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ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



SUMMER
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TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD WINE

ABRUZZISSIMO

MAGAZINE



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Magazine

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Ciao a tutti!

I have been overwhelmed by the positive response and congratulatory emails from our readers since **ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine** was launched. You, our readers, are scattered across the globe, many have Abruzzese roots, others fell for the relaxed lifestyle and bought a holiday home here or moved to the region permanently. Your stories are different but there is one thing in common: love for Abruzzo and a desire to learn more about this unsung corner of Italy.

This issue of **ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine** is packed with inspiring and practical articles to help you to tour Abruzzo virtually – from the comfort of your home – plan a day out, or dream about your next trip here. As well as my guide to exploring the beautiful town of Bominaco and its treasures in a day, we also have a local historian revealing why he thinks Bisenti is the birthplace of the notorious Pontius Pilate. We take you to Sulmona to learn about its garlic tradition, ask two experts where to see the most beautiful wild orchids in Abruzzo and tell a story of one couple's move to Abruzzo that led to a new life and successful tour business.

On page 30 we announce an exciting competition where you could win a romantic stay in a luxurious geodome surrounded by ancient olive trees near the town of Pianella.

I am always keen to hear your views and suggestions, so email me and we'll try to incorporate it into a future story.

Happy reading!

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

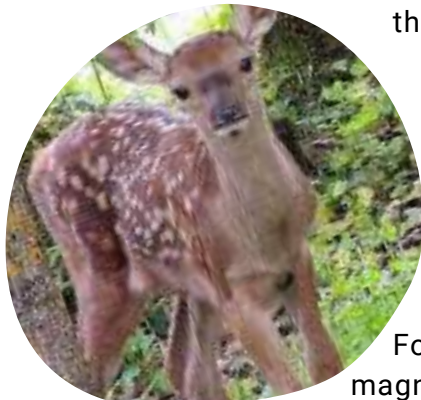


CANOE RIDES

Every day in June, the Cooperative Il Bosso runs beautiful canoe tours on the Tirino River, one of the cleanest in Europe. Suitable for all levels of fitness and families, they last two hours. You will learn about the local history and wildlife, jump in the icy waters of the river and taste a delicious edible water plant, endemic for this area. The guides speak English. Price is €30 per person, with two people per canoe. Booking is essential. For more information, see [Il Bosso's Facebook page](#).

ABRUZZO ON INSTAGRAM

Treat yourself to beautiful photos and videos of Abruzzo. Pietro Santucci, a mountain guide, fills his [Instagram account](#) with stunning images of wolves, bears and foxes that he meets in the Abruzzo National Park. A video of young chamois playing in



the snow and photos of deer walking among people in the streets of Civitella Alfedena will brighten up your day.

For a curated feed of magnificent photos of Abruzzo check out [Click for Abruzzo](#). It is the escapism we need in our lives right now.

Restrictions are being slowly lifted here in Abruzzo. Although there will be no events and festivals for a while, there are plenty of exciting outdoor activities and online experiences this month. And for those of you who cannot visit Abruzzo just yet, we also have a few suggestions below. All links are clickable.

CYCLING ON THE COAST

Via Verde dei Trabocchi is a 42-kilometre cycling path along the Trabocchi coast.

Although it is not completely finished yet, you will be able to cycle some parts of it this summer. The 10-kilometre stretch from Ripari di Giobbe to San Vito Chietino is partially paved and accessible, and so is the path from the Canale Beach (about four kilometres after Punta Aderci) to Marina Vasto. You can watch videos of different stretches of the cycling path to choose which ones are more suitable for you on the [Via Verde's site](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page to the section Situazione percorribilità).



VIRTUAL WALKS AND COOKING CLASSES

We at ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine have planned some exciting online experiences for readers who are missing Abruzzo but cannot be here right now. Last month we ran a live virtual tour of Rapino and two cooking classes (see the recordings on our Facebook page). In June, we invite you to go on a truffle hunt, make traditional sweet deep-fried ravioli, visit Caramanico Terme and learn secrets of the ancient stone huts that dot Abruzzo's mountains – all these without leaving your home. Check [our Facebook page](#) for the exact dates.



OLD MAP OF ABRUZZO

Have you seen this beautiful old map of Abruzzo? Created in 1673 by two Dutch engravers/cartographers, Gerard Valck and Peter Schenk, it is in public domain and can be downloaded free. Back then Abruzzo was divided on Citeriore (lower) and Ulteriore (upper) and you can see the Lake Fucino, which hadn't been drained yet. The resolutions available are quite high, so you should be able to print this beautiful map out, frame it and admire your home away from home while planning your next Abruzzese adventure.

ENCOUNTER WITH A MARSICAN BEAR

Abruzzo has been home to rare Marsican brown bears for 4,000 years. In this fascinating episode of The Wild podcast, the ecologist Chris Morgan and naturalist Bruno Demi go in search of the elusive Marsican bear in Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park. The population of this shy peaceful bear subspecies in the region is only 50 animals and their future is uncertain. Listen to [the episode](#) to learn more.



JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

Abruzzo Expat Community on Facebook is a group for those who love Abruzzo, have Abruzzese roots, dream of moving to the region or live here already. There you can ask questions, share your stories and help each other out. [Join the group here.](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

DEFYING GRAVITY

There are several locations in Abruzzo which seem to defy gravity. Strange phenomena happen on some stretches of roads in Pescosansonesco and Rosciolo dei Marsi: on the peak of the road, where it appears to descend, a car stopped in neutral rolls backwards uphill. Many believe supernatural forces play jokes there, but there is a scientific explanation.

"Gravity hills," as they are called, are

spots where the surrounding landscape creates an optical illusion, making a downhill slope look like an uphill one. If you want to test gravity hills for yourself (and explore the beautiful surrounding areas) you will find them on the road, just before entering Pescosansonesco, and also on the road that goes to the church of Santa Maria in Valle Porclaneta in Rosciolo dei Marsi. If you are lost, ask locals where to find *salita in discesa* or *punto di gravità* and they will give you directions.

A DAY IN BOMINACO

By Anna Lebedeva

Enjoy a day in Bominaco to discover the town's fascinating history, ancient monks' trails and one of Abruzzo's most beautiful frescoed chapels.



Bominaco is not one of those places that you “just happen upon” while driving to your destination. You will not spot it from the main road. Tucked away in a small valley, shielded by a green mountain from oblivious passersby, it conceals a treasure: the Oratorio di San Pellegrino, which is often called Abruzzo's Sistine Chapel because of its magnificent frescoes.

On summer weekends it is filled with a lively buzz, but for most of the year you will walk empty quiet streets by yourself. There are no shops or bars in Bominaco. The only pizzeria, small and cosy, struggled for a while and eventually closed a few months ago.

You can study the entire history of Abruzzo in Bominaco, where the layers of history are clearly visible: the fortified palaces of the Middle Ages, a few old houses abandoned by those in search of a better life decades ago, a propaganda slogan from the Mussolini era stencilled on a wall, scars and wounds inflicted by many earthquakes – even an ancient well that used to supply locals with fresh water for centuries.

The town (its original name was Momenaco) was founded as part of a Benedictine settlement, with one of the most prosperous abbeys of the order in the Middle Ages. Not much is known about its past, but historians say it might have been founded around



A doorway carving in Bominaco with the date "1794"

the 8th or 10th century. The monastery's strategic location on the Tratturo Magno, one of the main ancient trading routes in the area, its well-managed organisation, and relative autonomy brought prosperity to Bominaco. In the early 15th century, the mercenary army of Braccio da Montone passed through the town, leaving death and destruction behind. In the years to follow, the Church politics and papal interventions took their toll on the weakened abbey and, eventually, the monks abandoned Bominaco. Over the centuries, the economic decline almost emptied the town, which today has a population of only 54 people.

In recent years, interest towards Bominaco has been growing. Every time I go to the town, I notice more visitors. On summer weekends, small groups of discerning tourists – mostly Italian – flock here, weddings are celebrated in the chapel and families return to their ancestors' homes. Chiara Andreucci, a Bominaco local, told me that there is one German family in the town



An abandoned house in the town



Oratorio di San Pellegrino

that has a holiday home and comes back every summer.

It is a perfect little place for a day trip filled with history, art and nature. I go to Bominaco every few months, as it is one of my favourite places in Abruzzo, and have even developed somewhat of a routine. I arrive early in the morning, hike to the Castello Camponeschi in Prato D'Ansidonia or the town of Opi and then back to Bominaco, refuel with my packed lunch, chill out admiring the views from the Castello di Bominaco and then head to visit the chapel and the church and stroll around the town.

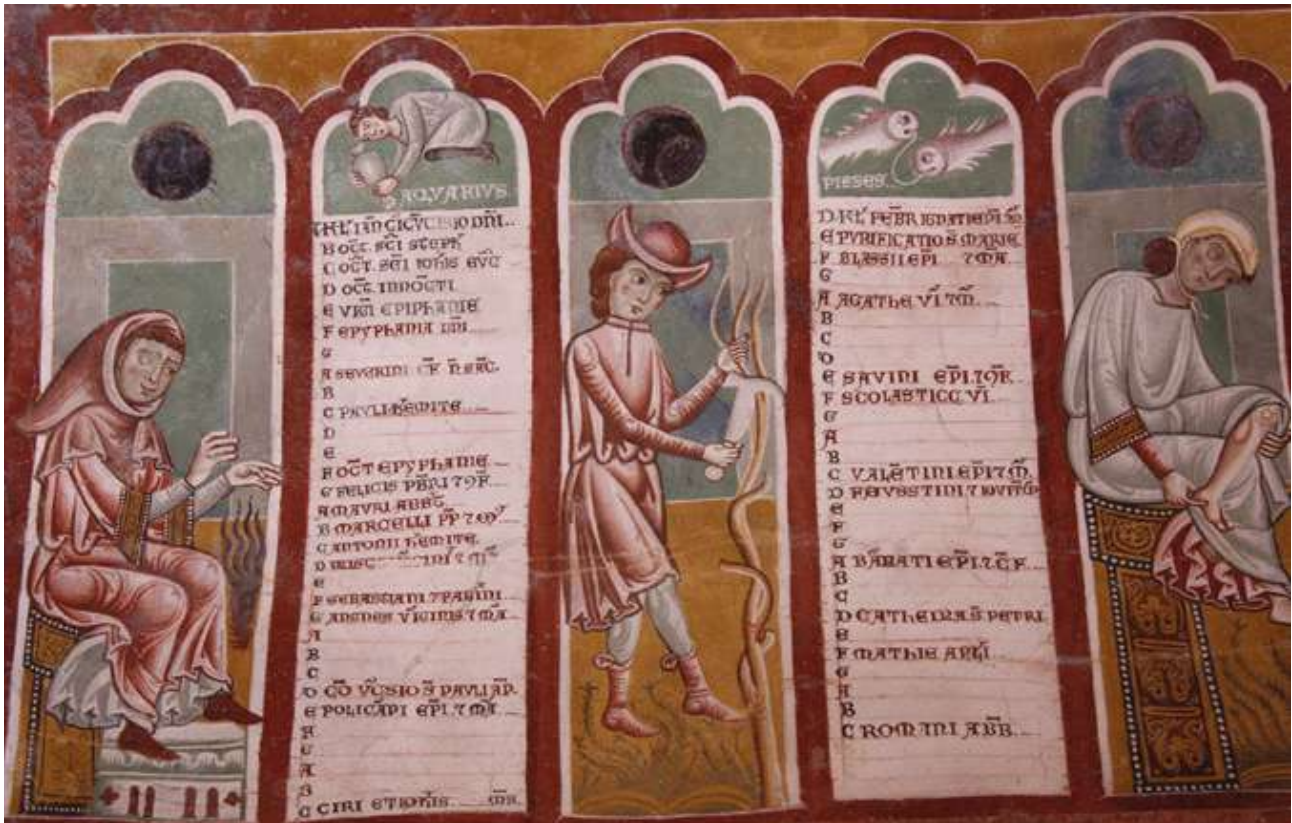
I never get tired of this place and often catch myself looking around, waiting to see a monk in a black habit slowly walking across a field or a medieval knight on a horse trotting towards the town, his armor glistening in the sun. Bominaco has that effect: it transports you back in time and makes you forget about the present.

