ensuring that the figs are covered. Close the jars tightly.

Connie De Vincentis runs a [home restaurant](#) and [cooking school](#) in Tocco da Casauria.



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Fragment of a fresco from Azzinano by Alessandra Puppo, 2001

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Pettorano sul Gizio, an old postcard

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Magazine

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Ciao a tutti!

First of all, I would like to thank all our readers who have been sending us donations. ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine is a free publication, but we thrive to be the best, which means our small team puts a lot of time and energy to prepare each edition. To help us continue our work, please keep your donations coming ([click here to donate](#)).

Autumn is always a special time in Abruzzo. The crisp mountain air fills with the formidable sounds of deer mating calls. We tell you where to head to watch and listen to the deer. The town of Casoli celebrates its patron saint, Santa Reparata, with feasts and a special dessert – *le totere* – the recipe for which you will find on page 27. In this issue we also talk about the old jobs that used to exist in Abruzzo: charcoal and sieve makers, donkey farriers and lupin sellers. We follow in the footsteps of Leonardo Da Vinci who, it seems, visited the Abruzzi at the end of the 15th century. Stroll with us around the tiny hamlet of Azzinano di Tossicia to admire its colourful murals and discover the history of an M-shaped building in Pescara.

We have received some amazing photos for our competition, Abruzzo in Photos, some of which you can see on page 5. To enter the contest, send us your best snapshots to win a copy of a history and art guide to Abruzzo.

If you have an idea for an article or want to write for the magazine, please get in touch at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

So welcome autumn, settle in, and enjoy the latest issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine!

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

WHAT'S ON



MAXXI L'AQUILA

After a long restoration, the magnificent Ardinghelli Palace in L'Aquila finally opens its doors. It will be home to MAXXI L'Aquila, a contemporary art museum with a permanent collection of masterpieces by international artists, exciting temporary exhibitions, and cultural projects. The Russian Government donated €7.2 million for the restoration of both the historic building and the church of San Gregorio Magno in the city. The museum's official opening is planned for October 30. For more details, see the [MAXXI L'Aquila website](#).



FOLIAGE DESTINATIONS IN ABRUZZO

By the end of the month, the mountains will turn to a beautiful blanket of reds and golds as the leaves begin to change. Some of the best spots to admire the autumn foliage are in the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo. The area around Civitella Alfedena and Barrea is spectacular this time of year. Hike the trails around the Riserva Naturale La Camosciara and Val di Rose to see the colourful mountains and valley. Keep an eye on our [Facebook page](#) where we'll be posting photos and suggestions for the best foliage hikes and walks.

October is unusually quiet this year, with fewer visitors around and many local religious celebrations and traditional food festivals not going ahead. However, there are still some exciting openings and events planned for this month. All links are clickable (hold Ctrl and click to open a link in a separate window).



GRAPE HARVEST WITH WINEMAKERS

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo grapes are being harvested this month. Some wineries invite the curious – children and adults alike – to participate in grape picking and pressing. On October 4, the following wineries are open: [Villa Medoro](#) in Atri, [Vini Contesa](#) in Collecorvino, and [Dora Sarchese Vini](#) in Ortona. On October 11, you can join [San Lorenzo Vini](#) in Castilenti and [Tenuta del Priore](#) in Collecorvino. Start with a simple peasant breakfast and soak up the joyful atmosphere of the harvest. Contact the wineries to book your place.

EAT LIKE A SHEPHERD

Four restaurants in Teramo will offer typical dishes enjoyed by local shepherds in the old days. Every evening (and lunch on Sunday), from October 8 to 11, celebrate the traditions of the transhumance (the seasonal movement of flocks) at [Cipria di Mare](#), [Capolinea](#), [La Cantina di Porta Romana](#) and [La Stazione](#), which will serve *mazzarelle*, *pecora alla callara*, *gnocchi al sugo di castrato*, *pasta alla pecorara* and other rich traditional offerings that are hard to come by nowadays.

WHAT'S ON



VIRTUAL COOKING CLASSES

If you can't visit Abruzzo this year, enjoy the region's traditional food without leaving your home. Our sister company, Abruzzo With Gusto, is starting online cooking classes in English this month. You will connect with local cooks who, via Zoom, from their kitchens, will teach you how to cook *cannelloni di scrippelle* (rolled thin crepes filled with cheese), *agnello cacio e ove* (lamb with cheese and eggs), *bocconotti* chocolate tarts and *celli pieni* grape jam filled biscuits and other dishes. For children, there is a virtual class on how to make *pupa* and *cavallo* giant cookies. You can join an online group class or plan a private virtual class with friends, family or colleagues. For more details go to Abruzzo With Gusto [website](#).



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DID YOU KNOW?

THE HIDDEN M



The Government Palace (*Palazzo del Governo*) in Pescara was built in the shape of the letter "M" but to see it clearly you would have to look from above (or on Google Maps in satellite view!). The Palace was designed by architect Vincenzo Pilotti during the Fascist Era, a few years after the province of Pescara was born and the city of Pescara merged with Castellamare. In those years, from 1927 to 1936, many public buildings were built in the symmetric imposing fascist architecture style to play on patriotic fervour and demonstrate the absolute rule of the State. In this case, it also celebrates Benito Mussolini, *il Duce* (from Latin *dux* which means "leader") as he was often called. As historical pictures show, there used to be a huge inscription "DVCE" on the main façade of the palace facing Piazza Italia and the town hall but it was replaced by the sculptures representing the River, the Mine, Agriculture and the Sea. The palace houses administrative offices of the Pescara Province and a library. The impressive entrance hall can be visited during business hours.

Address: Piazza Italia, 30, Pescara.

ABRUZZO IN PHOTOS

WIN A COPY OF HISTORY AND ART GUIDE TO ABRUZZO



"From my balcony in Vasto".
By Carmine A. Iannaccone

Our competition "Abruzzo in Photos" continues! To enter send us your best shots of Abruzzo with a caption explaining what the photo shows and your name. Over the next three months we will pick the best ones to publish in the magazine and on our Facebook page. The photo that receives the highest number of likes will win and its author will get the beautiful latest edition of Abruzzo History and Art Guide (in English) by Carsa Edizioni.

Submit photos to editor@abruzzissimo.com (max. size 1MB each). Put "Photo contest" in the subject field.

Closing date: November 15



The Corno Grande peak seen from Ornaio Grande. By Jacqueline Cupello



Beach of Ripari di Giobbe, hamlet of Ortona (CH) at sunset. By Giulia Pietrobattista



Citta Sant'Angelo. By Marcelo Lutter-Paz

WHEN LEONARDO DA VINCI CAME TO ABRUZZO

By Francesco Proia

Many historical clues tell us that the great Leonardo visited Abruzzo at the end of the 15th century. What did he see and do here? What was the purpose of his visit? Many aspects of his trip remain a tantalising mystery.

In May 1499, Leonardo Da Vinci was invited on a trip to the Abruzzi. His friend Paolo Trivulzio, a fabric merchant, was heading to the wild lands of Abruzzo, which at the time were part of the Kingdom of Naples. He was going to buy wool in the city of L'Aquila, the most valuable on the market at that time. Both Florence and Milan had close business relations with the Abruzzi, an important and one of the biggest suppliers of raw wool.

INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE

The journey ahead was not easy and Da Vinci, who was 46 years old at the time, drew up his will before leaving. Trivulzio had dozens of trips behind him, but the precautions he took were never too many. He did not stop in busy towns, to prevent anyone from recognising them, figuring out what they were transporting and where they were headed. He also hired about twenty people for each trip, who helped him to transport the Abruzzese woollen blankets and ensured the safety of the precious cargo. But that journey was different. The fabric merchant did not just come to buy wool – he had more ambitious projects for his artist friend. Trivulzio wanted to show the Renaissance genius Tarantam, today's Taranta Peligna, the town where the world's best fabric weaving looms were made. It was industrial espionage of sorts. Leonardo, a gifted engineer, did not take long to understand the innovative secret behind those intricate weaving machines. Some historians think that Da Vinci had to offer his sketches of cherubs in exchange for the mechanical secrets he managed to crack so fast. Those



Storm over a landscape, Leonardo da Vinci. Royal Library, Windsor.

cherubs are still used as a motif on the famous blankets from Abruzzo.

As it turned out, during that trip Leonardo also visited Sulmona. Someone recognized the city in one of his sketches (see above) preserved in the Royal Collection owned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, along with other drawings of the mountains in which the mountainous reliefs of the Morrone and Majella mountains, as well as Gran Sasso, can be recognised.



Cherubs on a blanket made by Coperte Merlino in Taranta Peligna

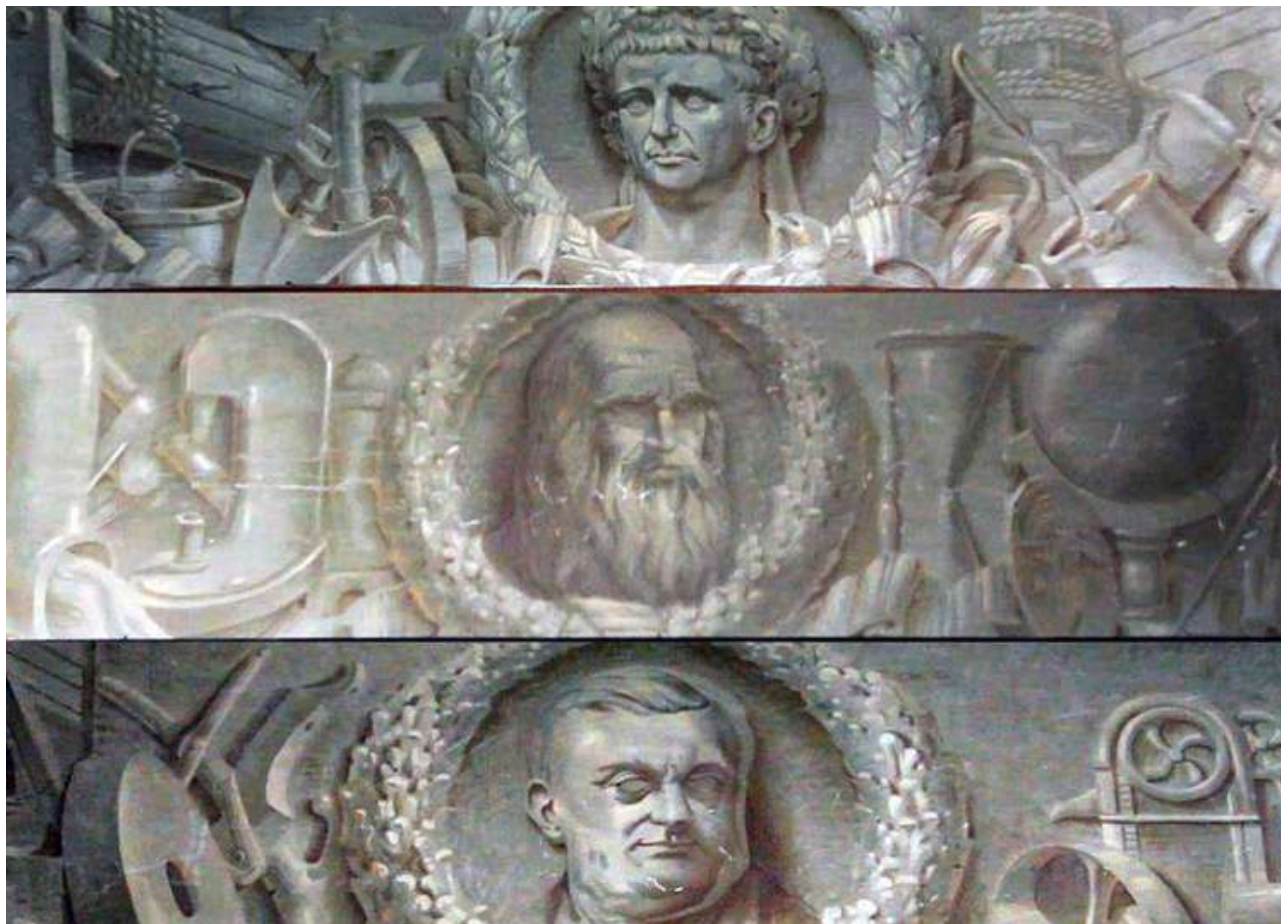
A proof of this trip is a manuscript by Leonardo Da Vinci, which tells in great detail his journey to the Abruzzi. It was published a while ago in a magazine, but no one knows where it is now. It has to be noted that, for security reasons, much of the material referring to Leonardo does not say where it comes from and where it is located. However, the fact that the manuscript is also mentioned in the book *Bibliotheca Leonardiana*, a volume of over 2200 pages written by Mauro Guerrini and edited by Augusto Marinoni and Carlo Pedretti, all experts on the life of Da Vinci, makes us believe that the manuscript about Abruzzo really exists.

A STOP IN CELANO

It is not certain, but there are also some clues telling us that perhaps Da Vinci also stopped near Lake Fucino. According to some scholars, during the journey back from Sulmona to Rome, Leonardo went to see the grandest hydraulic construction of antiquity, the tunnels built by ancient Romans 1500 years earlier in an attempt to drain the lake

(see the article about Lake Fucino in the August issue of *ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine*). A few years later, Pope Leo X commissioned Da Vinci to carry out a project of drying up the Pontine Marshes and the port of Civitavecchia, as he was the only one fit to the grandiose plan. Leonardo presented his studies to the pontiff, including a bird's-eye view plan of those lands. This drawing is also preserved in Windsor Castle. Unfortunately, a few months later the pope died, and his successor did not want to take on the ambitious project which remained only on paper.

Apart from the assumption that a genius engineer like Da Vinci could not have missed an opportunity to see the Roman hydraulic system, there is another clue that makes us think that he may have stopped in Celano. *The Lauri Code*, one of the three apograph manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci's *A Treatise on Painting*, appears to have been written on paper produced in the famous and prestigious paper mill of Celano. In those years, the paper from Celano was highly valued for being whiter compared to other, more ivory kinds, because it was washed with non-ferrous waters of the lake. I use the word "appears" because the priceless copy of the treatise, owned by the Lauri family from Pescara,



Fresco in the Palazzo Torlonia

has never been published. Only a few scholars of the scientific committee who are dealing with the analysis of the work have seen the watermark of the Celano paper mill on it.