WHAT TO SEE

ORATORIO DI SAN PELLEGRINO

On a small hill, a short stroll from the town's historic centre, sit a church and a small chapel, all that remains from the old abbey. Often called "Abruzzo's Sistine Chapel," the oratory is a true gem of medieval art. The plain, almost crude exterior does not prepare you for the splendour you see inside. The entire chapel, from the floor to the ceiling, is covered with magnificent 13th-century frescoes depicting the Childhood of Christ, the Passion, the Final Judgment and the life of Saint Pellegrino. In the presbytery part of the chapel, on two opposite walls, you will see a rare liturgical calendar, showing agricultural activities, saints' days and lunar phases for each month.

Taking photos is **not allowed**. To switch on the lights in the chapel, you will need a few two-euro coins. If the access gate is locked, call the custodian's number displayed on the



A fragment of the liturgical calendar in the chapel



Inside the chapel

plaque. The custodians, two local women, are unpaid volunteers, but feel free to give them a tip. Chiara Andreucci, a certified guide and Bominaco local, can do **tours in English** (free, but a small offering is expected). You can check her schedule on the parish's [website](#) and book an appointment by calling 0039 086 293764 or 0039 3286554604.

Opening hours: All days 9am – 12:30pm, 2pm – 7pm. In winter, the chapel closes at 4pm.

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA

On the hill above the chapel stands the church of Santa Maria Assunta, one of the finest examples of Abruzzese Romanesque architecture. It features three imposing apses in the back part, three aisles with beautiful arches, the altar and the ciborium canopy held by elegant pillars, the Easter candelabrum, the pulpit, and a few faded frescoes.

Don't miss spending some time admiring the intricate carvings' details. The rest of the monastery used to be on the left side of the church, where you can still see outlines of the doors that connected the building with the courtyard, monks' living quarters, library, and workshops, which were mostly destroyed in the 15th century.

Opening hours: the same as above

CASTELLO DI BOMINACO

From the chapel, a steep path leads to the peak of the Buscito Mountain, topped with the beautiful ruins of the Bominaco Castle towering above the town. Its original structure dates back to the 12-13th centuries, while the walls and the imposing round tower visible today were built later, in the 15th century, after Braccio da Montone's savage attack. A local legend says that the souls of those who were killed by the mercenaries return to the castle on dark moonless nights looking for revenge. From here you can admire the panoramic vistas of the Navelli Plains, hilltop towns dotted around and the majestic peaks of Gran Sasso.



Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta



Stone carvings on one the church's windows

EREMO DI SAN MICHELE

You will find a small hermitage dedicated to Saint Michael, the patron of Bominaco, just a short walk from the town. Follow the signs for the Grotta di San Michele in the town centre, down the main street, then turn right, off the main road, following the path up; after a few hundred metres, you'll see an arrow pointing left to the wooded area. There, at the end of the trail, you will find the hermitage. It is a small cave with a beautifully carved altar and several stone basins where "holy water" accumulates. Every year, on May 8 and September 29, a small procession from the town comes here for a mass to celebrate the feast of Saint Michael. The entrance of the hermitage is always locked. If you want to see it inside, call the town hall in Caporciano (tel.: 0039 086 293731) and pick up the key on your way to Bominaco.



Bominaco castle

IF YOU LIKE HIKING

HIKE TO CASTELLO CAMPONESCHI

I love the hike from Bominaco to the Prato D'Ansidonia Castle (Castello Camponeschi). It is a relatively easy one-hour (two hours there and back) walk through oak and pine woods, on an ancient trail that connected several medieval settlements. The path is accessible all year round, but you will need snowshoes in a snowy winter. Follow the signs for Grotta di San Michele, but instead of turning left to the hermitage, follow the path that goes straight on to Prato D'Ansidonia. There are only a few signs, so you might want to use a Google Maps navigator if you do not know the area well. The town of Tussio (see below) will be on your right, but stay on the path going to the left, which will bring you to the castle.

HIKE TO TUSSIO

On the way to Prato D'Ansidonia, you will arrive at a small stretch of paved road, which goes to the cemetery. Turn right (the cemetery will be on your left) following the signs for Tussio, a small charming village founded by San Tussio, a monk from Bominaco. Coming up to Christmas, locals organise a lovely artisans' market here.

WHERE TO EAT

Bar Pizzeria Trattoria M&M

An unpretentious family-run trattoria that serves simple pasta dishes and grilled meats.

Address: Via Roma, 4, Caporciano. Tel.: 0039 086 293751.

Agriturismo 4A

A small farm inn with nine rooms and a restaurant, which offers traditional dishes with local ingredients.

Address: Via Panoramica di S. Pietro, 8, Caporciano. Tel.: 0039 086 2931394

PONTIUS PILATE FROM BISENTI IN ABRUZZO

By Angelo Panzone

A legend has it that the notorious Pontius Pilate was born in Bisenti. Is it just a popular folktale or could there be historical truth to it? A local history enthusiast lays the facts out to prove that it really happened.

Among historic figures, Pontius Pilate, the man who crucified Jesus, is one of the most fascinating because of the air of mystery and uncertainty surrounding him. Wrapped in great infamy, his name is mentioned every day in every Catholic church around the world, yet we know very little of him and his affairs. There are no clear historic records of Pilate before his nomination on the post of the governor of the Roman province of Judea, nothing that could help us create an unambiguous picture of him. Some even question his existence.

BIRTHPLACE

Many locations, most of them in modern Abruzzo, lay claim to being the birthplace of Pontius Pilate based on local legends. Among them all, Bisenti is the place that boasts the most articulate legend, which can be referenced with unquestionable historic facts. This small town on the slopes of the Gran Sasso mountains is where the important settlement of Beregra might have been, located between the Roman colonies of Hatria, the modern day Atri, and Pinna, today's Penne.

The Pontii were a well-known family of Samnite origin. One of Pilate's ancestors, Pontius Aquila, a Tribune of the Plebs, took part in the conspiracy that in 44 B.C. resulted in the assassination of Julius Caesar. Like all other conspirators, he was forced into exile, far away from important power games and family ties. For this reason, Pontius Aquila and his family were sent to Beregra, and this is where later, his descendant – Pontius Pilate – was born. It is very likely that Pilate later married Claudia Procula who, according to some



The welcome sign at the town's entrance proclaims that Bisenti is the birthplace of Pilate

historians, lived in the nearby Roman colony of Hatria and might have been related to Emperor Tiberius.

THE GOVERNOR OF JUDEA

Beregra, where Pilate was born and raised, made part of the Roman district called Palestina Picensi, where middle eastern Semitic people fleeing from the land of Canaan had settled a few centuries earlier. They heavily influenced local traditions, introducing their customs and different cultural aspects, including some elements of their native Aramaic language.



Bisenti used to be enclosed by defence walls

Having grown up in a setting where a middle eastern influence was strong, Pontius Pilate easily beat the competition for the post of Governor of Judea. It is very likely that Emperor Tiberius had no doubts about assigning the job to someone familiar with the cultural sensibilities of the Jews.

It has been said that Pilate's nomination might have had something to do with favouritism because of his wife's family's possible relation to the emperor. However, I would like to believe that Tiberius chose Pilate not as a military figure to enforce strict laws and rigid discipline, but rather as someone who could be an ambassador with an appropriate cultural background, capable of governing efficiently, without delays and misinterpretations.

No historic documents talk about the notorious governor of Judea in depth, but many of them seem to agree that he was bad-tempered, stubborn, corrupt, spiteful, dictatorial and cruel. To know more, we can refer to detailed texts recounting the Passion of Christ such as the Gospels, including the



Fonte Vecchia fountain

apocryphal ones, which did not make it into the Bible. However, it is important to remember that their portrayal of Pilate was influenced by the prefect's role in the trial of Jesus and his crucifixion.

BRICK AND MORTAR AS PROOF

For tangible proof of Pontius Pilate's presence in Bisenti, go to see the qanat water system and the building that locals call "Pontius Pilate's House." The qanat is an underground aqueduct common for middle eastern countries and in Bisenti you will find one similar to the hydro system in Jerusalem, which was built by Pilate with temple money during his time in Judea as governor. Follow the signs for *Fonte Vecchia* and you will arrive at an ancient fountain, constructed as part of the qanat system, which brings water from various sources in the surrounding hills to the town.

So can we say that when removed from his job in Judea, Pilate returned to his homeland and, while awaiting for Roman authorities to decide his future, built there an aqueduct like the one in Jerusalem? It is possible, especially given the fact that the main tunnel of the qanat system in Bisenti runs towards the so-called Pontius Pilate House. The water there is fed into a well, which Pilate used to access fresh water at home and didn't have to go to the public fountain like the rest of the people in town. In the past, just like today, certain privileges went to people of importance.



Pilate's house on a ceramic tile by P. Fazzini



Pontius Pilate's House

From the moment when the notorious prefect was removed from his post in 37CE, there is no more news about him; official historiography was not interested in Pilate and his achievements after that. No wonder different hypotheses and speculations about his fate flourished in the absence of reliable information.

I wrote the book *Io, Ponzio Pilato di Bisenti* together with Graziano Paolone, my childhood friend. Born and bred in Bisenti, we both love our town and are passionate about its history. After many years of research we wrote the book, as we believed the legend about Pilate being born here and could not accept the scepticism and irony that sometimes accompanied the story.

We wanted to demonstrate that, like in many legends – along with elements of folktale – there is a solid historic base.

PONTIUS PILATE'S HOUSE

The building, which nowadays stands in the place where, according to locals, used to be the ancient villa of the prefect Pontius Pilate, actually, itself does not present the constructional and architectural features of the typical Roman domus. The house has clear medieval origins but it was erected on an earlier structure, which shows some details typical for patrician dwellings. One side of the building presents a portico with a small courtyard that makes us think of a vestibule of Roman houses; on the pavement of this courtyard are still visible remains of ancient flooring made with pebbles laid out in patterns, which are very similar to the mosaics in Roman villas. In addition, just before the courtyard, there is an area that might have been an atrium of the so-called Pontius Pilate's House. Underneath it, two enormous cisterns are present, which, judging by the building technique of their walls made with Roman concrete (*opus caementicium*) and traces of waterproof plaster of *opus signinum* type seem to be precisely of the ancient Roman period. So it would not be without a base to assume that these were cisterns, in which rain water was collected to be used for cleaning rooms and watering the plants on the peristyle porch. This way the precious fresh water drawn from the qanat tunnel, which passed within the Pilate's domus, was reserved for drinking and washing.

An excerpt from the book *Io, Ponzio Pilato di Bisenti* by Graziano Paolone and Angelo Panzone, 2015, published by [Ricerche & Redazioni](#).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

How to find Casa di Ponzio Pilato

To find Pontius Pilate's House look for the main roundabout in Bisenti, in front of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank. Go along the road on the left side of the bank. On the left you will see the local police station (Carabinieri), to the right, Via del Pastificio. Follow that road, past two yellow Humana containers for clothes collection. About 50 metres from them, you will see a stone building with arches on the left. That is the house that locals call "Casa di Ponzio Pilato."

How to find the qanat

From the main roundabout, go past the Pasticceria Donatella. Immediately after the pasticceria turn right and follow a set of steps down to the road and follow it to the left, between buildings.

As you come out to a small square, turn right. Look up, and there should be a sign on the wall of the yellow house for "Fonte Vecchia."

To your left you will see stone steps leading down to the fountain. It is not well kept, so the pavement will be wet. Peek through a rectangular opening to see the ancient water tunnels. The inscription on the fountain, March 1730, refers to the restoration date, not its construction.

*Angelo Panzone is a Bisenti local, history enthusiast and the co-author of the book *Io, Ponzio Pilato di Bisenti*. Translation and photos by Anna Lebedeva*

SULMONA'S RED GARLIC

By Linda Dini Jenkins

For many centuries, farmers cultivated red garlic in the fields around Sulmona. The tradition continues and the fragrant bulb is in high demand these days.



My uncle, Fred Dini, was the cook in his platoon in the US Army during World War II. When I was a little girl, he would often make me my favorite pasta: *linguine aglio olio*, he called it. Spaghetti with olive oil and garlic. So simple and delicious. I wish we had known about the famous red garlic of Sulmona, because I'm sure it would have made it even better.

LONG TRADITION

I discovered red garlic in 2010, on my first trip to Abruzzo. The intricate garlic braids at the market in Sulmona, in the Valle

Peligna, caught my eye, and I had to learn more. The outer, papery wrappers of the Sulmona red garlic (*aglio rosso di Sulmona*) are white, but the cloves inside are covered with rich cranberry coloured wrappers. The taste is unique – both sweet and pungent at the same time, with an intense aroma – and flavorful enough so that you use less than you normally would in a recipe.

And those braids? They are the traditional way to store the precious bulbs, consisting of 52 bulbs, one for each week of the year – testament to the fact that this garlic has such a long shelf life when kept in a cool, dry place (See "Making Garlic Braids" below).

Sulmona's aglio rosso has one other tasty benefit that is unique to the species: scapes (*zolle*). These are the flowery stalks that grow from the bulb and which must be removed (about one month before harvest) so that the bulb can fully mature. Once this delicacy is harvested – generally in late May – the scapes can be cooked and served as a side dish or preserved in oil (*sott'olio*).

Red garlic has a long tradition here in Abruzzo, with growing methods passed down from generation to generation. While garlic originated in Mesopotamia, the first known records of garlic in Abruzzo date back to the mid-nineteenth century, when historian Panfilo Serafini (1817-1864) wrote in his *Historical Memory of Sulmona*, "We cultivate various species of cabbage, celery, fennel, endive, garlic, etc."

In 2008, historian Franco Cercone, writing in *Sulmona's Red Garlic in Folk Medicine and Traditional Peligna Gastronomy*, reported that in 1876, "one hectare sown in garlic yielded 510 Lire to the farmer, a decidedly substantial sum in those days, since in this period a day of harvesting costs 2,50 Lire." What happened?

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The history of the crop is complicated, rife with hoarding, price fixing and stringent trade regulations, with the result that in 1929 it was reported that during the prior six years an average of only 15 hectares of garlic were grown in all of Sulmona.

In the 1980s, as production was further decreasing, red garlic was added to the Slow Food movement's Ark of Taste, designating

it as an endangered heritage food "culturally or historically linked to a specific region, locality, ethnicity or traditional production practice," according to Slow Food USA. The growing region was given a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) to further promote and conserve the variety.

The opening of European markets in 1993 led to a profound reduction in the areas cultivated with Rosso di Sulmona garlic. "Unfortunately, the production yield per hectare of Sulmona Red Garlic is lower than that of the varieties of garlic grown in Spain or France," reports Antonio Ricci, an agronomist with close ties to the revival of Sulmona red garlic. "They are equally red, yes, but have considerably inferior qualities." Still, in the Valle Peligna, Spanish or French red garlic started to be grown and marketed as Rosso di Sulmona – a move that actually risked making the Sulmona variety disappear.



Red garlic at the market in Sulmona

ON THE RISE

In 2009 a group of talented farmers established the Consortium of Sulmona Garlic Manufacturers (*Consorzio Produttori Aglio Rosso di Sulmona*) – now numbering more than 60 registered growers, which is about 50-60% of all the farmers who cultivate the bulb – with the aim of relaunching the crop, certifying the production, and marketing it with a label that would guarantee the origin and quality of the product. The Consortium, supported by interventions of the regional agricultural policy, restored the crop and put *Rosso di Sulmona* in the National Register of Vegetable Varieties. Happily, the crop is currently in full expansion phase and is loved and consumed throughout Italy.

In 2020, an overall area of about 300 hectares has been allocated for the production of Sulmona Red Garlic, with Consortium members accounting for 150 hectares. Ricci estimates that 1800 tons will be produced this year, not including the 200 tons of scapes, for a total annual crop estimated at seven million euros.

ITALY ONLY

Currently, *aglio rosso* production is totally absorbed by the Italian market, both through large retailers and in fruit and vegetable shops. In fact, the request has been higher than the demand for the past few years. No foreign commercial channels have yet been pursued for the raw bulbs, although producers hope that the fragrant bulbs from Sulmona will conquer overseas countries in three-to-four years.



Cloves of aglio rosso di Sulmona

Here's the Abruzzese version of the pasta dish my uncle made for me:

LINGUINE CON AGLIO ROSSO, OLIO E PEPPERONCINO

- 1 lb linguine
- 4 tbsp best quality extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large cloves *aglio rosso di Sulmona*, sliced thin
- Good pinch of dried hot pepper flakes (or use one small *diavoletto*, if available)
- Handful of fresh parsley, chopped finely to yield 2 tbsp
- Fresh ground pepper, to taste.

Bring a large pot of salted water to boil and add the linguine before you start the sauce.

In a large, heavy skillet heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the red garlic and hot pepper. Cook for about three -to-five minutes, stirring until the garlic just starts to change color. Add the parsley, mix it in, then remove the skillet from the heat. Add the cooked and quickly drained linguine to the skillet, toss, and serve immediately with some grated cheese.

A crusty bread and a glass of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wouldn't hurt, either. Buon appetito!

MAKING GARLIC BRAIDS

By Anna Lebedeva

Red garlic is harvested at the start of July and left to dry for 10-15 days. After that, the bulbs are sorted by size and, as the old local tradition dictates, garlic braids are made. Unlike many other types of garlic, *aglio rosso di Sulmona* is never treated chemically after the harvest. For centuries, the only way to store it was in braids hung in a cool dry place. This method allows better air circulation and the garlic can last for up to 10 months.

I went to the house of Filippo Centofanti and Franca Allegra to see how garlic braids are made. Filippo proudly showed me the prize he had won a few days before: Mister Aglio Rosso. The local jury of experts picked his



Perfect garlic braids

garlic as the best in the area that year. “They evaluate the shape, colour, uniformity and size, as well as the taste”, explained Filippo. “My garlic is pungent but not too much, with a hint of sweetness, just the way *aglio rosso di Sulmona* should be.” And he is certainly an expert: his grandfather and father cultivated the garlic and taught him a thing or two.

Franca and her son Alberto sat down to braid the bulbs. They didn’t talk much, and when I asked what is the key to making a good braid, Franca smiled and said: “A lot of practice.” This year Filippo, Franca and Alberto will harvest two tons (weight after drying) of garlic, so they will have many braids to make. To see whether a braid is made by an expert, you have to look on the back: it has to be straight with the leaves tightly wrapped in a neat even pattern.



Franca Allegra making garlic braids

A NEW LIFE IN ABRUZZO

By Jake Rupert

A visit to their Abruzzese relatives inspired a Canadian couple to move to Abruzzo where they started a new life and a successful business.

We started coming to Abruzzo in 2006 after reconnecting with my wife Lisa's relatives in San Sebastiano dei Marsi, a tiny mountain village in the province of L'Aquila. The people were warm and welcoming, the mountains were spectacular, the Adriatic Sea was only a short drive away, the food was delicious, and the wine was rich and plentiful. For the next few years, we came for the village festival followed by a week renting a place somewhere else in Abruzzo. Each trip, it got harder and harder to leave.

SLOW PACE OF LIFE

We soon realized that as beautiful as the region is, as warm as the people are, and as good as the wine is, what we were really falling in love with was Abruzzo's culture. In Abruzzo, there is a slower pace where relationships come before work. It is a place where people care more about what music you like than what you do for a living. A place where a discussion about what kind of sauce goes best with which shape of pasta can last for several glasses of wine. A place where the measurement of a good day is not in what you accomplished, but in how relaxed you were at the beach.

Each time, we would return from Abruzzo's



Jake, Lisa and their dog Vita

gentle lifestyle to our hectic lives in Canada's capital city of Ottawa and feel the stress levels rise. We would be out the door early, me to my uninspiring cubical at the municipal government and Lisa to her job as a federal criminal prosecutor. Our nightly conversations often drifted back to Abruzzo and to its relaxing pace. Sure, the economy was not great and many people were out of work, but it did not seem to matter. They took care of each other. They did not sweat it.



Jake and Lisa bought and restored a historic villa in Torre de' Passeri (centre of the photo)

PERMANENT MOVE

Our careers were stressful but manageable, and well paid. We had a good thing going in Canada. Nice house, no kids, a couple of dogs, recreation property on a river, a few vacations per year. We thought we could maybe even buy a small property in San Sebastiano dei Marsi to have a home base in Abruzzo. Maybe we could retire there. But the more we thought about it, the more we both realized that our *wants* to live a more Abruzzese lifestyle became *needs* to find a way to live Abruzzese lives permanently.

Finally, in 2015, we moved to Abruzzo full-time to oversee the renovation on the historic villa that we bought on the outskirts of Torre de' Passeri, a town in the foothills of the Pescara River valley. In 2016, we welcomed the first guests to our all-inclusive tour company that focuses on Abruzzese culture, history, food, wine, and lifestyle. Our first four years were successful. This year was booked solid, too, until Covid-19 appeared, but we expect things to return to normal later this year or next year.