MYSTERY IN THE PALACE

But Leonardo and Fucino are not only linked by the Lauri code. There is also a painting that can be seen in the Palazzo Torlonia in Avezzano. At the entrance to the palace, above a fresco depicting the Celano Castle overlooking Lake Fucino, there are three faces, in an order that cannot be considered random: Julius Caesar, Leonardo Da Vinci and Alessandro Torlonia. One wonders what Da Vinci is doing in the residence of Prince Torlonia? Roman emperor Caesar was the first man who came up with the idea of draining the lake and Alessandro Torlonia, one of the richest men in Europe, drained the Fucino, the third biggest lake in Italy, in 1878. Torlonia finished what the ancient Romans started building on the grandest hydraulic construction

of antiquity. Even today, over a century after the drainage, the incredible reclamation project still reigns over the waters of Fucino, which otherwise would return with all their force. But why is Leonardo's face between these two? Maybe we should ask who really is behind the greatest hydraulic work found in Abruzzo: Caesar, Torlonia or Leonardo Da Vinci?

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Palazzo Torlonia is open to public from Monday to Friday. Free entrance.

Address: piazza Torlonia, 91, Avezzano.

Francesco Proia is a journalist and director of www.marsicalive.it. He has written Il Principe del Lago, a book that talks about Da Vinci's trip to Abruzzo and his connection with Torlonia. His other books are Lake Dust (in English) and Polvere del Lago.

SIEVE MAKERS, DONKEY FARRIERS AND LUPIN SELLERS: JOBS AND TRADES FROM THE PAST

By Luigi Braccili

For centuries, every village and town in Abruzzo had artisans specialising in certain crafts. Many trades have disappeared, others exist to this day. Below are excerpts from a book by Luigi Braccili talking about some of them

SIEVE MAKERS FROM THE VALLEY PELIGNA

The job of sieve makers (*setacciarì*), who craft sieves for producing fine flour, still exist in the Valley Peligna. The use of this ancient tool, which in the past could be found in every home, is diminishing as today we can buy pre-packed flour in shops and supermarkets. But there are still some people who take their grains to a mill and sift the flour using various sieves with a different size of wire gauze depending on the type of flour they want to produce.

This was because the housewife wanted to choose, according to her preferences, the right type of flour for making pasta or bread, and set aside the coarse parts (*tritella*) for wholegrain pasta and bread.

The few artisans, mostly elderly, who still make sieves choose a certain type of plywood that curves well. Plywood bending is done by a fire or by applying heat. Once it is curved into a circle, a wire mesh is attached. Different types of mesh are used. Sieves with a tight weave mesh serve to produce fine flour (*fior di farina*), while ones with a wider mesh make mixed flour. In the old days, sieve makers were both artisans and sellers, taking their product to markets and fairs; today, of course, these tools can be found in household goods shops and at peddlers' stalls.



Setacciaro. By [Vito Giovanelli](#)

OMBRELLAI FROM SECINARO AND PRETURO

Nowadays you rarely hear the shout – once commonplace – of the “*ombrellaroo!*” with the long final “o”, followed after a brief pause by an announcement in dialect: “*assète pure li maccarunare*” (loosely translated as “also fix pasta makers”).

CARBONAI FROM PETTORANO SUL GIZIO

“Mountain dwellers and woodsmen” were the words that in the past were attributed to *carbonai* (charcoal makers) from Pettorano sul Gizio. There was no qualification of artisan for the job, probably because it was considered very hard, almost at the limits of forbearance. There are many aspects involved: cutting the wood, chopping it, arranging and then slowly burning it. After that, there is transporting the final product to sell to shops and at markets.

The age of gas stoves which arrived in our kitchens in the 1940s made us forget about charcoal once necessary for cooking and heating cold rooms. It hit the *carbonai* of Pettorano sul Gizio hard, who were forced to change their trade. Many of them, unwilling to move away from the woods where they used to work for 10 hours daily making charcoal, became wood cutters.

Charcoal has not completely disappeared, however. Although banned as a means of heating, it has remained in the kitchen for grilling meat and fish. This niche in the market keeps the tradition alive in the mountains of Abruzzo.

Every year, in December, the *carbonai* gather in the main square of Pettorano sul Gizio for their festival of polenta. They distribute to tourists what used to be their staple food: *polenta rognosa* with pieces of sausage. The dish that in the past was a symbol of their poverty has become a famous local attraction.

FARRIERS FROM LANCIANO

When donkeys, mules and oxen were used as means of transport, farriers (*i maniscalchi*) were in high demand. Without the metal shoeing for hooves, the harness animals couldn't walk and would have to remain in the stable.

The farriers' job was considered difficult and even dangerous because of the animals' reaction



Ombrellaio. By Vito Giovannelli

There are only a few left, but these humble artisans originating from Secinaro and Preturo still go around to villages. Apart from fixing umbrellas and pasta makers (*chitarra*), they also put back in order beach umbrellas, sun loungers and metal tubs used for doing washing by hand.

Umbrellas break easily, especially the small hinges that hold the internal metal stretchers. They are not thrown away but put aside while waiting for the shout announcing the arrival of the repair man.

Ombrellai know how to fix *maccarunari* (or *chitarra*), pasta making tools that every house in our region has. A *chitarra* is a rectangular frame made from beechwood with tightly strung steel strings on both sides. On these strings a thin sheet of dough is laid and rolled to cut it into strips of pasta. The pressure which the housewife applies to roll the dough often breaks the strings and this is when the humble skills of an *ombrellaio* become indispensable.



Mules carrying wood. Scanno, 1950s

during the fitting. Only the best blacksmiths could become farriers. They knew how to make good shoeing and how to fit it well, so it lasts and doesn't hurt the animal. It was said that well-made shoeing meant that the animals could work longer and better.

Farriers continue their trade today. Although oxen are not used anymore for transport, in some mountain areas, especially in the province of L'Aquila, mules and donkeys are still used to transport wood to small villages. They are also in demand in horse stables and farms. They are well-known for their skills in Lanciano, the equine city par excellence.

LUPINARI FROM FRANCAVILLA AND ASSERGI

Lupinari grew, processed and sold lupin seeds. There are two different types of *lupinari* in Abruzzo: the coastal variety from the area around Francavilla and the ones from the mountains in the vicinity of Assergi. Lupin (the scientific name *Lupinus albus*) needs a lot of attention when cultivated. The legume is slightly bitter and the difficulty in its preparation is softening that bitterness without making it

completely disappear. Two different methods exist for soaking the lupin seeds, one on the coast, the other one in the mountains.

In Francavilla, dry lupin seeds in jute sacks are immersed in shallow sea water, one attached to another with a strong rope. The soak helps soften the bitter note and there is no need to add salt to the seeds, as they are seasoned naturally in the sea water.

In Assergi, lupins in jute sacks are soaked in the cold waters of the Aterno River where they are left for several days. After that, lupin seeds are cured in fine salt. The salty note makes the bitter taste less accentuated. Many lupin sellers, the famous *fusajari* in Rome, come from Abruzzo because our *lupinari* are considered to be among the best.

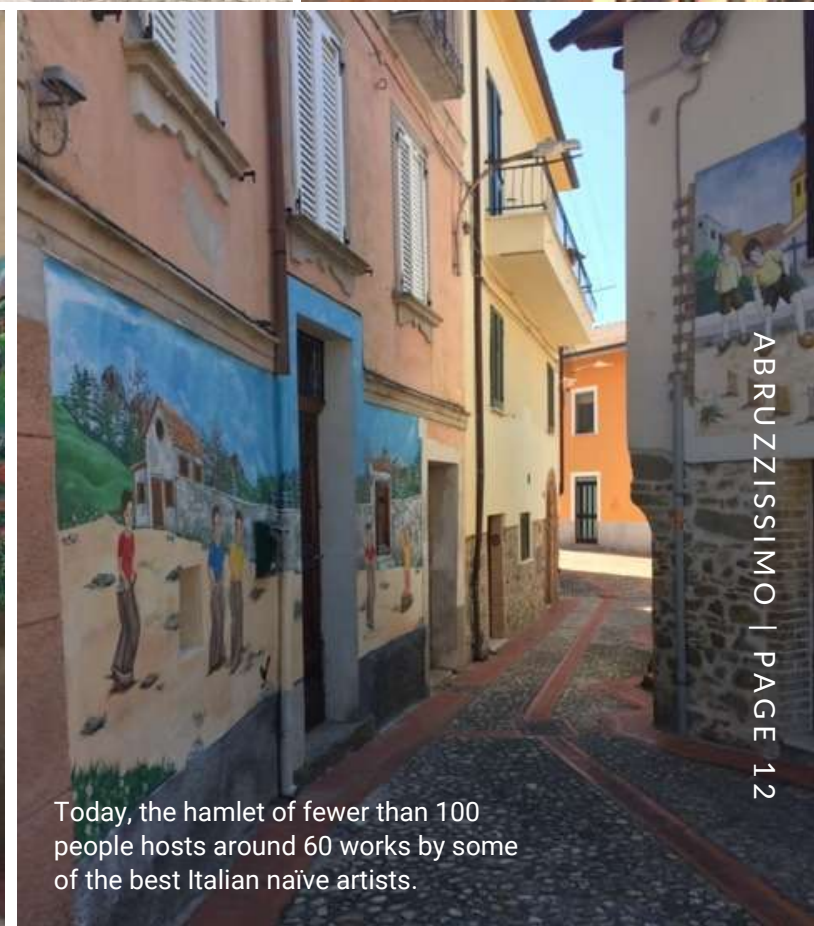
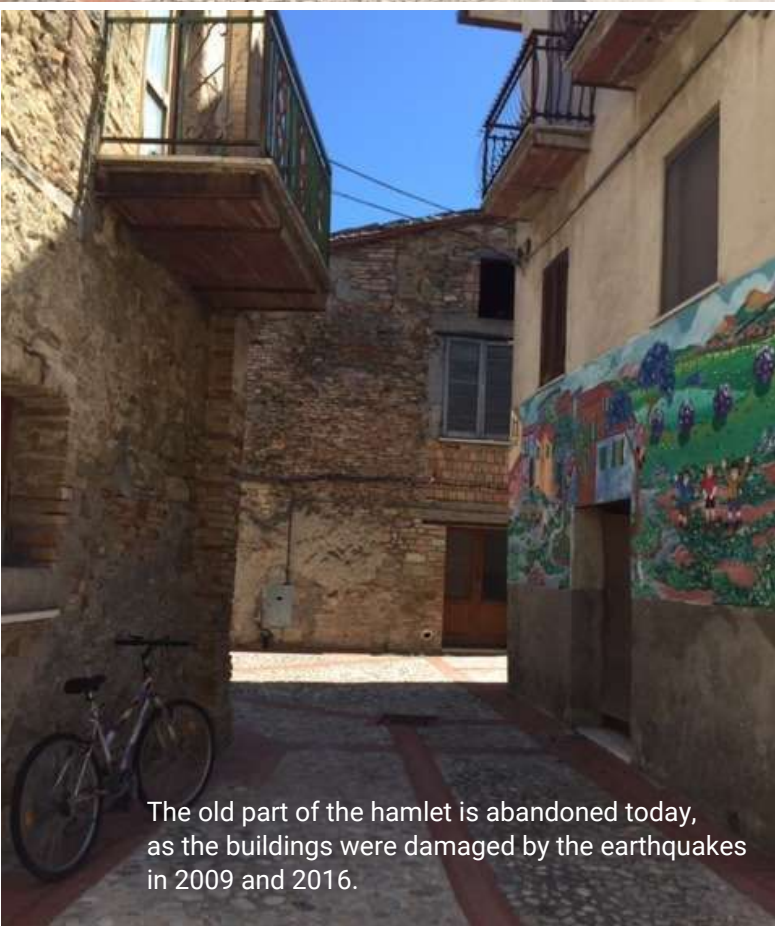
Translated from Quegli Strani Mestieri nell'Abruzzo di Un Tempo Che Fu by Luigi Braccili (1991, Adelmo Polla Editore) with permission from Adelmo Polla.

THE PAINTED HAMLET OF AZZINANO

By Anna Lebedeva

Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Gran Sasso mountain range, the hamlet of Azzinano di Tossicia, in the Teramo Province, is home to an open-air art gallery. Most houses here are decorated with colourful murals depicting street games that local kids used to play once upon a time.

Azzinano is the birthplace of Annunziata Scipione, one of the most famous Italian naïve artists, who inspired the idea of an open-air gallery in 2001.



The old part of the hamlet is abandoned today, as the buildings were damaged by the earthquakes in 2009 and 2016.

Today, the hamlet of fewer than 100 people hosts around 60 works by some of the best Italian naïve artists.



A mural by the great Annunziata Scipione, who is often called a "peasant artist." Secretly, she taught herself to paint at the age of 44.