I am not going to say it has all been a breeze. The flipside of the relaxed lifestyle is the sclerotic bureaucracy, projects that limp along at a snail's pace, and a lack of caring about getting things done that still sometimes shocks my North American "get-it-done" sensibilities. Still, for us, the benefits of living in Abruzzo beat the drawbacks by a big margin.

In Canada, we used to jump out of bed worried about work, now we wake up wondering how we can make things nicer for our guests each day. Instead of board rooms and court rooms, we have business meetings at the beach or at the local cafe. We live in a cosy rented apartment in town, but from November until late March we close the villa to guests and move in ourselves, filling our days with rest and relaxation and nights by the fire listening to music or watching movies. On our daily walks through town, we are greeted by name by almost everyone we meet. Our big decision each day is what to eat, and, yes, sometimes there is a debate over which pasta to pair with which sauce. We fell in love with Abruzzo, and moving here was the best decision we ever made.

Jake Rupert and his wife Lisa run [Amazing Abruzzo Tours](#).

WALKING AMONGST ORCHIDS

By Michelle Reid

Abruzzo is one of the best places in Italy for wild orchid spotting, with some of the rarest species growing in the mountains. Two experts share their favourite walks and locations for discovering these rare fascinating plants.



Lady's Slipper orchid (Cypripedium calceolus).

Photo by Emilio Esteban-Infantes/Flickr

Abruzzo truly is the perfect place to discover wild orchids. From April, May and into June the fascinating wild orchids, or *orchidee spontanee* as they are known in Italian, grace both the lowlands and the highlands on a scale you would be hard pressed to find anywhere else.

ASTONISHING DIVERSITY

“The Majella National Park is home to over half of the wild orchid species found in Italy, boasting more than 80 varieties of the 150 Italian *orchidee spontanee* recorded,” says

Marilena Del Romano, Doctor of Environmental Sciences, naturalist guide, and educator at the Regional Nature Reserve *I Sorgenti del Pescara*. “Wild orchids are interesting for their diversity of size, shape, and colour. Some of these fascinating plants have developed highly specialised reproduction methods. Certain species are reliant on symbiotic relationships with fungi in order for the seed to germinate and grow. It is a slow and delicate process, which means that some orchids grow unseen underground for up to 15 years before they come into flower above the surface.”



Naked-man orchid. Photo by Stuart Haines

ORCHID SPOTTING

Marilena says that this time of year you can go for a walk in the valley or up in the mountains and spot wild orchids in many places. “We walked through the fields by our house this week and spotted eight different orchid varieties in the space of just two hectares. For me, however, the place to see wild orchids in Abruzzo is around the town of Palena in the Province of Chieti. More than 60% of the orchid species found in the Majella National Park grow in Palena, equivalent to 35% of the total species found in Italy. If you are going to come across the rarest and certainly the most spectacular of our wild orchids anywhere, the Lady’s slipper, it is going to be there.” She adds that there is no one specific place that is better than another, so you have to simply get out and explore the tracks and trails within Palena comune.

When Stuart Haines, author of two Cicerone *Walking in Abruzzo guides*, founder of the website Sulmona Valley Walks, and botany enthusiast, wants to see wild orchids this time of year, he heads to one of the most important historical trails

that crosses the Majella mountain range, The Majella National Park’s “Freedom Trail” (*Sentiero della Libertà*).

The Majella National Park’s Freedom Trail is a two-day trail from Sulmona to Palena, marked on the park maps and on the waymarkers along the route with an “L” (for “libertà”). It follows ancient mule tracks that were used during the latter stages of World War II by prisoners fleeing from Campo 78 Prisoner of War camp in Fonte d’Amore, Sulmona.

“Although you have the perfect opportunity to see a lot of wild orchids by walking the two-day trail, you don’t have to walk the entire route to enjoy the rich variety of orchids it offers,” says Stuart. “There are several sections of the path that are easily accessible to all, from where you can see a significant variety of the Majella National Park’s wild orchid species. Personally, I think that one of the best parts of the trail for spotting the orchids is by taking the first section of the Freedom Trail in reverse, the Sulmona – Cansano section.



Elder-flowered orchid. Photo by Cristina Sanvito/Flickr



Bee orchid. Photo by Claude Dopagne/Flickr

“From San Donato church in Cansano, follow the “L” trail down provincial road S.P. 55 until you branch off on to the unmade track heading in the direction of Colle Mitra. You only need to walk the path for a kilometre or so through the plain to be able to spot a number of different orchids. It is an ancient landscape that has lain undisturbed for centuries and, as a result, wild orchids have been able to flourish here. Just to the sides of the “L” path that cuts through the plain I have been able to spot a variety of species including, amongst others, the Lady orchid, the Monkey orchid, the Military orchid and the Bee orchid.”

HIGHER UP

Another orchid trail that Stuart recommends starts from the stunning medieval mountain town of Campo di Giove and passes through the Cerreto Plain. Because it is a fairly easy section of the path with no particularly steep inclines, it is ideal for all ages and abilities. “Again, for ease of access I would think about taking the Freedom Trail path in reverse,” advises Stuart. “This time the section from Campo di Giove back towards Cansano, starting from the picnic area just along from Campo di Giove station and heading through the forest. Within 1.5 km you can experience a wholly different display of varieties. The higher

elevation here means that the habitat is quite different from that of Cansano, therefore there are very different orchid species to be found. Here you will come upon shorter, cropped varieties that grow well at higher altitudes, including the stunning yellow Elder-flowered orchids.”

If truth be told, there is no shortage of places at this time of year for discovering orchids in Abruzzo’s captivating wilderness. The most important thing is to get outside and start looking. With these recommendations, you now at least have a few options for where to start.

Remember that all wild orchids in Abruzzo are protected. You must never pick orchid flowers or remove them from their natural habitat.

The Majella National Park Authority has produced an excellent free guide to the orchids of the Majella National Park in Italian that you can download [here](#).

A detailed free guide to Italian wild orchids in English can be downloaded [here](#) (click the green button “Download PDF”).

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

AN ABRUZZO CLASSIC

By Lucas Lanci

La Bilancia is located in Loreto Aprutino and is popular with the locals and Italians visiting from other regions, as well as tourists from all over the world. The restaurant is part of a hotel – also called La Bilancia – and is big enough to fit a small army of hungry patrons daily. Sergio Di Zio and his charismatic wife, Antonietta Marrone, have managed the restaurant for over 30 years, making it the institution that it is today.

Their specialties are locally sourced meats, with a big emphasis on lamb, grilled using oak and a more obscure wood called “cerro,” or turkey oak to give the meat a special flavour. Sergio has always made sure that I order enough *carne alla brace* to feed myself for a whole week.

Their homemade *pasta alla mugnaia*, one of Abruzzo’s classics, is also a major draw. It is made with a simple tomato sauce, veal and pork, and some *pecorino* cheese shaved right on top. This is a dish that can be traced back centuries and encapsulates the pure ethos of *cucina povera*.

One of my personal favourites, and not to be missed, is the homemade *pappardelle* with a wild hare ragu. It is a dish that is hard to find and even harder to find made well – but here they excel. I personally am such a big fan of all of their pasta dishes, that I order

both, enjoying every bit of the gluttony knowing very well that a long nap is absolutely essential after a feast of such proportions.

Even after all this, it would be foolish to skip out on their selection of locally made cheeses, because when eating this much, why not try it all? One thing that may not be as obvious as their impressive food is their wine. As *vino da tavola*, they offer wine from one of the most famous wineries in all of Italy, *Azienda Agricola Valentini*, right up the street from them. Valentini makes some of the finest and most cherished white wines in the country.

And last, but not least, their olive oil, always sourced from Loreto Aprutino, is some of Abruzzo’s best and is always flowing freely at each table. *Mangerete e berrete tutti bene!*

Price: €30-60 per person

Address: C.da Palazzo 11, Loreto Aprutino

Telephone: +39 0858289321

<https://www.hotellabilancia.it/>

Lucas Lanci is an Abruzzo-based professor at Florida State University (Florence Campus) and a consultant to food, wine, and hospitality businesses.



WINES AGED IN AMPHORAE

By Lucas Lanci

Some of Abruzzo's top wine producers are utilizing one of the world's most ancient ways to store and age wine: *terracotta*, more commonly known as clay. In the last century, oak and stainless steel have been the primary materials used in storing wine, while *terracotta* was pushed aside as a thing of the past.

Recently, this has changed and more natural wineries in Abruzzo are realizing the benefits of *terracotta* as being more in tune with their philosophy of making wine.

The clay vessels meant to store and age wine are called amphorae (in Italian, *anfora*, *orci*, or simply *terracotta*). Historians have uncovered amphorae, either unlined or lined with beeswax that are over 6,000 years old, specifically made for fermenting and ageing wine. In fact, almost every ancient civilization has been found to ferment, age, and store wine in amphorae. Different materials used for ageing wine can impart different flavours in the final product. For example, stainless steel does not allow oxygen into the wine while ageing and does not contribute any additional flavours. Instead, it showcases the true flavours of the soil, microclimate, and grapes. Oak, on the other hand, contributes to the slow oxidative ageing and affects the taste by imparting flavours from its tannins.

Amphorae can be considered to be in the middle between stainless steel and oak. They can allow oxygen into the wine but not as much as oak. They "pull" out some of the acidity in the wine creating a "rounder" taste, and do not impart strong flavours like oak can, leaning much more to the neutral side, like stainless steel. As clay is an excellent thermal conductor, the temperature is regulated naturally, without any need for additional climate control equipment.



Below are my three top picks of wines aged in amphora made by natural wine producers in Abruzzo.

ROSSO ANFORA by LAMMIDIA

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 100%. Aged in amphora for 10 months. This medium-full bodied wine is not just good...it sings! Goes well with all classic pasta dishes, *arrosticini*, and aged *pecorino* cheese.

Buy from: [Rollingwine.com](https://rollingwine.com), [Don Gennaro](#) in Pescara.

Price: €23



TREBBIANO D'ABRUZZO DOC ANFORA by AZIENDA AGRICOLA CIRELLI

Trebbiano 100%. Aged in Amphora for 12 months. One of the better-known amphora wines from Abruzzo. Paired with white meats, hearty bean dishes, and grilled fish, it can turn a great meal into a stellar experience.

Buy from: [Liberty Enoteca](https://libertyenoteca.com) in Lanciano, [Callmewine.com](https://callmewine.com)

Price: €22



GIARA BIANCO by CANTINA INDIGENO

Trebbiano 100%. A fantastic example of what a skin-contact white wine aged in amphora can be. More complex flavours than a standard white wine, with developed notes like lightly roasted nuts and caramelized fruits. This pairs well with grilled vegetables, *fior di latte* and *pecorino* cheeses with fava beans.

Buy from: [Rollingwine.com](https://rollingwine.com), [Don Gennaro](#) in Pescara.

Price: €18

TRADITIONAL RECIPE WITH A TWIST

By Connie De Vincentis

One of the oldest recipes in Abruzzo that takes form in various guises is for the famous *calcionetti*, *cavcinitt*, *caggntt'* or *caciunitt* – deep-fried ravioli-shaped small pastries with a filling. The name and stuffing vary in different areas of Abruzzo. The most common are either a mixture of chickpeas sweetened with concentrated grape must or with just a basic grape jam. There are few homes in Abruzzo where some version is not made during the festive Christmas season.

When I first came to live in Abruzzo, the only recipe I knew was the chickpea version, which my family in Australia made religiously every Christmas. But my mother-in-law, Donnina, introduced me to an amazing version of *calcionetti* with honey and almonds. Her son, now my husband, is a beekeeper, so her supply of honey was abundant and it was her recipe of choice.

While in my town of Tocco da Casauria, where she lived and where I live now, the chickpea version was the norm, and she introduced her recipe from the province of Chieti to the locals. Considered the expert of the honey and almond *calcionetti*, Donnina eventually started making them for the whole town during the Christmas season.

Honey has accompanied, often behind the scenes, the history of Italian nourishment from the remote past to our current days. Used by the Etruscans as a votive offering, honey was mentioned for the first time by the Romans in detailed descriptions of its culinary usage, which was that of a sauce for savoury dishes.

Today, in Italian cuisine, honey is mostly used

in desserts such as *torrone*, *panforte* and fritters. Honey is a favoured ingredient in southern cuisine, as the Southern part of Italy has experienced the strong influence of the Arabs, whose palates have a preference for sweet and sour combinations. A spoonful of honey can sweeten a glass of tea, turn a plain piece of bread into a treat, glaze a delicious barbecued sparerib, or serve as the basis for an unforgettable salad dressing.

Below is my mother-in-law's recipe for *calcionetti* that I make for special occasions. You will need only a few simple ingredients and some patience for frying them.

Connie runs Home Restaurant in Tocco da Casauria where she cooks traditional Abruzzesi dishes.



LIVE COOKING CLASS

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine has invited Connie for a Facebook Live to show our followers how to make *calcionetti*. Watch the class on our [Facebook page](#) on June 6 at 3pm CEST.

CALCIONETTI WITH ALMONDS AND HONEY

INGREDIENTS

Makes about 40 small *calcionetti*

- 300 gr of almonds, preferably, unpeeled as they have more flavour; you will peel them at a later stage
- 3 tablespoons of firm honey (millefleur or similar)
- 600 gr all-purpose flour
- 150 ml extra virgin olive oil
- 300 ml white wine
- Vegetable oil for frying

PREPARATION

Boil the almonds for two minutes, strain and peel. Place almonds on an oven tray and toast in the oven until they are golden. Cool and chop finely. Mix them with the honey and place in fridge while you prepare your pastry.

Place your flour on a pastry board and create a well in the centre. Pour wine and oil in the formed well and add a pinch of salt. Knead the dough gently until it doesn't stick to your hands and is easy to handle, but do not overdo it. Cut thick dough slices and roll them into long strips (approximately 3 mm thick and 7 cm wide) with a rolling pin or a pasta machine.

Place a teaspoon of the honey and almond mixture in the centre of your pastry strip, ensuring there is sufficient space between the scoops for sealing the edges. Fold the dough over, seal the edges and cut ravioli-like shapes with a pastry cutter. Seal the *calcionetto* gently with fork tines and place on a floured surface while you prepare the rest.

Heat up the vegetable oil in a pot (at least an inch) and deep fry the *calcionetti* until golden brown. When they have completely cooled, sprinkle with icing (powdered) sugar.



RED WINE AND CHERRIES - A MATCH MADE IN ABRUZZO

By Antonella Santilli

Preparation of *Ratafià* in Abruzzo is part of a subtle family alchemy, almost a rite, which is passed down from one generation to another, like an invisible thread connecting with the past. The *Ratafià* liqueur is made with sour Amarena cherries and *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo* wine. Its name derives from a legal phrase "*Ut rata fiat*" meaning "the deal is made". In the past, when a contract was signed, the tradition called for a toast with *Ratafià*.

Every year, at the end of June, when the cherry tree in our family garden is bright red with the fruit, I carefully select the best *amarene*. I take a bottle of red wine and pour it over all the ingredients in a large glass jar, which I leave in the sunniest spot on my balcony for 40 days. I always make sure to take the jar inside every night and on cloudy days to make sure it stays at a more or less constant temperature and doesn't cool down too much.

Then, as the tradition requires, I bottle the liqueur on the Feast of San Lorenzo, August 10. Yes, it might seem like a lot of hassle to take care of the precious jar for so long but, at the end, when my *Ratafià* is ready, drinking it with friends and family is a great reward.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg ripe sour Amarena cherries
- 1 litre Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
- 0.3 litre spirit 95%
- 300 gr sugar
- 10 cherry leaves
- 3 pods of star anise
- 1 cinnamon stick

PREPARATION

Wash and pit the cherries. Put them in a large glass jar (or clear glass bottle) together with the leaves, wine and the spices (don't fill the jar right to the rim, leave a little breathing space). Close the jar and leave it in the sun.

After 40 days, filter the liquid three times, add the alcohol and sugar and leave to rest overnight.

Bottle the *Ratafià* with a few whole cherries. The liqueur needs to rest in a dark place for another month. *Ratafià* gets better with age!

Antonella Santilli lives in the Chieti Province and blogs about recipes with wild plants and flowers on [Fiori di Malva](#).

Dear editor,

I enjoyed the first issue so much that I couldn't resist reading parts of it to my husband. Said husband hates to be read to, so it was a surprise that he asked to know what else was in the magazine after I convinced him that the Capestrano Warrior he saw in Capestrano was not the original. He is now in the process of signing up for his own subscription.

Nelson and I moved to Abruzzo almost five years ago. That story is a book in itself. His grandparents left Barrea in 1913 and settled in New Jersey. They raised their children to be Americans, seldom telling them anything about the life they left behind. Nelson sat by his mother's bed as she was dying and asked her to please, at last, tell him where his grandparents came from. In one of her lucid moments she finally answered: "Barrea. It is in L'Aquila." That is where our own journey started. Did Nelson have family left? Would they accept him?

It turned out that Nelson is related to almost everyone in Barrea, as well as other folks in Alfedena and Castel di Sangro. He is so happy to live among the people, who bring back the memories of his childhood with his grandparents. The people here treat him as a family member, who had just been away for a while.

I would like to suggest that you consider a visit to Barrea. It is a sleepy little village most of the year. In August, it turns into a Little Napoli. First mention of the village dates to the 9th century. The main reason people make a trip to Barrea is to see the lake. Our front window overlooks the lake and we check her every day to see what mood she is wearing.



Barrea and its lake

During WWII, Barrea was occupied by Nazis and they turned the little village upside down. My husband had a newly discovered third cousin, who spent a week telling him about his family, her life as a young girl in the occupied town, and her eventual immigration to Ohio. Why did Germany occupy this tiny village? We found out, on a visit to Monte Cassino, that we live along the Gustav Line.

Thank you for bringing out the beauty of our region. We are inspired to do more exploring locally. We are looking forward to the next issue!

Stay safe,

Jan Thatcher, Barrea.

**Send your letters to
editor@abruzzissimo.com**

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ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



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Punta Aderci, photo by Luigi Bertello, AdobeStock

ABOVE:

Farindola, photo via Comune di Farindola, Facebook

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Ciao a tutti!

In our latest issue, we have an exciting line-up of features about Abruzzo's rich history, centuries-old traditions, and the region's food and wine.

With our guide to Pacentro, one of the most beautiful towns in Italy, you will explore its legends, elegant piazzas, noble palaces and a humble dwelling of a local healer. A history enthusiast tells us a moving story about the people of Caramanico Terme pulling together to help escaped war prisoners. We take you to Farindola to learn how a rare *pecorino* cheese has been made there for thousands of years; we suggest four easy beautiful hikes for novices; and we tell the a story of a couple who bought a holiday home in Abruzzo on a whim almost 20 years ago and has been busy ever since making olive oil and... tea.

In the food and wine section, you will find old recipes for a rose liqueur and delicious traditional biscuits, as well as our top picks of the best natural wines from Abruzzo.

Feeling lucky? Our exciting competition to win a romantic stay in a luxurious geodome surrounded by ancient olive trees in Pianella continues. Go to page 34 to see how you can enter.

Don't forget to check our [Facebook page](#), where we post a wealth of original content: videos of Abruzzo, live cooking demonstrations and virtual tours.

As always, I am looking forward to your emails with your stories and suggestions for future articles.

Enjoy reading ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine!

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

WHAT'S ON



PESCARA JAZZ FESTIVAL JULY 9-19

Every July since 1969, Pescara has welcomed international jazz musicians. Over the years, some of the greatest jazz performers from around the world have participated in the festival: Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Mingus, Bill Evans, Miles Davis, Oscar Peterson. This year's festival will be smaller, with performances only in two open-air venues. To see the full programme and book tickets, go to [Pescara Jazz Festival website](#).



The 15th edition of the contemporary art festival Zooart in Ortona will offer two and a half months filled with many exciting events: a photo exhibition, jazz concerts, installations, an aperitif with gourmet pizza – all in the town's park, surrounded by pine trees and sea views. The space where the festival takes place used to be, from 1891 to 1943, a beautiful funicular

A few exciting events and openings are planned for this month. While many festivals have been postponed, some will still go ahead, albeit in reduced formats. If you can't be in Abruzzo this month, bookmark these events for your visit next summer. All links are clickable.

ALL ABOARD THE HISTORIC TRAIN

Hop aboard the historic train to admire National Parks and Natural Reserves, the Apennine mountains and narrow gorges, while visiting charming small towns along the way. The trains run from Sulmona, making several stops, including at Rivisondoli-Pescocostanzo which, at 1268 metres above sea level, is the second-highest railway station in Italy. On the train, local musicians will entertain passengers with folk songs and dances. During the stops, passengers have plenty of time to savour local culinary specialities, take guided tours to discover museums and visit the towns of Palens, Campo di Giove, Castel di Sangro and several others, depending on the itinerary. The next train departures are scheduled for August 1, 9, 16 and 22. Book your tickets early, as the number of places is limited. For more information and to reserve your seats go to [La Transiberiana Italia website](#) (available in English, French and Spanish).



ART, JAZZ AND PIZZA IN ORTONA JUNE 26 - SEPTEMBER 13

railway running from the pine forest, *Passeggiata Orientale*, to the beach. After World War II, for a short while, it was turned into a sad communal zoo. The cages are still there, but they serve as exposition pavilions brightened up with beautiful modern artworks. The festival runs every day from 6pm to 12am. To see the programme go to the [Zooart Facebook page](#).