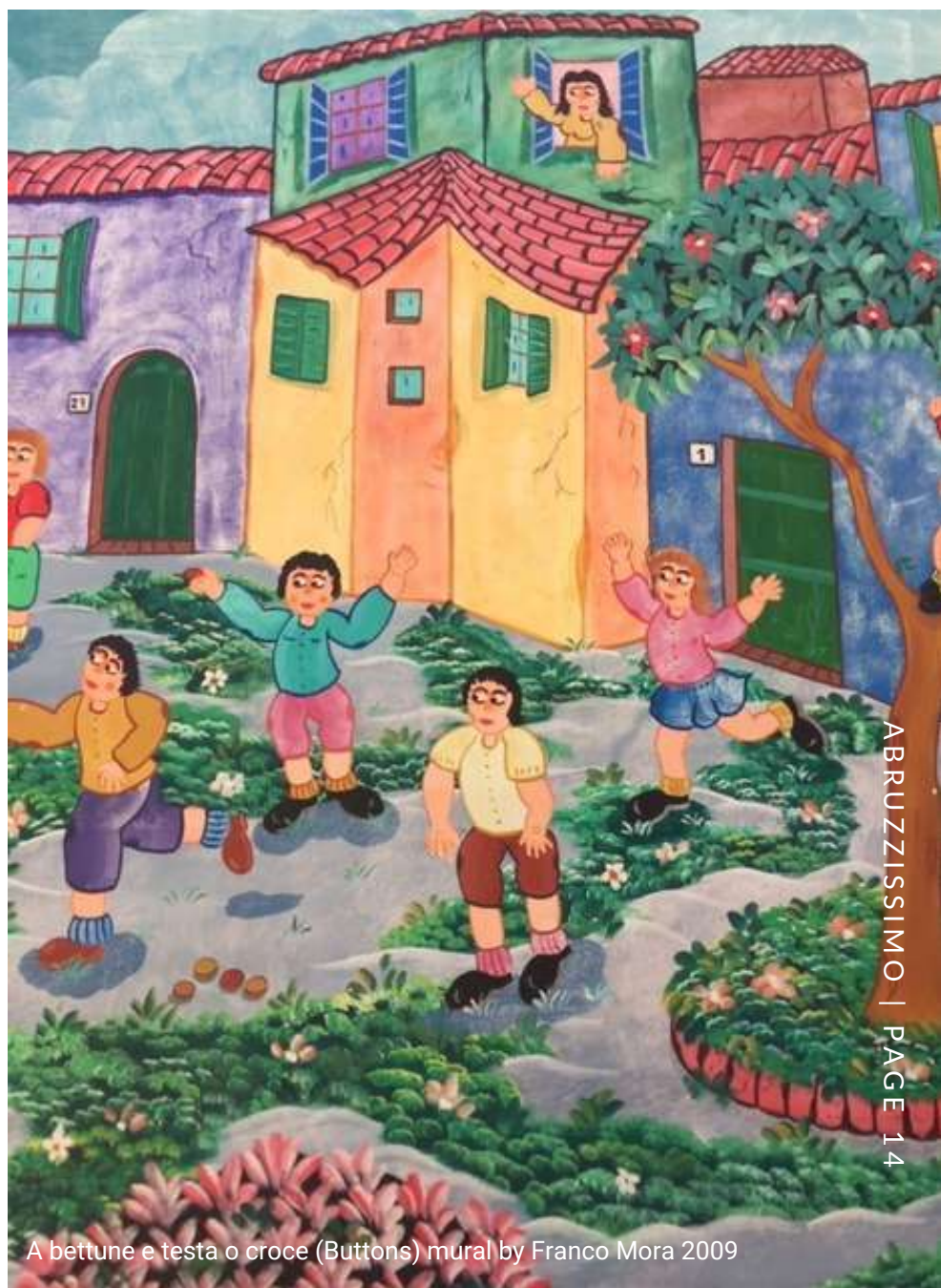
New murals are added every few years to the hamlet's collection during an annual festival, "I Muri Raccontano", that takes place in summer.



Schoolchildren from all over the region visit Azzimano as part of their study curriculum to see the murals and learn about street games from the past.



Nascondino (Hide-and-Seek) mural by Iago Barbieri, 2002



A bettune e testa o croce (Buttons) mural by Franco Mora 2009

A DISTILLERY THAT BECAME A CULTURAL HUB

By Maria Giovanna Palermo

Many know Aurum, the golden-yellow orange-flavoured liqueur made in Abruzzo, but few are familiar with the story of the magnificent distillery in Pescara where it was produced.



Ex-Aurum distillery in Pescara

There is no other factory in the world as elegant and grand as the ex-Aurum in Pescara. Just look at the amphitheatre that forms a ring behind the façade. Why would an industrial plant have such an extravagant design?

Before Pescara became a city, there was Kursaal, a two-storey building in Italian Liberty style near a pine grove, today's Pineta Dannunziana. It served as a meeting place for locals returning from the beach and looking for a place to stroll

in the shade. It was meant to be part of a bigger project for a sea resort, which was never realised. In 1919, the engineer Amadeo Pomilio opened his distillery, turning the building into a laboratory for production of Aurum. His business grew and in the 1930s he decided to expand the factory.

It was not an easy task: creating new spaces while preserving the main building of Kursaal and keeping the new construction in harmony with the environment and its natural beauty.



The amphitheatre with a concert stage

Another important thing that had to be taken into account was the owner's desire to open the factory for cultural events in summer months. That's why the new construction was made in the shape of a horseshoe in exposed brickwork, without big contrasts with the grand façade or dissonances with the pine grove around it. Inside the circular structure there were spaces for the liqueur production as well as concerts, exhibitions and theatrical performances. It was the only factory that was also designed to be a cultural hub – and its success was immediate. After World War II, the factory was gradually abandoned and stood crumbling for decades.

In 2007, an ambitious restoration project brought the magnificent structure back to life. Owned by the Province of Pescara, once again it became the city's most exciting cultural hub and one of the most impressive examples of industrial architecture in Italy. The Aurum brand was sold to a bigger company and the liqueur is now produced in by *Illva Saronno* company in Northern Italy. It can be bought in most

supermarkets and wine shops in Abruzzo and across the country.

Ex-Aurum, as locals call it, hosts many cultural events and open-air concerts in its beautiful amphitheatre hidden behind the main façade. The building is open to the public for free visits every day (opening hours vary depending on the season). For details check the [Aurum La Fabbrica Delle Idee website](#).

IF YOU GO

Across the road from ex-Aurum, is the [Pineta Dannunziana Natural Reserve](#), with a pond and pleasant walking paths in the shade of pine trees.

The reserve's 35 hectares are all that remain from a pine forest that used to stretch over 3000 hectares and was known since the 8th century as a safe harbour during storms.

Maria Giovanna Palermo is an art historian and certified tour guide. Follow her [Facebook page Sull'Arte](#).

DRAWN BY A PILE OF ROCKS ON THE INTERNET

By Linda Dini Jenkins

London-born Lorelei McConnell is re-inventing herself in Abruzzo with the help of its traditions and history, remarkable landscape and the gentle, genuine, and generous people who live here.

Lorelei never saw the inside of the house before she bought it. Her estate agent didn't even want to show it to her. It was twilight, and she was on her way to the airport to go back home to Cape Town. But it sang to her, even in the half-light. She put a €1.000 deposit down and boarded the plane. That was in 2006.

The house, located in Roccafinadamo, near Penne, borders the National Park of Gran Sasso. It was deemed "historic, but not habitable" and required a raft of permissions from the three abutting provinces (L'Aquila, Teramo and Pescara) which took more than three years to procure. She started in earnest on the "pile of rocks" in 2011 and finished "L'Rocca" in 2016.

While the house was being brought back to life, Lorelei rented a flat at the bottom of the road and simply put her stuff in storage for three years. You have to ask her about the moving van delivering her belongings up this hairpin-turn road; it requires some time and a beverage!

At the time, Tuscany and Umbria were already priced out of the market, and she looked into Le Marche. But then she saw that little pile of rocks on the internet . . .



Lorelei McConnell

"She really was a pile of stones," says Lorelei. "Luckily there are two double brick vaulted rooms, and the beauty and integrity of the construction had prolonged one side of the house's life. My architect felt that these alone could date the house as being 350 - 400 years old."

PILGRIMS' REFUGE

The house was a former refuge for Pilgrims traversing the Appenines from Rome to Atri.



The ruin that Lorelei bought

There is a huge iron cross on the hillock opposite the house, and when you cross over from Gran Sasso you can immediately see the cross with the naked eye. That was the destination marker, so travelers would know that the refuge lay below the hillock.

Her architect believes that a wealthy Pilgrim commissioned those vaults, since they are quite unique and of rare construction. The original floors upstairs were huge stone slabs found in the local fields. “The house itself, either as a refuge or barn, has had five family’s worth of ownership, and my builders managed to trace all the families over the decades,” explains Lorelei. Two of the families still live within eyesight and the others, once they heard that the house was being rebuilt, have visited over the years.

“Once you’ve found out that sort of provenance and history and family connection, you’re totally committed! It’s not just the financial investment, it’s giving the house life again, hopefully for another 400 years, long after I’m gone!”

Lorelei took the restoration of the glorious pile of stones seriously and enrolled in a short course in the restoration of historic stone

buildings in order to understand how to point all the stone walls, inside and outside. “It included everything: rebuilding stone walls, churches, restoring bridges and the flora and fauna that inhabit the stone: plant life, bats, lizards, scorpions. Stone is a living, breathing material so I really needed to learn as much as I could to get it right!”

IN LOVE WITH ABRUZZO

But it’s not just the house that keeps Lorelei here. She has fallen for Abruzzo – hard. “Abruzzo gives me everything I could hope for,” she beams. “There’s the extensive mountains of Gran Sasso and the Maiella, the beautiful Adriatic Coast, the ancient trabocchi, the transhumance, poetry, lakes, mountain refuges and its passionate people.”

She says that she loves that the region is genuinely undiscovered, unexplored, and therefore maintains its authenticity. “Here there are cities and villages that are not hounded by tourists and, most importantly, do not pander to the tourist trade. And honestly, once you’ve experienced the full and gorgeous seasons here, there’s no going back.”

If you get the sense that Lorelei is an adventurer, you'd be right. Before coming to Abruzzo, she lived in a little fishing village called Kommetjie near Cape Town, South Africa. Why? She arrived there after an around-the-world yacht race (she was also delivering yachts from France to Croatia and Greece) and just fell in love with the landscape. When her children, who were in UK schools, complained that the commute was just too far and begged her to find some place in Europe to live, she chose Italy. She'd fallen in love with it during her yacht-delivery days.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

With no experience of Italian before she arrived, and myriad permissions to procure, there were plenty of obstacles in the beginning. "I would almost throw up at the thought of having to speak Italian," she laughs. "But exposure and the people guide you through the fear. They are kind and not critical. They offer suggestions and ways of expressing yourself." She says Abruzzesi people are curious, responsive, and genuinely interested in why you are investing your time, heart, money, and future in their country.

Patience, tolerance, stubborn belief and passion all play their parts in overcoming these obstacles according to Lorelei who took

The vaulted ceilings in the house



The house after the restoration

all this on as a single woman. Although retired now, she still helps people on their yachts, either delivering them from one port to another or just sailing around the Greek or Italian islands. During the summer she rents the house out on [Airbnb](#) and goes exploring new places. "I have a couple of mountaineer friends and I join them on their adventures. We've been wolf trekking, bear watching and hiking and I might try a bit of snow trekking this winter."

To those who are thinking about moving to Abruzzo, her advice is to be prepared to fall slowly, deeply, and convincingly in love. "Be prepared to be enveloped in a way of life that is not familiar. And be open to experience things that will make you shed a tear of humbleness, joy, and sometimes disbelief in the beauty before you."

Linda Dini Jenkins leads small tours to Italy and blogs about travel at www.travelitalythewriteway.com.

CALL OF THE WILD

By Michelle Reid

As summer starts to fade and autumn slowly appears, there are so many things to appreciate in the wilds of Abruzzo. The dramatic annual deer mating rut is one of them.



Red deer (Cervo nobile). Photo by Mauro Cironi

September is one of my favourite months of the year. To be honest, I always love the changing of the seasons at any point of the year – nature’s way of marking time – but autumn always brings my favourite change. Summer draws to a close and flows seamlessly into autumn time. The days may still be warm and sunny, but as the nights draw in and the shortening days bring colder weather, the mornings and evenings have a cool freshness that bring relief from the intense heat of summer. The ushering in of autumn evokes images in my mind of the weeks to come – chestnuts roasting on street corners, crunchy frosted grass underfoot, long

walks through multicoloured leaves and hot chocolate by the fire after a day in the hills.

In September there is change afoot, you can smell it in the morning and evening air. It’s also a time where you can physically see and hear nature changing. The leaves put on beautiful shows of colour from golds and yellows through orange to bright and deep reds. The Morrone and Majella mountains become a vast, natural display of great vibrant swathes of colour. Birds start their winter migration, the Marsican bears start their preparations for hibernation, and something stirs in the

animal kingdom. But one of the truly fascinating natural events to witness at this time of year has to be the deer rutting. The drama and noise of the rut, so named from the Latin verb *rugire* meaning to roar, are unforgettable natural wonders – a true call of the wild.

One of the most spectacular places to witness this natural phenomenon takes you on a stunning walk through mountain meadows and high elevation beech woodland, to a high point above the plains of Campo di Giove, with a backdrop of Guado di Coccia and the Majella mountain range. Last autumn, in the company of our guide Marco Carafa, from the Majella National Park, we were lucky enough to spend a chilly, but beautiful evening listening to the mating calls of the red deer – *Cervo nobile* to use their Italian name – a cacophony of sound that echoed all around the mountain valley.

THE TRAIL

This route is suitable for anyone of average fitness, with 175m of ascent/descent across the full 7.5 km route.

Driving from the village of Cansano on the western edge of the Majella National Park, take the SP 55 provincial road that heads towards Pescocostanzo. After approximately 6.5 km on the left-hand side of the road, at the point of a hair pin bend, is a small layby/track junction area (enough to park 2 to 3 cars end to end). There is also a small Majella Park information board and the standard Italian Alpine Club (CAI) red and white signs announcing the start of CAI Path 4, indicating route (*sentiero*) O1: 20 mins, Il Monte: 1 hr, *Sentiero* O3: 1 hr 30.

Follow the path along the track, which is easy enough and well-marked, and find yourself at first crossing through mountain meadows, which are starting to turn back to their lush green after the scorching summer. Look out for

Red deer. © Umberto Esposito - Wildlife Adventures





Two red deer stags fighting. © Umberto Esposito - Wildlife Adventures

the various signs of wildlife as you make this an all-round nature experience. We spotted wild boar tracks, bear fur on a tree trunk where a bear had been scratching its back (in true Baloo from the *Jungle Book* style) and wolf pellets full of hair amongst other signs of wildlife. The meadows lead you into the stunning beech woodland, typical of this area of the Apennines, where the light filtering softly through the trees and the multicoloured leaf floor beneath your feet set the scene, right out of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Continue along the path for approximately 1.5 km, and reach a junction. Take a left turn here and keep following the path in a shallow descent through the beech woods. Exit the woodland into the brush and the sides of the path become edged with ferns. After approximately 2km, turn off the path up to slightly higher ground, just 50 or so metres from the path itself. From this higher vantage point the view opens up across the plain in Campo di Giove to the Majella mountains and Guado di Coccia.

At this point we settled in, waiting for dusk to come – and then it started. Slowly at first, but surely, the sounds of the deer mating calls began echoing across the valley all around us. From our viewpoint we could watch the dramatic deer rutting happening in the meadows just a short distance below us as the male deer vied for the attention of the females.