LUXURY ON THE TRABOCCHI COAST

Supporter Hotel is the first 5-star hotel to open on the beautiful Trabocchi Coast, in Fossacesia Marina. The hotel has 25 rooms with minimalistic white décor – most of them overlooking the sea – two restaurants, a rooftop bar, swimming pool, spa and private beach. It is the only place on the coast where you can have breakfast on a trabocco, a traditional wooden platform with a hut used for fishing in the old days. Costs range from €90 per night for a standard room to €350 for a junior suite. For more, see www.supporterhotel.it

E-BIKE AND WINE AT SUNSET

Fancy an easy bike ride at sunset? Every Friday in July and August, Il Bosso organises relaxed tours on two wheels at a slow pace for any age and fitness level. Hop on an electric bike to pedal along the Tirino River, discover the beautiful town of Capestrano and finish the evening with a dinner and excellent wines in the vineyard of the Cataldi Madonna winery in Ofena. Price is €50 per person (includes a bike rental and dinner). For more information and bookings, go to [Il Bosso Facebook page](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

SINGING FOR ABRUZZO

If you've ever been to an Italian-American wedding, you know that, at some point, the Neapolitan songs will start – no matter where the families originated – and people sing, whether they know the Italian words or not. *Oi, Mari . . . Torna a Surriento . . . Funiculi, Funicula.*

Italian-Americans dominated the music scene in New Jersey, South Philadelphia, and New York when I was growing up, from the old Pop standards of the 1940s and '50s to Doo Wop and all the way into Rock 'n Roll – even a little light opera. As I got older, I was curious to know where some of these singers came from. Answer for many of them: Abruzzo!

Perry Como (Pierino Ronald Como) had parents who hailed from Palena. Dean Martin's (Dino Paul Crocetti's) father was from Montesilvano. Mario Lanza (Alfred Arnold Cocozza) was the child of an Abruzzese mother from Tocco di Casauria. Al Martino, from Nereto.

Moving to more current times, Madonna's family is from Pacentro. Ariana Grande (Ariana Grande-Butera) is half Abruzzese. And Canadian Michael Bublé's family is from Villa Santa Lucia degli Abruzzi.

Do you know of more Italian-American singers with roots in Abruzzo? Let us know!

DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA FOR AN ARTICLE OR WANT TO WRITE FOR ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE? EMAIL US AT EDITOR@ABRUZZISSIMO.COM

HEROES AMONG US

By Cristina Parone

In 1942, three soldiers escaped from a prison camp in the Majella Mountains. They arrived on foot to Caramanico Terme, where locals helped them to survive the harsh winter. One of them, John Broad, later told the story in a book.

A few years ago, I came across an old book, *Poor People - Poor Us*, written by John Broad. The author, a New Zealand ex-prisoner of war, wrote it after World War II and sent it to the chief magistrate of Caramanico Terme in gratitude to him and the townsfolk who helped Broad survive during the war. I realised how important that story was and took on the task of translating the book into Italian. Being from Caramanico Terme, I felt especially connected to this story about life in our town during the fascist occupation. There was also an urgency to do this job while some of the witnesses of those extraordinary events were still alive.

Ruins of the camp 78/1 in Roccamorice

PRISON CAMP

The author, John Evelyn Broad, was a corporal from New Zealand enlisted with the Allied forces and captured by Nazis in 1942 during the battle of El Alamein in Egypt. After a period of time in prison in Libya, he was sent to Tutturano in Apulia and after that to the camp 78/1 in the village of Roccamorice in the Majella Mountains. It was a small prison camp, part of the bigger Campo 78 di Fonte D'Amore in Sulmona, where 350 inmates from New Zealand and South Africa worked in a mine extracting bitumen.

Italy surrendered to the Allies with the armistice



signed on September 8, 1943. Amid the general confusion in the prison camp, many prisoners escaped. Some of them headed to the south in an attempt to reach the Allied forces situated between Molise and southern Abruzzo; others scattered in the area around the prison camp looking for places to hide while waiting for their troupes to arrive. Corporal Broad with two fellow soldiers, Ted and Bert, crossed the arduous mountains in the northwest of the Majella and arrived at the town of Caramanico Terme in September 1943. So began the extraordinary story of solidarity and resistance, with the town's chief magistrate and local peasants doing everything to save the fugitives from the bitter cold, starvation and, above all, from being re-captured by the Nazis.

IN HIDING

First, the young soldiers were hiding in Caramanico, in barns and haylofts. When the Germans occupied the town, the escapees had to be moved to the cold, inhospitable caves in the Orfento Valley. Local farmers, shepherds and woodcutters knew the area well. The rock cavities in the

One of the rock cavities where Broad and his friends hid

craggs, typical for the valley, were often enclosed with dry stone walls. Known by strictly local dialect names they were not marked on any maps.

For seven months, men, women and children did whatever they could to help the soldiers in hiding: they walked for hours to bring them simple food, washed and mended their clothes, relayed news from the front.

This story was not unique to Caramanico. After the armistice, without any coordination or planning, rural communities across Italy helped escaped war prisoners. Peasants and farmers were a formidable task force of passive and peaceful resistance against the barbarity of the Nazis, saving the lives of young foreign soldiers. Simple, poor people did all they could to help the fugitives to survive the harsh Abruzzese winter. Like true heroes, they walked the difficult mountain trails in rain and snow to take food and clothes to the hideouts. It was an incredible, but not isolated, undertaking. Caramanico Terme locals helped many escaped prisoners of different nationalities.

The unusual part of this particular story was the help of a local authority who represented the Nazis. The chief magistrate of



Caramanico Terme, Nicola Nanni, coordinated the network for helping the escaped prisoners but, on a tip off, was arrested and imprisoned. Nanni was sentenced to death by the Nazis, but the Liberation army saved his life.

Life in Caramanico in those terrible days was very hard – everyone lived in absolute poverty, and helping escaped soldiers could cost the lives of entire families. For each fugitive delivered to the Germans, there was a good reward. Locals could have shooed the escapees away as an unwanted problem that only added to the daily struggle to survive. Instead, they recognised them as brothers in misfortune. When a local woman working in a vineyard first saw the approaching tired, emaciated prisoners, she exclaimed, “Poor people, poor us.” The phrase later became the title of John Broad’s book.

In April 1944, John Broad and his two friends, guided by a few shepherds, crossed the Majella Mountains, still covered with snow, to finally join the Allied forces stationed in Fara San Martino.

John Broad recorded the events almost daily for seven months, filling eight diaries. He hid them in barns and caves to make sure that they did not end up in the Nazis’ hands. The book that he wrote after the war was based on those diaries and gave an “instant” picture, a real-time report, which makes it especially valuable.

AFTER THE WAR

Corporal Broad returned home after the war and was always grateful for the help he received in Abruzzo. He had an especially strong connection with Antonio Cialone, a Caramanico local, and his family, who supported Broad during those hard seven months in hiding. The New Zealander called his first son Anthony, after Antonio Cialone



John Broad

from Caramanico. For many years, Broad and his wartime friends sent fabrics for making clothes, honey, chocolate, coffee and valuable gifts to the Cialone family and to others who helped them during the war.

To the chief magistrate Nicola Nanni, Broad sent copies of his book published in 1945. He died suddenly in his 50s, before he could return to Caramanico Terme to embrace his saviours once again.

A few years ago, when I found out about this story, I felt obliged to reconnect the people involved and meet their descendants. After various attempts to find them, I was finally put in touch with Harry Broad, corporal Broad’s son. He visited Caramanico Terme twice, met the families of the people who helped John Broad, and received honorary citizenship in his father’s name. When Harry returned to New Zealand, he told this wartime story in a radio interview (you can listen to it [here](#)), and other people, whose fathers were among the escaped war prisoners, contacted me. In the last few years, many of them came to visit Caramanico Terme.

THE FREEDOM TRAIL

I translated the book into Italian as a labour of love, a service to my community. I felt an obligation to be a voice for those silent heroes whose story was not widely known in the local community and risked being forgotten.

But it was more than just translating the text. An old man from Caramanico Terme, who all his life was a shepherd and had an incredible knowledge of the area, helped me to find the caves where John Broad and his friends hid. I was able to retrace the soldiers' steps in the lower part of the Valley Orfento. With assistance from the town hall and the Majella National Park, I mapped out a route that connects to the Freedom Trail (*Sentiero della Libertà*), from Sulmona to Casoli, taken by almost 1,000 war prisoners to traverse the mountains and reach the Allied forces.

Locating descendants of the people who helped John Broad was not easy, as many moved away after the war. What

Cristina Parone and Harry Broad, John Broad's son

astonished me was that very few of them knew what heroes their relatives were. Maybe it was an attempt to leave those tragic memories behind; or maybe it was the reserved character of our people, who were not used to showing off. I think the disarming human simplicity made those people think they were doing what had to be done rather than something extraordinary. My grandmother, when asked why she brought food to an "English soldier" in hiding, simply responded: "Because it could have been my son."

Poor People – Poor Us is out of print. You might be able to find it in a library. The Italian translation of the book, *Povera Gente Poveri Noi*, can be bought online or in the Centro Visita Valle dell'Orfento (Via del Vivaio, 1, Caramanico Terme).

Cristina Parone is a tour guide and a Caramanico Terme local. She translated Poor People – Poor Us into Italian and is involved in voluntary projects for promoting the history and culture of her native area.



Wednesday, October 20th: A loud hulloing of a shepherd boy woke us with a start. In these Apennine mountains the shepherds call out to keep themselves from feeling lonely and also banish the evil spirits. The shepherds sometimes play on reed whistles which are very musical indeed, and to hear this haunting melody for the first time is quite fascinating.

Felice and Nuziata brought us fifteen pounds of potatoes, eight pounds of bread, three wings and three legs of chicken, ten tomatoes, four peppercorns, three chillis and about two ozs. of fat. They told us that last night the Germans made a house-to-house search in Caramanico, looking for fugitives and also for British clothes, intimidating the peasants to turn everything out at the point of the revolver. Near the Caramanico bridge the Germans discovered five New Zealanders who were hidden in a hole. By their description we took three of them to be John Ringland, Jack Shepherd and Harris. The news spoilt the day for us. Nuziata promised to bring me some bandages and ointment for Ted's foot, which was in a bad way. One compress suggested by Nuziata was a mixture of wood-ash and warm water.

Thursday, October 21st: The sun peeps into our hole for half an hour each day. We found some penny-royal which proved a good substitute to mint to boil with the potatoes.

Friday, October 22nd: Nuziata together with Graziella di Fuori trudged out to see us. We were boiling a pot of potatoes for our evening meal at the time, and they

were amused to see the penny-royal, telling us that we had better not use any more of it. They brought us a fowl which was steamed in oil, seeped in a thick sauce of peppercorn, tomatoes and chillis, and no greater delicacy could have been served at the Hotel Savoy. They also brought 15 to 20 pounds of potatoes, 2lbs. of pane, 2lbs of beans, 2 large peppercorns, and to our amazement, some salt. On the fall of Sicily Italy's supply of salt was cut. Nuziata produced a bottle of home-made embrocation which Bert swiped to put in with the potatoes. I stopped him just in time telling him that it was not sauce, but was for Ted's burn. Nuziata also gave me some boracic paper to put on after the lotion had been applied. Nuziata said there were ten fugitives concealed in the mountains near the village of San Nicola. Four prisoners who had been hiding in the mountains near Sulmona crept into Caramanico that day in a very emaciated condition and were being well looked after. Nuziata asked for a piece of thread to sew her slippers. It was dreadful to see the pitiful condition of her feet which were bleeding and badly lacerated. Her slippers were made out of sacking. The women each gathered a huge waka of firewood. Bert and Ted lifted the heavier bundle on to Graziella's head and I lifted the other bundle on to Nuziata's head. The weight was staggering. To carry such a load for two hours over such rough country was an exceptional feat.

Excerpt from *Poor People – Poor Us* by John E. Broad. Published by H.H. Tombs, 1945

PECORINO DI FARINDOLA: THE CHEESE MADE BY WOMEN

By Anna Lebedeva

According to Pliny the Elder, Roman emperors and nobles loved pecorino cheese from the land of Vestini people. Today, the sheep milk cheese is made using the same ancient methods.



Pecorino di Farindola

“I just know when it is ready,” says Lucia D’Angelo, lightly touching with the back of her hand the curdling ewe’s milk that is heating up slowly in a large cauldron. There is no school or course that teaches how to make Pecorino di Farindola, the prized sheep cheese from a small mountainous area in the heart of the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga in Abruzzo. The cheese is made exclusively by women, and local girls learn the skills from their mothers as they grow up. “Only a woman has the patience to make good pecorino in a slow unrushed manner,” Lucia tells me.

ANCIENT TRADITION

It has always been that way: the men tend the livestock, do heavy work outdoors and the women, with their gentle hands, work the milk. Gas burners and electric stoves have replaced the fire, but the process of cheese making has remained unchanged here since Roman times when Vestini, a local tribe, lived in these mountains. It is the only cheese in the world that is still, like in the ancient times, made with pig rennet. Nobody is quite sure why pig rennet was used to make sheep milk cheese in the first place, but the tradition lives on.



A sheep flock in Farindola

Just like with many other traditional Italian products, pecorino production has seen ups and downs, although local farmers never really stopped making it for family consumption and that's what saved it. Interest in Pecorino di Farindola was renewed in the 1990s as traditional small-scale farm production went through a revival.

LIMITED PRODUCTION

Lush green pastures and fresh mountain air give the pecorino its complex fragrant flavours, and when combined with the characteristic sweet note from the pig rennet it makes this cheese stand out. A big hype was created at the international cheese fair organised by Slow Food in 2001, when 100 kg of Pecorino di Farindola were sold within a couple of hours and everyone wanted to know more about the rare cheese from Abruzzo. On the wave of interest, the Pecorino di Farindola Consortium was established to safeguard this unique cheese and revitalise its production. Today 15 small family-run farms tend 4000 sheep and make 90,000 kilos of pecorino



Lucia D'Angelo making pecorino

every year – however, it is still not enough to satisfy the ever-growing demand from Italian and international buyers. The area of production covers nine municipalities in the eastern part of the Gran Sasso Mountains: Farindola, Penne, Montebello di Bertona, Villa Celiera, Carpineto della Nora, Arsita, Bisenti



Pecorino ripening in a wooden box

and Castelli. Sheep milk cheese made outside of these villages cannot be called Pecorino di Farindola. The oldest member of the Consortium is Paolina, a 90-year-old producer who, together with her son, makes 100 -150 kg of pecorino every year. In recent years, encouraged by European funding, a few younger people joined in. “We still have a long way to go,” says Ugo Ciavattella, the President of the Pecorino di Farindola Consortium. “One of our main goals is to bring pride back to the farmers. If they don’t value their work, nobody will.”

NEW GENERATION

Lucia’s son, 40-year-old Daniele D’Agostino, is a perfect example of the new proud generation of local farmers. After having worked in construction for many years, Daniele decided to go back to his roots. His mother was happy to help. He applied for a rural development European grant, bought sheep and brought back to life the old farm that his ancestors owned. Daniele’s enthusiasm was infectious and his

father, Dante, realising how much he had missed farming, joined the son. Now, together they tend 160 sheep and produce 800 kilos of cheese.

At Daniele’s wedding a few years ago, every guest received a beautifully packaged piece of the family’s pecorino aged for this special occasion for 20 months. He tells me that the business is going well and that last year they sold out by the end of summer. “We get phone calls from people ordering a few kilos of our pecorino in March, just before we start the milking season,” says Daniele with pride.

MADE BY WOMEN

As with any other artisanal product, the taste of Pecorino di Farindola slightly differs not only every year but also from one producer to another. Lucia says it depends on the weather and pasture as well as the rennet used. Each producer



The label on each wheel shows the name of the woman who made it ("Fatto da Lucia" on the photo above)

makes their own rennet: pieces of pig stomach lining are pickled in white wine with spices. "We tried to give our pickle to a neighbour who was starting up cheese production, but it didn't work there," explains Lucia. "It just shows you that there are many subtleties in this business."

Watching Lucia work is mesmerising. When the milk reaches the right temperature (measured by hand, without thermometer), a small amount of rennet (no measuring tools involved here either) is poured in and then more waiting, until curd is formed. "Everything has to be done by hand, otherwise the taste will not be the same," says Lucia, breaking the curd with gentle confident moves. From early spring to the end of July, she

goes through this centuries-old cheese making ritual almost every day. During the aging process, which takes up to 12 months, each wheel is wiped and rubbed with local olive oil every few days to make sure the cheese does not dry out. Colourful labels on each wheel show the name of the woman who made it. Now and then Lucia gets a little help from her four-year-old granddaughter who likes to make pecorino by pressing the cheese into teeny-weeny forms kept especially for her. "That's how we all learn our trade here," smiles Lucia.

WHERE TO BUY PECORINO DI FARINDOLA

You will find the cheese in most supermarkets and delicatessens in Abruzzo. If visiting Farindola, go to the Consortium's shop (Via Circonvallazione; enter "Consorzio di Tutela del Pecorino di Farindola" in your navigator).

Photos by Anna Lebedeva.

A DAY IN PACENTRO

By Monica Antonelli

One of the most beautiful towns in Italy, Pacentro is filled with history and legends. With plenty of things to do and see, it makes for a perfect destination for a day trip.



Pacentro. Photo by Lauren Malone Newcomer

Set in the mountains of the Majella National Park, Pacentro stands like a guard overlooking the Peligna Valley. According to legend, the town was founded by Trojan hero Pacinus. Historians say that Pacentro's origins can be dated between the 8th and 9th centuries, but numerous archaeological finds suggest human presence in the area well before that, in early prehistoric times.

Today, Pacentro is home to just over 1000 people. In summer, the town's population grows with holidaymakers and visitors arriving from all over the world.

The rich town's history is crystallised in the ancient stones of the buildings, medieval alleyways, old palaces and churches. There are so many things to see in Pacentro, you will want to stay longer than just a day.

The part of the town around the castle is older, dating back to the Middle Ages, once encircled with fortified walls. Here the houses crowd on top of each other and narrow streets curve sharply. Over the centuries, Pacentro slowly expanded. From Piazza del Popolo to the west, the streets become wider and the buildings grander, as this part was constructed in the 16th – 17th centuries.



The bell tower of the Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore rising above Pacentro

WHAT TO SEE

CASTELLO CANTELMO-CALDORA

As you cross the Peligna Valley, one of the first things you see is the Cantelmo-Caldora Castle, rising at the top of Pacentro. A legend has it that a desperate spirit of the beautiful Margherita De Braj roams between the castle's walls. The noblewoman died of a broken heart when she heard that her husband, Baron Roberto De Luczinardo, had been killed. The news about his death turned out to be untrue and the grieving widower placed a sculpted face of his beloved on one of the castle's towers, which you can still see today. Built in the 14th century, it rises to almost 28 metres and is called "The Ghost Tower." Another legend attributes the face on the tower and the wandering phantom to Medea d'Evoli, the first wife of Giacomo



One of the towers of the Cantelmo-Caldora Castle

Caldora, who couldn't bear the death of her son Antonio. The jury is still out on the identity of the phantom, but legends like these certainly add more mystery to the castle.

First mentioned in a document dating back to 951, the Caldora Castle is one of the oldest and best-preserved castles in Abruzzo. Over the centuries it belonged to different powerful families: Caldora, Cantelmo, Orsini, Colonna, Barberini. Trapezoidal in shape, it used to have four towers decorated with crenellations, manlike figures and shell-shaped arches. Only three towers remain today, with the oldest, Siege Tower, rising on the southeastern side of the castle. Part of it collapsed in 1230 during the battle against the army of Frederick II.

Open: April – September 10am – 1pm, 3pm – 7pm; October – March 10am – 1pm, 3pm – 5pm.

Price: €2

CASA MARLURITA

Behind grand noble palaces hides the small humble house of Marlurita. Like a time capsule, it preserves the typical interior of a poor peasant home. Maria Loreta Pacella lived here until her death in 1978. She was the town's healer, who could protect from the evil eye, chase away toothache with spells and prepare medicinal herbal cures. The two-room house is still filled with Marlurita's pots and pans, and a cardboard donkey occupies a corner of the bedroom where the real one used to live. At one stage, this minuscule dwelling accommodated two families. No running water, the only luxury was limited electricity that provided scarce lighting with a few-watt bulb. When Marlurita's brothers left for America and her parents died, the town's healer lived here by herself. Under the bed, Marlurita kept a coffin she bought for herself with savings.

Address: Via Santa Maria Maggiore (walk



Marlurita's house

under the arch in front of Via Madonna di Loreto, the house is on the right at the end of the small courtyard).

Open: in summer, open every day. If you find the doors closed, call Pasquale Di Ianni at 0039 338 9671376.

PRETA TONNA

Near the old watermill stands a hollowed out cylindrical stone called "preta tonna," or "the scandal stone." It served as a measuring unit for grains and a shaming place for insolvent debtors, who were ordered to sit nude on top of it, in front of passersby. Unfortunately, the opening on the top was cemented to stop people from putting rubbish inside. Preta Tonna has been moved temporarily (until the road works on Via Antera, where it normally stands, are finished) to Largo del Mulino, beside the stonecutter's workshop

FESTIVALS

I CALDORESCHI

For six days in August, Pacentro celebrates a re-enactment of the events that took place in 1450 when two members of the powerful Orsini and Caldoreschi families united in marriage. Historic processions, knights' combats and witches' sabbath fill the town's streets. See upcoming festival dates at [Associazione Culturale Pacentrana](#).

CORSA DEGLI ZINGARI

On the first Sunday of September, local youngsters run barefoot on a rocky 862 metre trail, from the mountain Colle Ardingo to the church of Madonna di Loreto. The race – with roots in pagan times – was adapted by Christians to symbolise the devotion of the poor to Madonna. Check the [festival's page](#) for details on the dates.



Preta Tonna

MAMMUCCJE FIGURINES

On Piazza del Popolo, dominated by the monumental 17th-century fountain and the magnificent Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, tucked in a corner, is a small workshop where local artisans create mammuccje, terracotta figurines for nativity cribs. The tradition started by Peppino Avolio, who moved to Pacentro from Napoli in the 19th century. Apart from Biblical characters, some figurines are dressed in traditional Abruzzese costumes and would make a beautiful gift to take home.