Marco explained, "At this time of year and throughout late September and October the male deer will be competing for females. The stags will try and make themselves look bigger than their opponents and charge back and forth in an impressive display of strength and power to win a female mate." And there we stayed for an hour or so, just watching, listening and revelling in the wonder of nature. Then to finish our adventure, as night was falling, we donned our head torches and retraced our route back to the car, on a forest night walk that everybody loved.

Michelle Reid is an Abruzzo-based translator, blogger, outdoor and modern history enthusiast.



Photos from top down: Female red deer, © Mauro Cironi; Deer stag drinking, © Mauro Cironi; Stag rutting, © Umberto Esposito

WHERE TO LISTEN TO DEER MATING CALLS

Apart from the itinerary described above, you can hear and, if you are lucky, watch deer rutting in the area around Goriano Valli and Beffi, Barrea, Valley Giumentina and Monte Rapina.

You can join organised small group tours. Majambiente runs evening walks in mid-September-October.

Wildlife Adventures offer excellent two-day tours in the Parco Nazionale D'Abruzzo (some English spoken).

Mauro Cironi of Discover Abruzzo offers private and small group tours (he speaks some English) in Goriano Valli, Parco Sirente-Velino and Parco Nazionale D'Abruzzo. Contact him at 0039 3396931376.



IL TORCHIO – A LOCAL GEM FOR POLENTA

By Karen Hundebly

Travellers to Italy have likely sampled polenta (boiled cornmeal). It's possibly the first known cooked food – made by the Sumerians, who are considered the creators of civilization.

Indisputably, *polenta* is considered an Italian staple, typically characterized as rustic food. In the past, Italian *carbonari* (charcoal makers), suffered extreme and extended conditions to manufacture charcoal, working in camps at high altitudes. Large amounts of high calorie staples were paramount to adequately sustain themselves: hard cheese, pancetta and fresh eggs, when available, to make a *carbonara* sauce. Polenta was a lifeline for the *carbonari* of Pettorano sul Gizio and an important part of their history. For 58 years, Pettorano has hosted a polenta festival to celebrate its ancestral connection to the traditional dish – and one of the village's restaurants, *Il Torchio*, is the best place to fill up on hearty polenta.



Il Torchio is situated behind a stunning Roman fountain, and has an ancient *torchio per vino* (wine press) inside the restaurant, hence the name. The star menu items are two *polenta* dishes, methodically cooked and coaxed into shape inside massive antique copper pots. *Polenta rognosa*, minced pork sauce, pecorino cheese and pork sausages and *mugnoli*, with sautéed local greens, are both gastronomic delights. The centuries-old recipes are meticulously executed and have been guardedly passed down the family line. Perhaps both polenta dishes are best shared to allow room for some of the other choices, too. There is an extensive menu: lamb, veal, pork, delicious local cheeses, *pappardelle al cinghiale* (pasta with wild boar sauce), *mugnele e chezzerieje* (gnocchi with vegetables), *chitarra al ragu di maiale*, (pork sauce with zucchini and saffron). Many pleasures to savour, with an average wine menu.

Personable service and consistently delicious meals have kept our family going back to *Il Torchio* since 1999. Michele and his daughter Milena, the charming chefs, are passionate about their homemade polenta. Every year, during Pettorano's festival, they make delicious *polenta rognosa* in huge copper cauldrons to feed hundreds of hungry guests.

Il Torchio

Address: Pettorano sul Gizio, Piazza Rosario Zannelli, 14. Tel.: 0039 333 640 3577. **Opening hours:** Every day 12pm – 2.30pm, 6pm – 10pm.

[Follow Il Torchio on Facebook.](#)

ABRUZZO'S FORGOTTEN GRAPE

By Anna Swann

For centuries, the ancient white grape variety called Montonico has delighted wine connoisseurs. The first mention in a historic document dates to 1600 when the white grape variety was widely cultivated around the modern day Bisenti, in the province of Teramo. The Napoleonic forces stationed in the area at the end of the 18th century enjoyed “*petite champagne*,” as they called Montonico, for its elegant bouquet and acidity levels similar to the famous bubbly. For a while, it was grown across the region and shipped in great quantities to the north of Italy and abroad. In the 1960s came the decline in production, with just a handful of farmers in Bisenti and Cermignano keeping Montonico in their vineyards for family consumption.

Because of its thick skin, the grape is especially good dried. Bunches are left to hang from the beams or in a cellar drying naturally from late October until Christmas. Today, the grape variety is registered as a Presidia Slow Food and only three winemakers produce Montonico at a commercial level in the province of Teramo. It is a hardy vine that can resist harsh winters, the cold winds from the Gran Sasso mountains and thrive in a poor pebbly soil even at 500 meters above sea level. As the cultivation is slowly growing, producers are starting to experiment, making excellent *passito* sweet and *metodo classico* (as *méthode champenoise* is called in Italy) wines.

Every year the town of Bisenti celebrates Montonico at a small lively wine festival held in October. It is almost impossible to find Montonico wine outside of Abruzzo, so if you want to try it you have to come to the region or contact the producers directly to discuss shipping options. Here are my favorites:



SANTAPUPA MONTONICO SUPERIORE DOC (VINI LA QUERCIA)

Characterised by mellow notes of fresh grass and a marked acidity. Drink young or after a few years in a cellar.

Price €12.

Buy from [Winezon.it](https://www.winezon.it) or directly from [Vini La Quercia](https://www.vinilaquercia.it).



PRETONICO MONTONICO SUPERIORE ABRUZZO DOP (AZIENDA AGRICOLA CICCONE)

A limited production of just over 1000 bottles a year. Delicate fruity notes. Great paired with fresh cheeses or a light risotto.

Price €15.

Buy directly from [Azienda Agricola Ciccone](https://www.aziendaagricolaciccone.it) (minimum purchase 6 bottles).



EMOZIONE N°1 MONTONICO IGT COLLI APRUTINI (FRANCESCA VALENTE)

A light fresh wine with beautiful notes of hay and wildflowers.

Price €11.

Buy from [Abruzzowithlove.it](https://www.abruzzowithlove.it) or directly from [Agricola Valente](https://www.agricolavalente.it).

SAFFRON PASTA WITH A SEAFOOD SAUCE

By Emanuela Trotta

The *chitarra*, a wooden frame with strings (*chitarra* = guitar) tool used to cut pasta is an old symbol of our Abruzzese cuisine. For this recipe, I used a *chitarra* with the tightly spaced strings to make a thinner, more delicate pasta called *chitarrina*.

Pasta alla chitarra (pasta made with the *chitarra* tool) can be dressed with a wide variety of sauces, from the traditional lamb ragù to a sauce with porcini mushrooms and truffles or seafood, with or without tomatoes.

I want to share a recipe of *pasta alla chitarra* with a cuttlefish and shrimp sauce. I have added another typically Abruzzese ingredient here – the precious saffron of the Navelli plain, which gives a beautiful colour and flavour to the pasta.

I always find inspiration in my grandmothers' dishes – which remind me of my childhood and big family lunches – but I like to add a creative twist. So I often use natural ingredients, such as tomato paste, spinach, pumpkin or saffron for colouring home-made pasta to personalise the traditional recipes.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 4 servings

For home-made pasta:

400g durum wheat semolina, 4 medium eggs, 1 small pack of powdered saffron, 1 tbsp olive oil, a pinch of salt.

For the sauce:

400g cuttlefish or squid, washed and cleaned, 400g shrimp, washed and cleaned, 2 tbsp chopped vegetables (celery, onions and carrots), 1 garlic clove, 1 tsp cornstarch (optional), fresh parsley, olive oil, salt and pepper to taste, a splash of white wine, 2-3 tbsp fish stock.



PREPARATION

Form a small mound of flour with a well in the middle. Add the eggs, oil, salt and saffron diluted in a spoonful of warm water. Mix the ingredients with a fork and knead until you get a smooth and homogeneous dough.

Leave the dough to rest for 30 minutes. Heat some oil in a frying pan and sauté the chopped vegetables and garlic for a few minutes. Slightly increase the flame and add a splash of wine and cuttlefish, and sauté until it starts turning golden. Season with salt and pepper and add the shrimp. Cook for only two minutes. Throw in the fish stock and, if you feel the sauce is too watery, thicken it with cornstarch dissolved in half a cup of cold water.

Roll the dough with a rolling pin into a thin sheet and cut out rectangles. Place a piece on the *chitarra* and roll the pin over, pressing it hard enough to cut the dough into square long spaghetti. Cook the pasta in lightly salted boiling water for 3-4 minutes. Throw it in the pan, tossing it for a second or two to dress with the seafood sauce. Serve hot.

Emanuela Trotta is an Abruzzo-based food writer and food stylist who works with various Italian magazines.

A SMALL PASTRY WITH A LONG HISTORY

By Anna Swann

Casoli, a small hilltop town in the Province of Chieti, is home to delicious *totere casolane*, a local cone-shaped crunchy pastry filled with luscious custard. No historic documents exist to confirm the origins of this sweet treat, but the local story goes that over a century ago a pastry chef, inspired by recipes from Naples, created *le totere* for one of the town's cafes frequented by the rich and famous.

Over time, the little cones have become Casoli's specialty, with local housewives making them by the thousands for the town's festivals. Although you can find this traditional dessert in some restaurants and *agriturismi* for most of the year, the official opening of the "totere season"

is October 7, when the town celebrates its patron saint, Santa Reparata, with religious services and feasts. They are also made for Christmas celebrations, all the way to the end of January. *Le totere* are so popular that you will find metal cone forms for making them in many shops locally and some jewellery stores even make tiny totere-shaped pendants in gold and silver.

Below you will find a recipe for *le totere* that Claudia Travaglini from [Agriturismo Travaglini](#) generously shared with [ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine](#). You can taste *le totere* in the agriturismo from October to January but they also make them for special occasions throughout the year.



TOTERE CASOLANE

INGREDIENTS

Makes 30-35 *totere*

- **For the cream:**

- 6 eggs
- 16 Tbsp sugar
- 5 Tbsp flour
- 1 liter whole milk
- Zest of one lemon

- **For the pastry:**

- 500g white flour
- 3 eggs
- 130ml olive oil
- 3 Tbsp sugar
- Olive oil for deep-frying



PREPARATION

Make the Cream:

Whisk eggs with sugar and flour. Pour milk in a pot and bring it to boil. Remove the formed foam and add the eggs, briskly whisking constantly.

Lower the flame and cook the custard, stirring with a wooden spoon until it is thickened and not letting any lumps form. Add lemon zest and let the custard cool.

Make the Pastry:

Whisk eggs with sugar and oil. Place the flour in a mound on a worktop. Create a well in the middle of the flour mound. Add the eggs in the centre of the well. Knead the dough gently until it doesn't stick to the surface (add more flour if needed). Cut it into four portions and roll them one by one into thin sheets (about 1mm).

Totere casolane are made using special metal cones. Wide strips of dough are wrapped around them and they are deep-fried in olive oil for 2-3 minutes until golden. The pastry shells are left to cool and the metal cones are taken out after that. To get an idea how they shape the pastry in Casoli watch [this video](#).

Unless you have relatives in Casoli, you won't find the metal cones forms easily, so experiment with other methods: you can bake pastry shells in a round waffle maker or in the oven and roll them into cones while they are hot and soft. Ideally, they should be about 5" (13cm) long. Fill the cooled pastry cones with the custard before serving.

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TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD WINE

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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Stone carvings on houses in Roccamorice. Photo by Mario Di Matteo

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Magazine

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Ciao a tutti!

This year has been hard for everyone. It seems we are back where we were in spring, uncertain about what happens next. It is in times like this, focusing on little joys brings comfort: flipping through your holiday photos, chatting to family members or cooking your favourite dish. For some of you, ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine provides that soothing escapism we are all craving now.

Did you know that you can welcome the New Year in November, just like they used to do in Abruzzo not too long ago? *Capetièmpe* (page 6) is a tradition we might want to revive so we can wave goodbye to 2020 earlier.

Doing what you love, day in, day out, is everyone's dream. For Anna Maria Verzino from Casalbordino, the oldest fisherwoman in Italy, it is reality. She has been going to sea for 79 years and has no plans to stop any time soon. Read about her on page 9.

Buying your dream property just before the earthquake hits might not sound like the beginning of a happy story, but Andrew and Katja have renovated a historic palace with a tower despite all obstacles to start a new life in Abruzzo (page 16).

As always, we are ever grateful for all your donations, small and large. Please keep them coming, so we can continue our work. You can [donate here](#).

I love receiving your emails with feedback, stories, and ideas for future articles. Drop a line at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

So, go pour yourself a glass of *vino novello* (page 3) or grab a cup of coffee with an *ossa dei morti* biscuit (page 30) and enjoy the November issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine.

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

WHAT'S ON



THE MEDICI TOWER RESTORED

After a long restoration, the Medici Tower, a symbol of the village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, has been finished. The 14th century round tower collapsed during the earthquake in 2009 due to a badly engineered restructuring with cement in the 1930s. This time, the works were done properly and the project – at a total cost of €1,5 million – has brought the 20-metre-high tower to its original splendour. The scaffolding will be taken down by spring. You can see the photos of the final restoration works [here](#).



NOVELLO TIME

The season of *vino novello* has started! By law, in Italy, this type of wine is allowed to go on sale from October 30. *Vino novello* is made using a special technique, carbonic maceration, developed in the French wine region of Beaujolais. Whole intact bunches of grapes are left to ferment in vats filled with carbon dioxide for 5-15 days. The result is a fruity, easy-to-drink red wine. In Abruzzo, [Cantina Tollo](#) and [Cascina del Colle](#) make excellent *vino novello*. Drink it while you can, as the wine doesn't keep for more than six months!

ABRUZZISSIMO WEBSITE

Finally, we have a new home online! The ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine [website](#) is up and running. We are uploading some articles that you might have read in the earlier issues, but certain content you will only find online. We will regularly publish news from Abruzzo, events (virtual and offline), special offers, videos and much more, so make sure to check it regularly. If you want to put names to faces, go to our About page to see who is part of the team ABRUZZISSIMO and our constantly growing list of contributors. And don't forget we also have a very active [Facebook page](#) that will keep you up to date with the happenings in the region whether you live here, dream to make it your home or just love all things Abruzzo.



THE BEST TRATTORIE

Three of the 50 best Italian *trattorie* are located in Abruzzo. [Top 50 Italy](#), a prestigious guide to restaurants in Italy, listed *La Vecchia Marina* in Roseto degli Abruzzi, *Taverna 58* in Pescara and *Osteria La Corte* in Spoltore among its favourites. These three esteemed Abruzzesi eateries have won many other titles before and are well known for the excellent quality of food and service. *La Vecchia Marina* is a family run, old-style trattoria renown for its seafood dishes; *Taverna 58* has been delighting foodies with the best of traditional cuisine in refined surroundings since the 1980s; and *Osteria La Corte* offers a sophisticated take on regional cooking. *Mangiamo!*



Visit the town of Lanciano without leaving your house on our live virtual tour. Kharen Dell'Arciprete, a local certified guide, will take you to see the beautiful Piazza Plebiscito and the old historic part of town. Tune in to the [ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine Facebook page](#) on November 6 at 3pm Italian time (9am EST). We will also do a live virtual tour in Ortona this month, date to be announced shortly on Facebook.



If you enjoy reading the magazine please consider giving a small one-off or monthly donation to help us add more in-depth articles and pay our authors. Every little bit helps!

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

THE CUCKOLDS OF SAN VALENTINO

Since the 19th century, on the evening of November 10, the town of San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore hosts the festival of . . . Cuckolded Men (*La Festa dei Cornuti*)! In the town, according to tradition, San Martino (Saint Martin of Tours) is a protector of cheated husbands and a parade is held as part of the celebrations of the feast of San Martino. It all started in the 1800s, when a group of friends quietly walked around the town, leaving candles at the houses where cuckolded husbands lived. The next day, the unlucky men were expected to wear their jacket backwards and the hat askew to demonstrate their grief.

Over the years, the tradition evolved into a bigger light-hearted celebration with a cheerful crowd walking along the streets and singing old songs describing escapades of unfaithful women. All participants are required to wear or carry goat or cow horns or horn-shaped peppers. They also carry a veiled phallic symbol, *La Reliquia*, carved from an olive tree root, which is passed to the most recent newlywed as a welcome to the married men club.

Locals are very proud of the tradition and are always quick to point out that you do not need to be a cuckold to participate and enjoy the festival. At the end of the evening, the loud crowd stops for a few glasses of wine and roasted chestnuts. In the evening, the town's restaurants serve the traditional dinner of a rich veal stew. The *Festa dei Cornuti* will not be taking place this year but, as soon as life goes back to normal, the festival will return. You can watch a video of one of the previous processions in San Valentino [here](#).

ABRUZZO IN PHOTOS

WIN A COPY OF HISTORY AND ART GUIDE TO ABRUZZO

Our competition "Abruzzo in Photos" continues! To enter, send us your best shots of Abruzzo with a caption explaining what the photo shows and your name. Over the next three months we will pick the best ones to publish in the magazine and on our Facebook page. The photo that receives the highest number of likes will win and its author will get the beautiful latest edition of Abruzzo History and Art Guide (in English) by [Carsa Edizioni](#).

Submit photos to editor@abruzzissimo.com (max. size 1MB each). Put "Photo contest" in the subject field.

Closing date: November 15



Lago di Scanno. By Oliver Woods-Spence



Sunset in San Benedetto in Perillis. By George Tinsley



Trabocco. By Carmine A. Iannaccone



Travelling from Silvi Marina to Silvi Paese. By Albert Pisani



Pacentro. By Giulia Pietrobattista

CAPETIÈMPE: WHEN THE NEW YEAR BEGAN IN NOVEMBER

By Antonio Secondo

Pagan rituals connecting the world of the living with the dead were a big part of rural life in Abruzzo for a long time. The bond was especially felt in November, when agricultural works finished and the New Year was celebrated.

All Saints' Day, November 1, is a Catholic celebration dedicated to the memory of the dead. The rite's origins go back to the pagan Samhain, the Celtic New Year, which marked the end of the solar year and a closure of agricultural activities. It was a special period, during which provisions were made for the difficult winter months ahead. The nature's colours were fading under the cold touch of autumn and days drew shorter. With the advancing darkness, the line separating the earthly world from the one belonging to the deceased blurred and, according to pagan beliefs, the spirits returned to visit their loved ones to soothe the suffering brought by death.

In this period, ancient Celts organised noisy bacchanals on the graves of their dead, dancing, drinking and feasting to delight the tormented dead souls, so they could return to their underworld without worry or delay. In pagan and popular culture, the dead were, among other things, associated with the fertility of the land and were propitiated in rites for good future crops. To bring prosperity to the table you were supposed to keep your dead happy.

CAPETIÈMPE

The Celtic New Year, or Samhain, was also celebrated in Abruzzo, especially, in the Valley Peligna and neighbouring municipalities but under the name of *Capetièmpe* (*Capotempo*). Just like Samhain, Capetièmpe went on for ten days, from November 1st to the 11th, during which it was necessary to follow certain rites

to guarantee the spirits' clemency and bountiful harvests. These rites were divided into four main phases, translated roughly into solar, or fire rites, funeral or purification rites to appease the dead, rites called "the passage", which were meant to restart time and the cyclical nature of agricultural work, and fertility rites.

With the advent of Christianity, the Church began to reinterpret pagan rituals, so the dragon-slaying heroes turned into Saint George, gods of tempest into Saint Elijah, the concepts of fertility become merged into the figure of the Virgin Mary and female saints, and Samhain became the All Saints' Day. However, despite



Sulmona's cemetery



A fence detail at the cemetery in Sulmona

the Church's efforts to eradicate certain pagan rites, the cult of *Capetièmpe* survived in the Valley Peligna for a long time, in parallel with Christianity. According to historic documents, the tradition of noisy banquet celebrations at the cemeteries to appease the dead, in Sulmona and across the valley, was officially prohibited only in 1861.

RETURN OF THE DEAD

The first night of *Capetièmpe*, November 1, was the night of return. It was the custom not to clear the table, leaving some food and a few drops of wine in a glass, so that the dead, on their return, could see that they had not been forgotten. The doors of the houses were left ajar and the floor was not swept.

Every house lit candles ("*lumini*") in the windows to illuminate the path for the spirits and to make sure they recognised the houses in

which they once resided. Wealthy families used to prepare numerous dishes which, the following morning, were given to the poor.

There are certain similarities between *Capetièmpe* in the Valley Peligna and Halloween. The children of Sulmona, Pratola Peligna and Pettorano Sul Gizio, used to wander the streets of the towns with their faces painted white like those of ghosts. They went from house to house to collect offerings of food or small coins. In Raiano and Prezza, boys carved large pumpkins, *chècocce*, hollowed with demonic eyes and mouths; with a candle inside they were supposed to scare passers-by in the dark.

In Introdacqua, locals believed in *Scurnacchièra*, a procession of the dead that, on the night of All Saints, went silently through the streets of the town, first heading to the main church, where a deceased parish priest would officiate a mass for the souls, and then the ghosts headed to the homes of



Lumini candles lit in the windows to illuminate the path for the spirits

relatives to eat returning to the cemetery at the first light of the dawn. The procession was led by stillborn children followed by adolescents and adults with the oldest, who died of natural

causes or disease, closing the phalanx. All the ghosts carried a candle in their hands and walked in silence, without taking their eyes off the ground. The unfortunates who happened to stumble across this silent parade would have a short life as seeing the *Scurnacchièra* was a sign of approaching death.

Despite the long list of traditions and ceremonies connected to it, the Capetièmpe has now completely disappeared from our lives. The fields in the Valley Peligna were abandoned, new factories built, and the peasant became the proletarian and later, the bourgeois, forgetting the ancient traditions of the land. The memory of those precious customs, intertwining the pagan and Christian today lives only in the stories of the elderly who will soon leave this world. There will be sad silence above their graves instead of joyous banquets that once were so popular in the Valley Peligna.

Antonio Secondo is a local history enthusiast. He lives in Sulmona and runs the [Gotico Abruzzese](#) page.

MASS OF THE DEAD

This is a story that the elderly in the towns of Pescina and Cerchio tell about the Mass of the Dead which, according to local beliefs, is celebrated on the night of November 1.

“Everyone who has ancestors buried in the church where the Mass on the All Souls’ Day is celebrated light up candles and lights on the tombs. There is no other celebration during the year when the church is so fantastically lit. But before the living the divine Mass is celebrated by the dead. A lady from the bakery, who didn’t know about it, woke up before dawn to get the wood oven going. Walking past a church she saw it illuminated

and, thinking it was a Mass, entered inside. The church was brightly lit and full of people. She kneeled and a woman from the village, who had been dead, approached saying: “Neighbour, you are not good here, leave. We are all dead and this is our service. With the lights off you would die of a fright surrounded by many deceased.” The woman thanked her and left immediately but lost her voice from the fright.

Translated from Credenze Usi e Costumi Abruzzesi by G. Finamore (Adelmo Polla Editore, 2002).

ITALY'S OLDEST FISHERWOMAN

By Antonietta Centofanti

Locals call her “the bride of the sea” for a reason. The first time Anna Maria Verzino stepped on a fishing boat, she was 5 years old. Seventy-nine years later, she is still at sea, every day.



Anna Maria Verzino

In Casalbordino, a small village near Vasto, in the Province of Chieti, lives a woman whom everyone calls the “bride of the sea.” It seems like the start of a fairy tale, but it is a real-life story of a woman — flesh and blood — petite, blonde, with blue eyes and sunburned skin. Many years ago, she swore her eternal love to her prince, the blue sea.

The first of four children, Anna Maria Verzino inherited a passion for the sea and fishing from her father, Donato. “It is my life,” she says. When Anna Maria was a little girl, she saw her father leaving the house to go fishing before dawn. She couldn’t wait to grow up, so she could go with him. When Anna

Maria was five years old, her father took her on his boat and it was love at first sight. She says the greatest gift her father gave her was permission to go on his boat alone when she turned 14.

THE FIRST WOMAN

Only in 1977, when the Gender Equality at Work law was passed in Italy, could Anna Maria Verzino finally obtain an official nautical licence. She was 30 years old and was the first woman in the country to do so. The man in charge of the Port Authority in Ortona who had to sign the licence for her was rather astonished and asked: “Why don’t you stay at home and be a housewife, like all

women?" Anna Maria, unfazed, replied: "I do the housewife duties when I'm not at sea."

Since then, night after night, she goes out to sea without fear with Gloria, her boat that, despite being changed a few times over the years, has kept the same name.

The oldest fisherwoman in Italy, Anna Maria learnt from her father to observe the horizon and clouds and knows, like all fishermen, how to predict changes in the weather. She has thousands of stories to tell about her long life and they all lead back to the sea.

Anna Maria remembers the old days when she had to go fishing in a dress rather than trousers and boots, and how hard it was for a young girl to pull out heavy fishing pots, out in the sea alone, on a boat with oars. Her mother wanted Anna Maria to become a seamstress at all costs but, fortunately, her father allowed her to become what she wanted: a fisher-woman. It was a long process to get her pension as an "independent fisherman" recognized, which involved a lot of paperwork and going around offices. Anna Maria tells all these stories with humour and clear pride. To those who point out that the life of a fisherman is full of sacrifices, she always says that doesn't regret anything and would do it all over again if given a chance.

STILL AT SEA

Today, at the age of 84, Anna Maria Verzino still goes to sea twice a day. She goes in the afternoon to place the nets and at night to collect the catch and sell it on the beach at dawn. Bruno, her brother, accompanies her. But, as she is keen to point out, she is the commander.

During the stormy season she does not lose her spirit and dedicates herself to reading and mending her work equipment. And even though most fishermen nowadays prefer replacing damaged nylon nets with new ones, Anna Maria spends her days patiently repairing them, as if it were a matter of dressing a wound, with precise, loving gestures, just like her father taught her.



Anna Maria when she was young

Her brother Bruno looks after the fishing pots for catching cuttlefish.

Like all fishermen, Anna Maria Verzino is devoted to the Madonna of the sea and, together with her brother, takes care of a small shrine on a road near her home. On Sundays, she goes to mass, dedicates herself to her large family and, sometimes, makes *pizz e foje*, a local traditional dish of corn bread cooked on coals, fried sardines, and boiled wild greens. But she does it all while keeping an eye on the sea. Anna Maria puts her gas stove on a low flame, so she can go out on the balcony to look at the sea. If this isn't love, what is?!

Her only fear in life is that one day she will wake up without the strength to go to sea, without being able to put her Gloria in the water.

Antonietta Centofanti is a journalist and communications and marketing consultant based in L'Aquila. Photos courtesy of Anna Maria Verzino.

The article first appeared on [Abruzzo Travel and Food](#). Translated by Anna Lebedeva.

A DAY IN ROCCAMORICE

By Anna Lebedeva

Immerse in the wilderness of the Majella National Park and explore the trails of ancient hermits, shepherds and outlaws.



Roccamorice. Photo by Enzo Vaira/[EVdrone videomaking](#).

If you mention the village of Roccamorice to someone from the coast in Abruzzo, they would most likely note how far into the mountains it is. Yet, you only need 15 minutes to reach Roccamorice from the motorway by car. There is a notion that the village is like the last frontier, beyond which is nothing but wilderness. And, for a long time, that is exactly how it was. In the Middle Ages, hermits settled around here seeking peace and quiet. In the 1800s, brigand bands hid in the caves in the mountains above the village. But times have changed and today, on the outskirts of Roccamorice, you will find way-marked trails, decent asphalted roads, and picnic tables that attract crowds of mostly Italian tourists in summer.

Roccamorice sits on a small plateau framed by dramatic cliffs. Everywhere you look, the scenery is breathtaking: the patchwork of the valleys

below stretching into the horizon, the distant blue ribbon of the sea, grassy mountain slopes and towering mountain peaks. Part of the Majella National Park, this territory is home to red and roe deer and wolves. A few Marsican brown bear sightings have been reported recently, too.

The first mention of Roccamorice in a historic document dates back to the 11th century. The village's medieval origins are clearly visible in the narrow parallel streets ("rue") and chunky fortified buildings in the old centre. Only one tower still remains from what once must have been a formidable castle. The village continued to change over time, and walking along its streets is like flipping through a history book: an arch with the inscribed date of "1579"; a medieval stone carving incorporated in a Baroque building; a mysterious symbol chiselled on a stone near a church entrance (supposedly, a length that might have been used to measure



Above: An ancient length measure. Right: streets of Roccamorice

something; a lone mulberry tree in a small park where local barons cultivated silk worms in the 1700s.

Roccamorice is the only place in Abruzzo where the ancient tradition of *la morra* is still alive. There was never enough livestock in this poor area to justify joining the transhumance (the seasonal movement of flocks from Abruzzo to Apulia and back), so locals put their sheep and goats together and took turns to graze and milk them up in the mountains. A few villagers still do it. Each member of the group takes the milk drawn during the shift to make cheese at home.

The village's rugged beauty and historic monuments have even attracted film makers in the past few years. The new TV series, *The Name of the Rose*, was filmed here (to everyone's excitement, John Malkovich stopped for a coffee in one of the bars while working here), as well as some scenes from *The New Pope* by Paolo Sorrentino.

Despite its small size, Roccamorice makes for an exciting day trip destination. Start the morning exploring the beautiful hermitages and shepherds' stone huts up on the mountain slopes, have a hearty lunch in one of the village's excellent restaurants, stroll the old part of the village in the afternoon, and finish with an enjoyable aperitivo in one of the local bars.





Hermitage of San Bartolomeo in Legio

WHAT TO SEE

HERMITAGE OF SANTO SPIRITO A MAJELLA

Hidden in a dense forest, just a short drive from the village, sits the 11th-century hermitage where Pietro da Morrone, the future Pope Celestino V, lived for a while. Leaning on a craggy rock, the hermitage consists of several levels reached via vertiginous steps carved in stone. The chapel, sacristy, hermits' cells, and other spaces date to different historic periods.

The hermitage is open for visits from May to October (remains closed in case of inclement weather). See the opening hours [here](#). There are picnic tables on the front lawn, so even if the hermitage is closed you can admire it from outside and enjoy the peaceful surroundings.

Ticket price: €5 per person (€7 with a tour guide; some guides speak English, but you would need to book in advance). Reachable by car (enter "Eremo di Santo Spirito" in Google maps).

HERMITAGE OF SAN BARTOLOMEO IN LEGIO

Six kilometres from the village you will find the stunning hermitage of San Bartolomeo, another humble abode of Celestine monks in the Middle Ages. The first hermits settled here as far back as the 6th century. Chiselled in the rock, the ancient refuge is split into several small rooms with fading 13th century frescoes above the entrance. The steep steps at the entrance, called Scala Santa, were climbed by pilgrims on their knees. As you enter the hermitage, in the wall on the left is a small carved basin with holy water, *l'acqua Santa di San Bartolomeo*. Every year, on August 25, the villagers gather in the hermitage for a liturgy and carry the statue of San Bartolomeo to the main church of Roccamorice for the patron saint's feast celebrations.

The road from the village will take you to a small parking lot in front of a restaurant, *Macchie di Cocco* (enter "Eremo di San Bartolomeo" in Google maps to reach it). From there you will have to walk for about 30 minutes. Wear good hiking shoes, as some stretches of the trail are quite steep and the rocks in the hermitage can be slippery.

Always open. Free entrance. Please note, it is not allowed to approach, walk or immerse in the

stream below the hermitage in order to protect rare amphibians living there.

SHEPHERDS' STONE HUTS

The area around the village is dotted with 250 stone huts (*capanne*, or *tholos*), many of them dating back to the 1800s. The huts were made from stones "a secco" – without mortar – employing a special ingenious technique: the stones were placed in a spiral, pushing in each row by a centimetre, so at the top of the hut only a small hole remained. The *capanne* were used as a shelter by shepherds and farmers, who worked the rocky fields to feed their families.

From Piano delle Castagne follow the road running up to the mountains above Roccamorice. Once you reach the end of the paved stretch, continue on foot in the direction of Località Acquafredda (signposted). There you will find many *capanne* and magnificent panoramic views. The Majella National Park has developed a network of easy trails around the dry shepherd huts, which are well marked (look for white and red rectangular waymarks with "CP" written on them). See the itineraries on the [park's website](#).

A shepherds' stone hut and details of the roof and entrance



BITUMEN MINES

Ancient Romans mined bitumen in Roccamorice. The industry was revived between 1850 and 1950. During World War II, the Germans built a labour camp with around 300 prisoners who worked the bitumen deposits. Today, local authorities are in the process of organising tourist itineraries in the abandoned mines. Majambiente runs fascinating tours there occasionally. [Contact them](#) about private tours.



WHERE TO EAT

AGRITURISMO THOLOS

One of the best restaurants in the region, serving traditional food. Most ingredients, from ancient grains, flour for pasta to cheeses and cured meats, come from the owners' farm. Order their tasting menu (*menu degustazione*) to taste the full range of local seasonal dishes. Some English spoken.

Address: Località Collarso, Roccamorice. Tel. 0039 085 857 2590.

HARD ROCC BAR-PIZZERIA

This lively bar is run by a local family. Pier Paolo makes excellent naturally leavened, thin crispy pizzas with gourmet toppings. They always have a range of excellent beers, including Chimay on tap (rare in Italy!). For €3.50-€4 you can have an excellent *aperitivo*: a drink with a generous plateful of snacks. If you happen to be there in the morning, don't miss their heavenly artisanal *cornetti* made locally.

Address: Via de Horatiis, 1, Roccamorice

OSTERIA DEL BELVEDERE

Good for very decent pasta dishes. Make sure you try their *genziana* bitter-sweet liqueur made on the premises (they sell nine different kinds; also sold by the bottle, if you are looking for an unusual gift). In summer, you can eat at a table outside overlooking a pretty park. In winter, there is a roaring fireplace going for a cosy atmosphere. The owner is a sculptor, so the restaurant is filled with his beautiful abstract works made from the local Majella stone.

Address: Via Belvedere, 12, Roccamorice. Tel.: 0039 085 857 2115.



Stone carvings on houses in Roccamorice. Photo by Mario Di Matteo. A charming ruin in the village.

THEN THE EARTHQUAKE HAPPENED . . .

By Linda Dini Jenkins

Andrew and Katja spent more than three years looking in Abruzzo until they found their perfect home. Something that had enough space for living and working — plus fantastic views. Then came the earthquake . . . here's how they recovered their dream and are discovering all the pleasures of living in Abruzzo.

"I discovered Abruzzo on the internet," says Andrew Miles, a British photographer and former TV producer for National Geographic. He and his then-girlfriend, German-born Katja von Schweitzer, decided to come for a ski holiday in 2005. "We stayed in Pescocostanzo and skied Roccarasso and were hooked," says Katja, who had lived in Switzerland and Austria previously, so she knows a thing or two about skiing. She was enchanted by what she found in Abruzzo.

The two married, had two children (Safina, now 12 and Rocco, 10) and, as Andrew became more and more disillusioned about all the travel he had to do for his job (it was about 90% travel), decided to set their sights on Abruzzo, which they had both fallen hard for. They left their home in Brighton (UK) many, many times in search of the perfect property. Andrew estimates they saw at least 100 houses. But that all changed in 2008 when they went to San Benedetto in Perillis.

Andrew was searching the internet when he saw it. It seemed perfect, but he phoned a local friend and asked her to go and have a look before they made yet another dead-end



Andrew and Katja in front of their house

trip. Her response was simply, "I think you should come." Turns out, if they hadn't bought it, she was going to!

"The house is massive," says Andrew. "It is a mix of a 15th century palazzo, an 8th century fortified building, and an 11th century watch tower. We learned that the palazzo was built by a Spanish captain." The 1000-square-meter property was well



San Benedetto in Perillis

situated in the middle of four national parks, affording great views, and had the potential to give them everything they were looking for: a home for their family, four apartments for tourists, a place where they could work, a space for a garden and quick access to the wilderness of Abruzzo. Everything was falling into place, they were getting ready to start the renovation but then came 2009 and the earthquake.

The watch tower collapsed, although there was not much damage to the rest of the property. “Still, the house was put into the red zone,” says Andrew. “And time stopped in its tracks. Now we owned a house that we couldn’t live in and the money we might get from the Italian government would barely fix the watch tower.”

Eventually they learned that they could have the house declared a historically important property in Italy, which they did. The exterior construction was taken entirely out of their hands and they had neither a key nor a say in the work for more than a year. In 2018, Katja took a rental in nearby Popoli so they could be closer to the project, and in mid-September this year, they got their keys. But while the house looks amazing on the outside – restored



The house after the earthquake

to a high standard, and as original as possible – inside it has no electricity, kitchen, or internet, and their furniture is stuck on a truck in France. So Popoli it is for a while longer, but they are hoping to move in by the spring.

WHY SAN BENEDETTO?

Apart from it being in a simply beautiful corner of Abruzzo, Andrew and Katja chose San Benedetto in Perillis because it is such a special place. “There’s lots going on here,” says Katja. “There’s an 8th century Abbey and a gorgeous main street, which is being restored at the same time as our palazzo.” The last time there were even 1,000 residents in the town was the 1950s, but they both agree that this will change.



Restoration works are almost finished

“It’s in the middle of four parks, close to the motorway and it’s easy to get to anywhere from here,” adds Andrew. “Mountains, hiking, skiing, the beach – it’s all here. And it’s being discovered.”

Andrew especially loves all the open spaces. He enjoys being so close to nature and calls it “very elemental.” Having four proper seasons is incredibly important to them both, and they are struck by the kindness and generosity of the people they’ve met as well as by what they agree is the best food they’ve had anywhere. And they swear by the Montepulciano wine. . .

“I love the intergenerational aspect of living in Abruzzo,” says Andrew. “Go to a restaurant and you’ll see the young and the old interacting together, enjoying themselves and their lives in this amazing place.”

Andrew and Katja have been building a travel business since arriving in Abruzzo, with the aim of sharing the bounties of this place with tourists. First there was Sacred-Walks holidays, which is now being incorporated into the larger [Exploring Abruzzo](#) site where, with their friend and guide Lorenzo, they offer everything from food and wine tours to guided

private one-day tours, bespoke holi-days and the sacred walks experience.

The earthquake could have dissuaded them. Not speaking much Italian could have stopped them in their tracks (although Andrew admits to knowing a lot of construction terms by now). And the time factor could have been a negative. But they are realistic about what they’ve been through and have some advice for people considering a move to Italy. First, don’t just visit once, they say. Come a few times, at different times of the year, and see what the seasons have to offer. “The summers are very hot and the winters are very cold in the mountains here,” says Andrew. “Come with a different head on your shoulders in terms of how and how fast things should be done. Money is not the most important thing here. Relationships are, nature is, enjoying life is.”

As for the lives they left behind? As the saying goes, living well is the best revenge.

Linda Dini Jenkins leads small tours to Italy and blogs about travel at www.travelitalythewriteway.com.

RESTORING A NOBLE PALACE: NOT FOR THE FAINTHEARTED

By Bimbi Bellhouse

We continue following the progress of a group of friends who have embarked on the challenging project of turning a crumbling noble palace in a hilltop town of Casoli into a luxury residence. The works are finally starting and the scale of the project is grand!

It has taken us two years since we made our offer, but we are now finally ready to begin the renovation. The Palazzo is in the very heart of Casoli's *centro storico* and all the building supplies will have to be brought in via the giant crane (approximately 38m high with a 50m span) which will be installed in front of the Palazzo on the Piazza del Popolo. It will be embedded in a base of concrete which will have been poured into the ground to a depth of 12m. A concrete platform will be placed on top of this platform to take the crane. Only after erecting the crane can the building be made safe, and the scaffolding put in place. The roof, which is in a perilous state, will be temporarily strengthened in case of winter snowfall, and much of the internal vaulting and flooring, at present very damaged, will be propped and strengthened before the major works can begin.

The builders we have chosen, Fratelli Mammarelli Srl from the nearby town of Vacri, are not daunted by the project, as they have completed even bigger construction works: restorations of the cathedral of San Cetto in Pescara, the cathedral of San Giustino in Chieti and the Palazzo Auriti in Guardiagrele – another haunt of Gabriele D'Annunzio, who spent many happy days in Palazzo Ricci. Their know-



Palazzo Ricci (below the castle, on the right , with the arches)

ledge of historic buildings and building techniques will prove invaluable.

The demolition process will be challenging – not only because the internal rubble and masonry will have to be removed from the site, but also because of the large amount of excavation in the garden required to re-landscape the space and dig out the pool area. Only once all this has been accomplished can the process of restructuring and strengthening begin.



Beautiful old windows in Palazzo Ricci

KEEPING THE BEST

We will of course be preserving as much of the original interior woodwork as possible (internal doors and door-frames, window frames, surrounds, wooden shutters and the like). These will be restored and repurposed, some doors and door-frames being repositioned in their original settings, with many others integrated into kitchens, cupboards and even used just decoratively to add atmosphere and age to the building. All the actual windows and shutters are being replaced with state-of-the-art thermally sealed ecologically approved systems, as now required in historic restorations throughout Italy.

Apart from the actual building works, which include the remodelling of the building into apartments, plus the plumbing, heating and very high specification electrical systems, there are some extremely exacting restoration processes to undertake. The Liberty style stained glass windows in the atrium

(we talked about them in the September issue of ABRUZZISSIMO) will all have to be either re-made where they are completely beyond restoring or, as in the case of the huge skylight Lucernario, taken down, sand-blasted and then re-glazed in the original colours which date back to the early 1900s. This requires expert and specialist attention; once restored, this stained glass will be one of the architectural highlights of the building.

ANCIENT PAINTING TECHNIQUES

Another striking feature of the restoration will be the specialist paintwork which will be used to great effect throughout the building. This will range from the painstaking repairs to the much-damaged marbling, stippling and other antique paint effects in the Family Chapel on the top floor, to the painting of murals and grisaille work (painting in monochrome, typically to imitate mouldings, reliefs and sculptures) in the common areas and the



The Experience Centre with some specialist paintwork

apartments themselves. This has been an architectural tradition since the days of the Roman Empire. The villas of Pompeii are decorated with it, and it has remained popular throughout the centuries. A palazzo such as ours which has relatively plain surfaces and not much decorative plasterwork, would have been embellished in this manner in the 18th and 19th centuries, in a variety of ways: faux marble columns, "stone" blockwork, faux wooden panelling, murals and much more. We will be restoring all this splendour not only within the building itself but also in the garden which is being laid out in a classical manner. Some of this paintwork, rarely used today, we showcase in our Experience Centre, across the road from the palazzo.

All our friends and neighbours in town have told us how excited they are to see the noblest and largest palazzo of the town re-emerge from its many years of hibernation and neglect to take its place



The team's artist, Spencer Power, working on antique paint effects

once more as Casoli's crowning glory. So are we! We are counting the days for the crane to go up and begin our epic restoration!

<https://palazzoricci.club/>

ENCOUNTERS WITH MARSICAN BROWN BEARS

By Mauro Cironi

Only 50-70 Marsican brown bears, a subspecies of the European brown bear, survive in the ancient forests, recently proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in the Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park.

This year, two truly wonderful events have brought optimism and hope for the future of the species: the birth of a litter of four cubs, the first time documented in the national park, and a bear sighting, after more than 150 years, in the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga.

The survival of Marsican brown bears depends on the creation of ecological corridors that will allow them to move safely between various protected areas of Central Italy. It will help the rapid demographic expansion necessary to avoid the extinction of these beautiful animals.

The conservation efforts of natural reserves, such as *Riserva Naturale Monte Genzana*, national parks' personnel and private associations such as *Salviamo l'Orso*, together with volunteers, give us hope for the future of Marsican bears, which are among the rarest in the world.

I have taken these photos in different areas of the Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park and in the wildlife area of Villavallelonga. Photographing bears in the wild is difficult. These are very fleeting encounters and you only have a moment to get it right. The hardest thing is to know how to manage your emotions during the encounters with this wonderful wild animal, especially if you are close.



A bear is stripping bark from a tree looking for insect larvae.

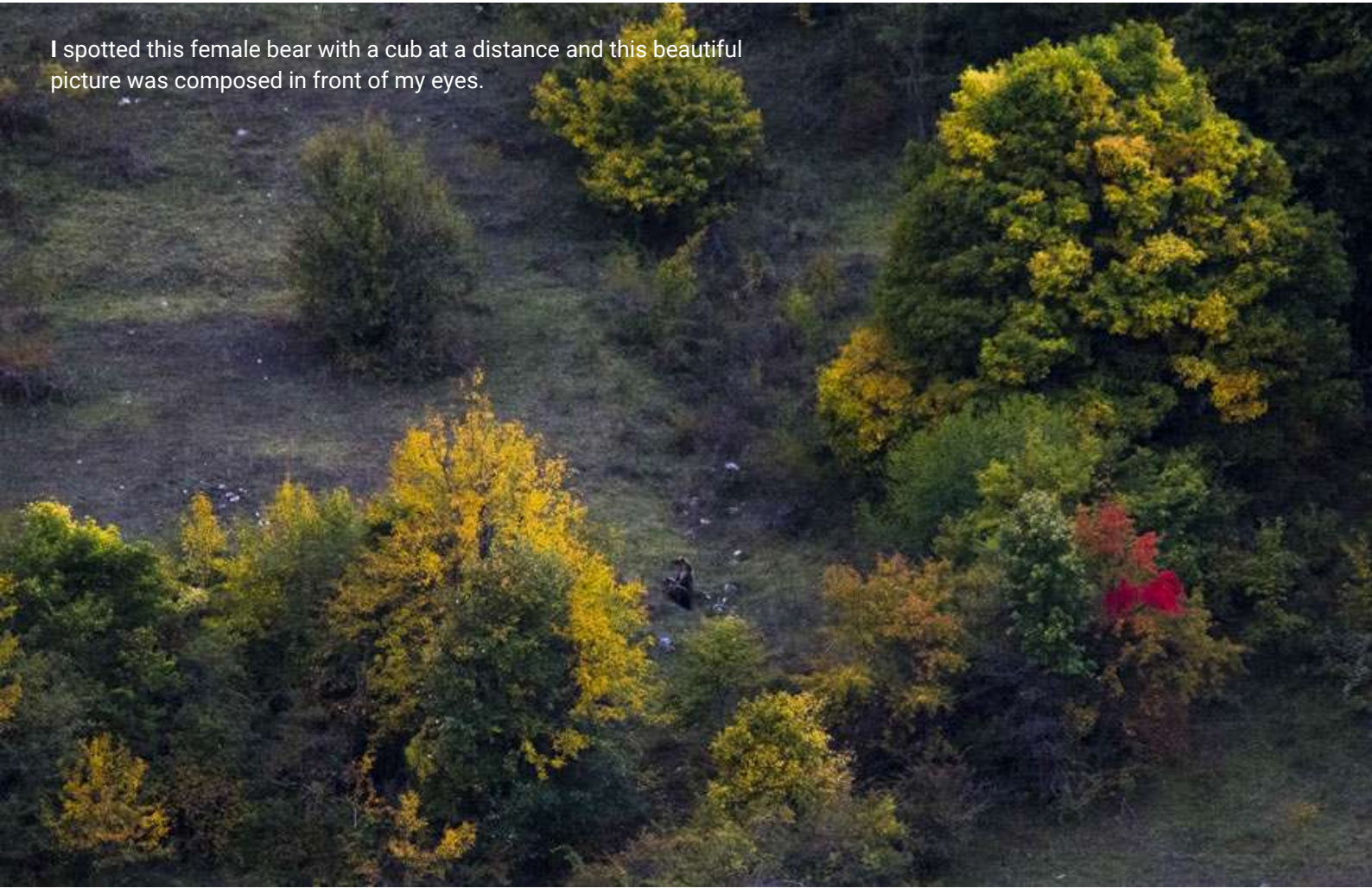
We found ourselves with a big surprise on a trail, only six metres away from this young bear who was snacking on wild garlic. The bear immediately moved away.



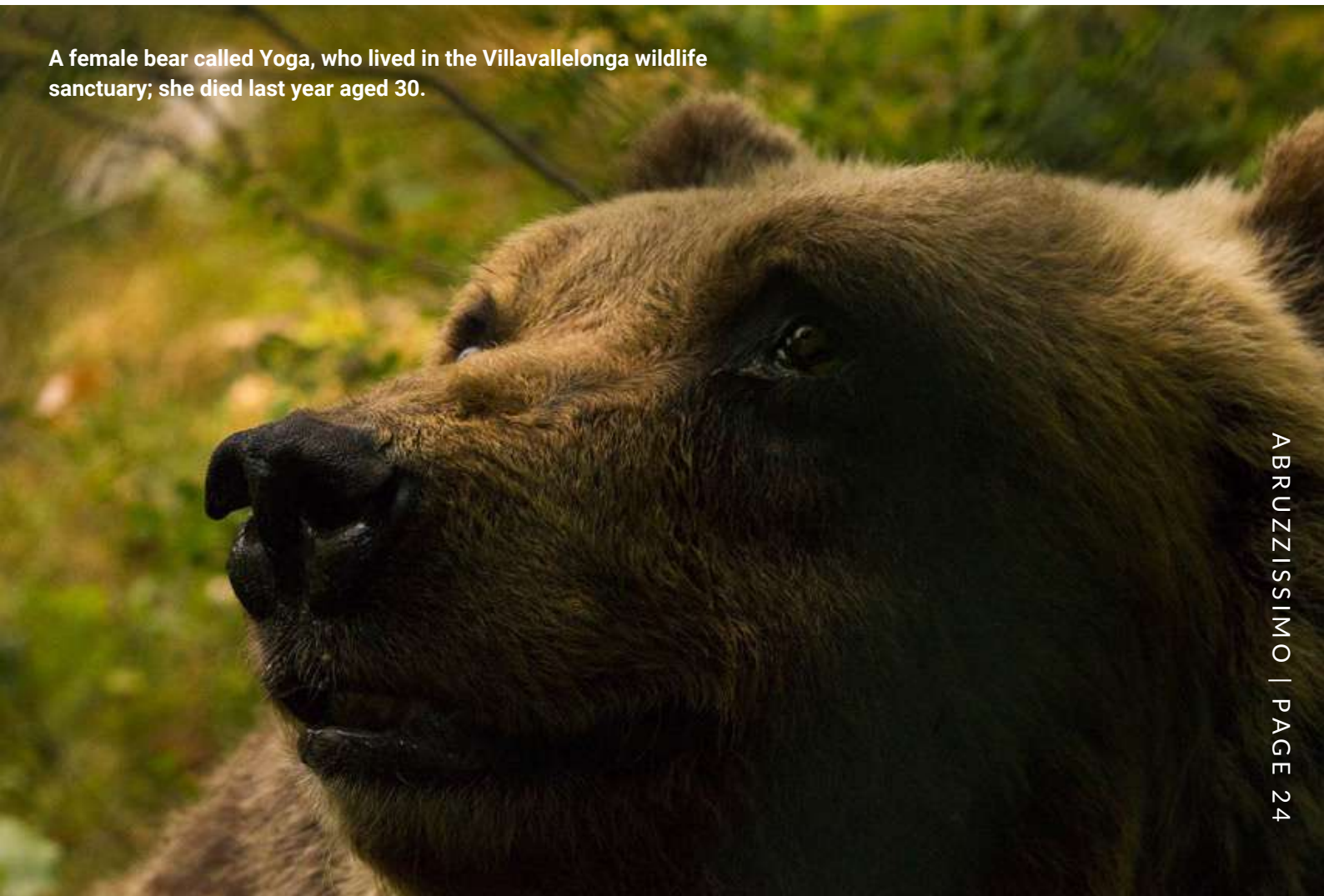
He stayed at an elevated position, about 30 metres from us, observing until we continued along the trail.



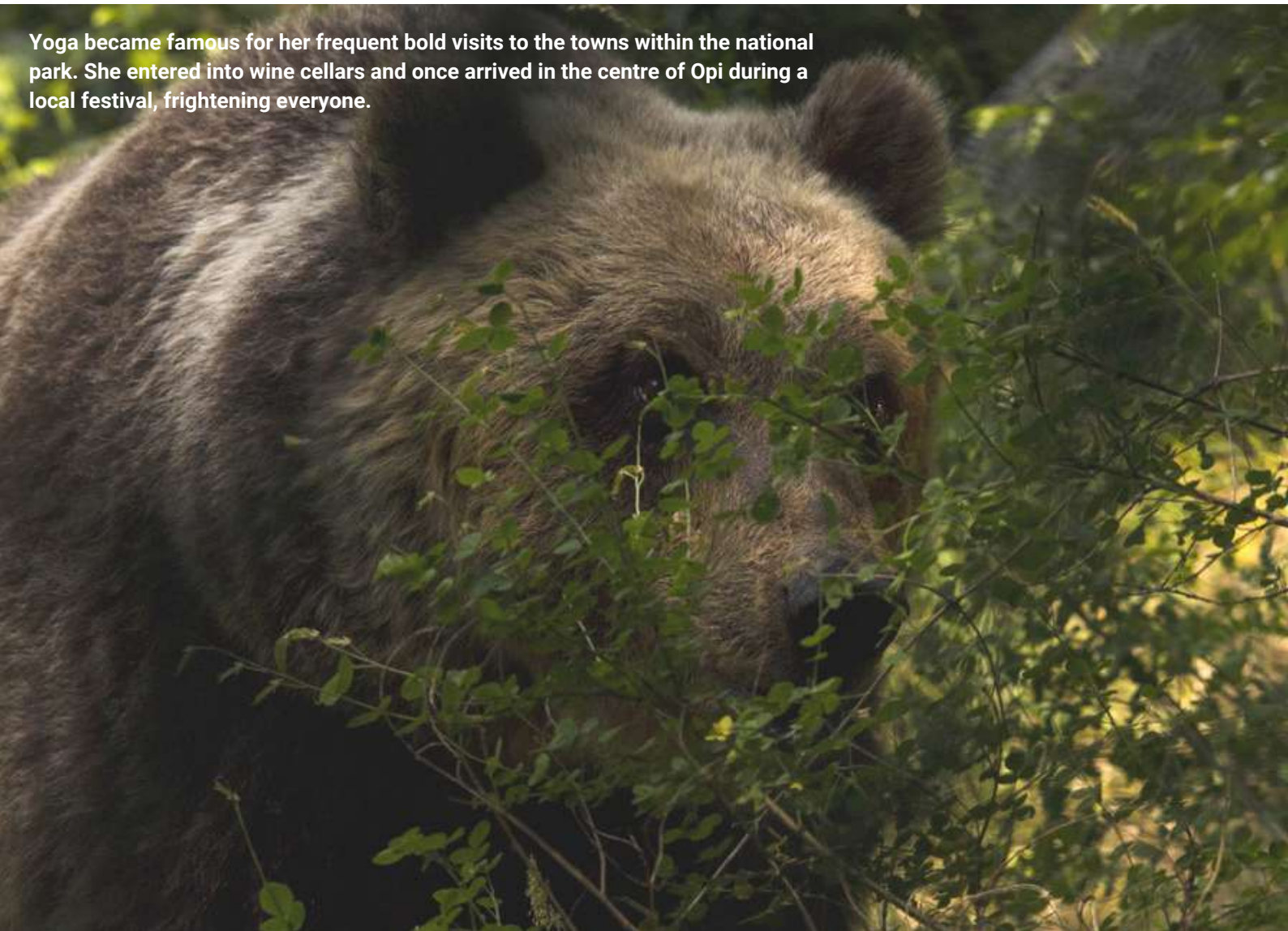
I spotted this female bear with a cub at a distance and this beautiful picture was composed in front of my eyes.



A female bear called Yoga, who lived in the Villavallelonga wildlife sanctuary; she died last year aged 30.



Yoga became famous for her frequent bold visits to the towns within the national park. She entered into wine cellars and once arrived in the centre of Opi during a local festival, frightening everyone.



WHERE TO GO BEAR WATCHING

The towns of San Sebastiano dei Marsi and Villavallelonga are frequented by some, more confident, bears. If you are staying there for a few days, you might be lucky to see one.

La Betulla runs bear watching tours from March to June, during the bears' mating period, and in autumn when bears prepare for hibernation.

Ecotur organises evening bear spotting treks with a light dinner in a mountain refuge. They also run bear watching weekends. Check the calendar [here](#).

During these tours you will be walking on designated trails and observing animals from a safe distance without disturbing them. Obviously, there is no guarantee that you will see bears but you are likely to encounter deer, wild boar and wolves.

To learn more about the conservational efforts of Salviamo l'Orso go to their website. They are always looking for donations and volunteers.

Mauro Cironi is a mountain guide and an amateur photographer in love with the earth and nature. He is involved in the Life Coornata project for the protection of the Apennine chamois and Salviamo l'Orso protecting the Marsican brown bear.

All photos © Mauro Cironi.

ANIMA: THE NEW SOUL OF ABRUZZO'S COOKING

By Michelle Reid

Introdacqua is a thriving small town in the Valle Peligna with an abundance of heart, soul, and energy. Unlike some other towns and villages in inland Abruzzo where life seems to be dwindling away, there is just something about Introdacqua. It is renowned for its passionate music tradition (the Introdacqua band is famous throughout Abruzzo and trains many young musicians) and its stunning natural setting, dominated by a mountain backdrop at every turn. It also has a long history of hardship and emigration, epitomized by the work *Son of Italy* by Introdacqua's own emigrant poet, Pascal d'Angelo.

Now Introdacqua has two more "sons" that are putting this traditional Abruzzo village on the map. In 2018 the Di Grandis brothers, Nicholas and Stefano, opened the aptly named *Anima* restaurant in the centre of the historic village. Young and passionate – with ample ambition and creativity – and driven by love for their home region, they are aiming for culinary excellence, whilst using only locally sourced, high quality, organic ingredients. They aim to provide a unique culinary experience that elevates classic Abruzzo cuisine to new heights and highlights the world-class meats, wines, cheeses, and vegetables found in the region.

Set in historic Palazzo Trasmondi, the traditional stone interior has been beautifully and thoughtfully preserved, so the ambiance immediately sets the scene for the entire eating experience. As Stefano and his staff bring you the dishes so carefully prepared by Chef Nicholas, they share with you their passion for the ingredients, explaining the dishes and where the ingredients originate from. The menu changes on a quarterly basis to make use of the best seasonal ingredients and, combined with the chef's exacting standards, the dishes are both delicate and delicious. I loved the organic *fior di latte* cheese from Scanno served with roasted red peppers in a red pepper jus. The risotto, with fresh aromatic herbs and lemon, was simple and



elegant. In a short space of time, the Di Grandis brothers have made such a ripple that in 2019 *Anima* was included in the prestigious *Gambero Rosso* culinary guide, Italy's authority on Italian food and wine.

Anima is not your average Abruzzo trattoria, nor does it claim to be. Nicholas and Stefano literally pour their souls, as well as their expertise, into their restaurant. The menu is priced a bit higher than you often find in traditional Abruzzo kitchens, but it is by no means overpriced. When you want a fine dining experience, *Anima* is well worth the money. Nicholas and Stefano are keen to show that traditional Abruzzo cooking can hold its own on a national stage.

ANIMA

Address: Piazza Cavour, 4, Introdacqua. Tel.: 0039 347 5039164. **Opening hours:** lunch and dinner on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, Monday and Thursday – dinner only, Sunday – lunch only. Closed on Wednesday. Set menu starts from €40/person.

[Anima on Facebook.](#)

THE FORGOTTEN OLIVES FROM CASOLI

By Luana Tusset



The Presidia is one of the most important projects of the Slow Food Foundation. It supports thousands of small producers worldwide to sustain quality production at risk of extinction, recover traditional processing methods, and safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties.

There are currently 327 products protected by Slow Food across Italy, 17 of which are in the region of Abruzzo. We want to tell you, our readers, about these unique products. We kick off this series with the *Intosso* olives from Casoli. The large fleshy olives can be eaten cured or used for oil production. The native *Intosso* trees grow in different areas at the Maiella foothills, mainly around the town of Casoli.

The unusual name *Intosso* comes from the traditional curing method. The olives had to be *ndosse*, softened with lye and water, as linguist Gennaro Finamore explained in his 1880 Abruzzese dialect dictionary. After the World War II this olive variety was so profitable that the farmers slept in their olive groves to make sure nobody stole the harvest. After all, 220 pounds of olives were worth more than an average monthly wage in the 1960s. During that period, a paper cone of marinated *Intosso* olives was the most popular street food in Rome and Naples, the main markets for *Intosso* farmers, which kept the prices high. However, over time, the arrival of cheaper table olives from other Mediterranean countries changed the market

drastically and the more expensive *Intosso* was forgotten. Farmers started to blend it with other varieties to make olive oil.

In the early 2000s a passionate young agronomist, son of a local farmer, Tommaso Masciantonio, set on a quest of finding the best local olive varieties to revive. Working *Intosso* to produce single variety oil (*monocultivar*), Tommaso fell in love with its sensorial characteristics: intense, peppery, with strong notes of freshly picked artichokes, green walnuts and tomato leaves. Over the years, Tommaso has perfected *Intosso* oil production and today his single varietal extra virgin oil is considered one of the best in Italy.

Several olive oil producers work with *Intosso* in Abruzzo but there are only two growers in its homeland around Casoli: Tommaso Masciantonio's [Trappeto di Caprafico](#) and [L'Olivicola Casolana](#)

You can buy *Intosso* oil online from L'Olivicola Casolana, [OliveoilsItaly.com](#) or by contacting Trappeto di Caprafico directly.

Intosso is perfect drizzled over a salad, pasta or in a dressing for fish, like in the recipe below.

GRILLED MACKEREL WITH AN INTOSSO DRESSING

Try this traditional recipe from the book *Storie del Cibo* by Gino Primavera

Prepare the dressing: Mix 100ml *Intosso* extra virgin olive oil, 2-3 crushed cloves of garlic, a teaspoon of lemon juice, finely chopped parsley, salt and pepper to taste. Let the dressing rest for two hours, stirring it a few times.

Drizzle some olive oil on the mackerel and grill them for 15-20 minutes on a high heat setting. Once the fish is cooked, serve it with the dressing. Pair the dish with Trebbiano d'Abruzzo white wine.

Luana Tusset is an Italian-Brazilian restaurateur based in Abruzzo. She is the co-founder of the Brazilian Slow Food Convivium "Primeira Colônia Italiana".

TWO RECIPES FOR CRÊPES TERAMO-STYLE

By Emanuela Trotta

The traditional dish, *scrippelle 'mbusse*, is typical for the Teramo province but is loved across the whole region of Abruzzo. The legend has it that a local, Enrico Castorani, while helping the chef cooking for the French Army stationed in the area in the 1800s, dropped a tray of crêpes in a large pot of broth. To resolve the problem, he suggested to serve them like that. “*Mbusse*” in dialect means “in broth, wet”.

In my version of *scrippelle 'mbusse* I add the *parmigiano* cheese to the crêpes mix, not as a filling as it is traditionally done, because that way the broth stays clear.

The version with broth is only one of several ways to serve the *scrippelle* Teramo-style. Another, more elaborate, option is the *timballo teramano* with tiny meatballs or minced meat, which is often made for important celebrations. Here I offer a simplified and lighter recipe of *timballo* with chicken and lamb giblets.



SCRIPPELLE 'MBUSSE (CRÊPES IN BROTH)

INGREDIENTS

Makes 4 servings

For the crêpes:

6 eggs, 200g white flour 00, 500ml water, 3 tsp grated parmigiano reggiano cheese, dry parsley, salt and pepper to taste, small nob of butter

For the broth:

1 kg broth meat (chicken, turkey, beef), one medium carrot, one medium potato, one onion, one celery stalk, some fresh parsley, a laurel leaf, a peeled tomato, salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

Put all the ingredients for the broth in a large pot, cover them with cold water and cook until the water is reduced to half of the original volume. Take out the meat and veg and filter the broth, pouring through a tight sieve.

Beat up eggs and, gradually, add flour, breaking any lumps. Add water, salt, pepper, parsley and *parmigiano* cheese, mix well. Leave the batter to rest for 30 minutes. After that, heat up a frying pan, lightly grease it with butter and pour a ladleful of batter to cover the surface and form an even thin crêpe. Flip it on the other side after 2-3 minutes when the crêpe easily separates from the pan. Repeat the process until the batter is finished.

Serve the crêpes rolled up and covered in piping-hot broth.

TIMBALLO DI SCRIPPELLE

INGREDIENTS

Makes 4 servings

For the crêpes:

6 eggs, 200g white flour 00, 500ml water, salt and pepper to taste, a small knob of butter

For the meat filling:

500g minced beef, 500g peeled tomatoes, 2 tsp dried mix of celery, carrot and onion, one laurel leaf, some olive oil, salt and pepper to taste, a splash of white wine, some fresh basil leaves

For the topping:

2 scamorza cheese balls, 80g Grana Padano, grated

PREPARATION

Make crêpes as described in the previous recipe and leave them to cool.

Heat up a frying pan and add some olive oil, laurel and the dried mix of celery, carrot and onion. Throw in the meat mince to brown it on a high flame. Splash some wine on it, add tomatoes, fresh basil, season with salt and pepper. Cook for a few minutes until the meat is firm.

Cut scamorza into small cubes and start assembling the timballo in an oven-proof dish: cover the dish bottom with a few overlapping crêpes, then a thin layer of the meat filling, some scamorza and Grana cheese. Continue alternating the layers, finishing with minced meat and a generous amount of cheese.

Bake the timballo at 180°C for about 40 minutes.

Emanuela Trotta is an Abruzzo-based food writer and food stylist who works with various Italian magazines.



Do you know a traditional recipe from Abruzzo you would like to share?
Send it to:
editor@abruzzissimo.com

NOTHING SCARY, SIMPLY GOOD: BONES OF THE DEAD BISCUITS

By Michela Portacci

When I was a child, I did not even want to taste these biscuits. Their name, *ossa dei morti* (bones of the dead) scared me. As they are pale, hard, and crunchy I suspected for a while that they could be my ancestors' bones. On top of that, bones of the dead biscuits always appeared this time of year, when we celebrate *Ognissanti* and *Tutti i Morti* (All Saints' and All Souls' days). Following old traditions, families lit up candles and prepared food for their deceased relatives returning just for that night, on the night of November 1, to the places and people they loved.

Some years and many biscuits later, I made my peace with *ossa dei morti* and, after tasting many of them, I've come to believe that our family friend, Signora Annarita, a kind lady from Spoltore, a town in the hills near Pescara, makes the best bones of the dead. She happily shared her recipe with me, passed to her by an old woman in the town. *Ossa dei morti* biscuits are made in the regions of Southern Italy using only a very few, simple ingredients that you can easily find in every house pantry.



INGREDIENTS

Makes about 40 biscuits

- 600g wheat flour
- 500g almonds, unpeeled
- 500g sugar plus some extra for dipping
- 5 eggs
- Zest of one lemon
- Baker's ammonia (*ammoniaca per dolci* is sold in Italian supermarkets, but you can substitute it with baking powder) on the tip of a teaspoon

PREPARATION

Pre-heat the oven to 180°C.

Put the almonds in the warm oven (without peeling them) and wait for few minutes until they are toasted, then remove and chop them into small pieces.

Prepare the flour on your board and create a well in it, where you will add the sugar, almonds, eggs, zest and baking powder. Start mixing all the ingredients with a fork, then knead the dough for a few minutes and shape it as a loaf. If the dough is too sticky, add more flour.

Take a piece of dough and roll it into a roughly shaped thick rope. Cut it into pieces 7-8 cm long. Now prepare 2 small bowls, one with water, one with a handful of sugar: brush each biscuit with water (or wet them slightly using wet hands) and then, quickly, dip one side in the sugar.

Lay the biscuits – sugared side up – on the baking tray; remember to leave some space among the pieces because they will swell a little.

Bake for 15-20 minutes and then cool them.

Michela Portacci is born and raised in Abruzzo. She works in the regional government and is passionate about promoting Abruzzo and its traditions.

Dear editor,

I was born in Sulmona just after World War II, the youngest of five children. My parents were local farmers who harboured escaping POWs in a hut on their land who had been imprisoned at Campo 78 at Fonte d'Amore near Sulmona.

My parents, Filippo and Rita Verrocchi, as well as many other farmers, worked tracts of land across the fertile Peligna Valley. Small huts in which the farmers ate and rested during the heat of summer were located on these small farms. Some of the escaping POWs had luckily found these huts for shelter. My father, on discovering this, decided to give them refuge and for about two weeks, took food to them on a daily basis, acting as if all was "normal" as, after all, it was harvest time. A seriously risky decision by any account! In the meantime, word had spread that the remaining German Command, still based in Sulmona, had announced that anyone caught harbouring escaping POWs would be executed. My mother, panicked, alarmed and terrified, immediately insisted that my father not continue taking food to the fearful and hungry soldiers. The thought of enduring the potential loss of the family breadwinner and endangering the lives of her three young children was too horrific to contemplate.

After the war had ended, Italy began the mammoth task of post-war reconstruction. By then, many had left the misery, poverty and destruction created by a dictatorship that had brought the country to its knees. Whilst many of my uncles and cousins had emigrated to Boston (USA), the first as far back as 1892, my father decided that Australia was to be our future destination, notwithstanding my mother's reluctance, despite the fact that her cousins had migrated to Australia in 1926. He departed in 1950. The following year three of my older siblings, 16, 14 and 9 left Sulmona to join him. In May 1952, my mother, another brother and I travelled to Australia and the seven of us were finally reunited in Melbourne.



The Verrocchi family in front of their house

My father found a job as a cook at a dam construction site to improve water supply to Melbourne, a growing post-war city. Labourers were required, so he helped my cousins and others in Sulmona to emigrate and get jobs. The paperwork wasn't too onerous back then.

In 1991 we brought our kids to Sulmona so they could see where I came from. I regularly return there and hope to take the grandchildren at some stage.

Campo 78 was under the jurisdiction of the Military for a long time. Negotiations have been ongoing as to who should administer the site and maintain it. The Camp has been open for visitors interested in its history, especially those whose fathers had been imprisoned there. Now Campo 78 is under the control of the Commune di Sulmona.

In 2016, together with the people from Sulmona living in Melbourne, I raised over AU \$3000 to contribute towards the restoration of one of the barracks at Campo78.

Rosa Verrocchi-Miot, OAM, Melbourne