Address: Angelilli M, Piazza del Popolo, 2.

Open: in the morning. Call Signora Teresa for an appointment 0039 3338822192.



Corsa degli Zingari. Photo by Karl Mincin

PECORE ALLU CUTTURE

During the first week of August, locals and visitors alike gather on Piazza del Popolo to taste *pecore allu cutture*, a slowly cooked sheep meat stew, which was a shepherds' staple dish for centuries. In the evening, there are also folk songs and dances. The dates of the festival are published on the organisers' [Facebook page](#).

FOR ADRENALINE JUNKIES

Zip down a 992 metre cable to admire Pacentro from above. Open from March to December. Price €40-45 per person. For details, check [Zipline Majella](#).



An arch in the medieval part of Pacentro



Piazza del Popolo

WHERE TO EAT

TAVERNA DE LI CALDORA

Traditional seasonal dishes and a good local wine list. Book a table on their terrace for magnificent panoramic views of the valley and the mountains.

Address: Piazza Umberto I, 13. **Tel.:** 0039 086 441139. **Open:** every day 1pm – 2.30pm, 8pm - 10pm.

RISTORANTE PIZZERIA MAJELLA

A friendly restaurant in the heart of Pacentro serving excellent pizzas, traditional pasta and meat dishes.

Address: Via Santa Maria Maggiore, 146. **Tel.:** 0039 086 4773391. **Open:** Tuesday – Sunday 11.30am – 3pm, 7pm – 11pm, Monday 6pm – 11pm

Monica Antonelli is a certified tour guide at www.serendipitytour.net.

IMPULSE PURCHASE – WITH NO REGRETS

By Linda Dini Jenkins

Bimbi Bellhouse and her husband Spencer Power have been in lockdown in London during the coronavirus siege and can't wait to get back to their home in Abruzzo. Here's how they blend their creativity with the pleasures of the Abruzzo countryside.

Bimbi and Spencer first came to Abruzzo in 1999 for a family holiday, taking a small villa near Guardiagrele. At that time, according to Bimbi, there were only about five holiday rentals in the whole of Abruzzo compared to the hundreds available today. They fell in love with the region and, a few years later, bought a house in Piano La Roma, near the hilltop town of Casoli, with very little pre-planning, and have not regretted it for a second. When they arrived in 2003 they were one of the extremely few "incomers," with no other *stranieri* for many miles around.

FARMHOUSE WITH A VIEW

The house afforded fantastic 360-degree views: over Lago di Casoli to the south, the Majella mountains to the west, the Adriatic to the east and olive groves and Guardiagrele to the north. While the building itself was rather unremarkable – a large modern farmhouse with a 300-year-old stone barn attached to it – it nevertheless had the advantage of lots of space and lovely high ceilings. Soon the stable, cantina and hay barn were all incorporated into the design, creating a huge reception area and enough bedrooms for all their family, many friends



Bimbi Bellhouse and Spencer Power

and guests, who can rent some parts of the house.

Spencer and Bimbi completely remodeled the house and also took on the design and plan for the garden, which was once nothing but a ploughed field. The initial work took nine months (including a winter when nothing happened, as they were covered in snow), and now looks to all the world like the house and garden have been there forever.



The house in Piano La Roma

While they had not been planning to buy a house in Italy, circumstances changed, so they did. Plus, the original price was extremely low, and even with all the work completed, the costs were less than a one-bedroom flat in Notting Hill, where the couple is based in the UK. They have been spending between 4 – 5 months of the year in Casoli, but will be there much more as they are designing and project managing their next venture.

“Abruzzo is the most amazing place and we would not want to be anywhere else,” says Bimbi. “The people are so sincere, genuine, hard-working and also fun – truly Forte e Gentile – and the countryside itself is unrivalled with its mountains, beaches and all the stunning small towns and villages which make up the tapestry of the region.”

With language skills and a sense of adventure, they didn’t find many obstacles to coming to Abruzzo. Although Bimbi’s interior design business is based in London, she is able to work worldwide in both locations. Spenser as Fine Artist and Specialist Painter is not tied down to one location and can also work on projects all over the world. Beginning with their extensive

refurbishment in Piano La Roma, they have, over the years, undertaken various projects locally in Abruzzo for friends, both British and Swedish.

OLIVE GROVE

Once their home was completed, Bimbi and Spencer started on their olive grove, comprising more than 1,000 trees. They brought them back from near abandonment and soon produced a first-class, single estate, organic olive oil which they market in the UK. During harvest, Spencer takes care of the picking teams while Bimbi cooks enormous lunches for the workers. She recalls, “It’s always a hugely convivial time, with a great mix of local Italians and English friends who come for the experience.” For all these reasons – the building projects and their agricultural works – this hard-working couple feel completely integrated into their local community.

Oil isn’t the only thing that comes from Bimbi and Spencer’s olive trees. They produce olive leaf tea, which is extremely health giving – a fact known even by the Romans 2000 years



Bimbi and Spencer have more than 1,000 trees

ago. Mirabilia is run with the help of partner Kim Evans, who lives in Palombaro, and the tea is sold abroad, either in stores or in bulk in the UK, Europe and the United States.

“Our team of pickers, all local ladies of a certain age, are amazingly enthusiastic about their work. They can remember their grandmothers talking about the benefits of olive leaf tea and are thrilled to be part of this revival of local culture and tradition,” exclaims Bimbi. “Everyone involved in this project is proud to be taking part, seeing it not only as a positive benefit to the region but also as a fun and satisfying way of working together on the land.”

BUSY LIFE

Bimbi and Spenser also find time to curate a number of art exhibitions at the Castello di Casoli – called *Artisti Inglesi - Paesaggi D’Abruzzo* showing works of English artists, some Royal Academicians, who were bewitched and inspired by the stunning Abruzzese mountains and the varied landscapes of the region. Indeed, this year’s event was in the planning stages when everything ground to a halt.

Bimbi and Spencer do not take their successes

lightly. And they have always included local talent in their projects. “We had a fantastic team on our initial project, who we have retained over nearly 20 years,” explains Bimbi. “And our excellent team is backing us up in the project management and renovation of a new venture restoring a noble palace, Palazzo Ricci, in the centre of Casoli.”

They both hope that the project – converting the structure into 14 luxury residences – will not only bring the building back to its former glory but also provide much-needed jobs for the community and help revitalize the local economy.

Even if this couple always retain a base in the UK (where they have children and grandchildren) they are equally lucky with all their Abruzzese friends and acquaintances. Their life in Abruzzo is extremely busy on so many different levels, and Bimbi and Spenser cannot envisage a time when they are not here as much as possible. In fact, this lockdown marks the longest they have been away in more than 15 years. Needless to say, they are currently booked on the first possible direct flight to Pescara!

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

GORGES, RIVERS AND THE COAST: FOUR EASY WALKS FOR BEGINNERS

By Stuart Haines

You cannot fully experience Abruzzo until you pull on your walking shoes, grab your pack and venture into the inspiring countryside that so defines the region. Here are four easy itineraries for days out on foot.



The Pescara River and Popoli

There are countless opportunities and itineraries – from strolls along the beach, to walks in silent forests and big days out amongst the wild mountain peaks. Where, though, if you are keen to venture from the road but are not an experienced walker, do you even think of beginning your explorations with such riches at your feet?

In ABRUZZISSIMO Issue 01, Jacqui Mathews-Price gave her lovely description of walking the *Sentiero dello Spirito* in the Northern Maiella. This magnificent long-distance trail offers much for the seasoned hiker, but in its entirety,

is not for beginners. So here we offer four short, relaxing routes to tempt you onto your feet and into our wonderful world of gorges, rivers, meadows and coast, never too far from a welcoming bar or cosy trattoria.

DITCH THE CAR

And here's my second goal: to provide an introduction to Abruzzo's extensive and underused public transport system, that will take you cheaply and comfortably around the region. All four walks can be accessed by the

train (in one case, train and bus). You can drive, of course, but there is little as satisfying as a train ride followed by a stroll in the woods and a cool beer to round off the day.

The walks are in central Abruzzo, from the seaside and into the heart of the mountains. Selecting from the great range of possibilities was challenging, but I hope these gems will provide a memorable introduction. At the end I'll tell you how to download the route waypoints to your smartphone and how to check train and bus timetables but, for now, my recommendations!

POPOLI – THE SOURCE OF THE PESCARA RIVER

The substantial Pescara river appears from nowhere at the foot of an inconspicuous hill on the edge of Popoli, at the northern end of the Sulmona Valley. Amazingly clear water bubbles up through sands and percolates from beneath a low rock band and a major river is born! It's an astonishing place made perfect by its setting amongst swaying willow trees, tall reeds and water weeds swirling gracefully in the crystal flow.

Rain that fell or sank as melted snows across a vast area of the central Apennines has been channeled underground to re-emerge at this particular place; a coincidence of the juxtaposition of porous and impermeable rocks and a complex system of faults in the fractured mountains.

The springs are protected within the *Sorgenti del Pescara* nature reserve, incongruously bordered on one side by A25 motorway. But it doesn't much affect the tranquility of the place and its great charm – the calming effect of nature. The mostly flat 5km route begins and ends at Popoli railway station on the north west side of town, across the river from the town centre. The reserve is a short walk away via quiet lanes.

Popoli is on the Pescara – Sulmona – Rome line and there are about 12 trains a day each way. The route follows the main waymarked path within the reserve, taking in a fine viewpoint and a café. The viewpoint involves about 100m of ascent which you could leave out. But, frankly, walks in Abruzzo



Sorgenti del Pescara

don't come much easier (or more enjoyable) than this.

If you prefer to drive, you can leave your car at the station or the nature reserve carpark, which would make the walk a lot shorter. Popoli is a 20-minute drive north of Sulmona on the SS17. The *Sorgenti del Pescara* nature reserve is reached by turning left down the Vittorito road, just as you enter Popoli when coming from Sulmona.

CARAMANICO TERME – THE ORFENTO GORGE

The charming, well-kept town of Caramanico lies at the heart of the Maiella National Park. It is an attractive place, with the relaxed feel of a mountain air resort, that rewards a couple of hours exploring its refined and busy centre. Lying at 650m, the views to the north and the west are grand.



Raiano market

The suffix, Terme, tells you that the resort grew up as a place to take the waters and, on some corners, you will catch the sulphurous smell of the mineral springs.

Not immediately obvious is the deep and dramatic gorge, cut by the Orfento river, that lies to one side of the town. This short walk of just over 4km combines the two in a half-day of great interest and contrast. The path is good underfoot all the way, but bear in mind there is about 150m of descent into the gorge and the same to climb steep steps back out again.

The route heads east, past the spa complex to the Paulo Barroso visitor centre before descending into the Orfento valley, passing the otter sanctuary, to arrive at the beginning of the gorge. The path then turns back through the narrow cleft with its spectacular overhanging rock walls until the graceful arch of the road bridge appears high above. All is cool and silent, dappled sunlight glinting on the tumbling waters of the river. Opposite the cascading waterfall, the path zigzags up to the bridge before following the road back into town.

You'll need to call at the visitor centre to register before entering the Orfento gorge – a painless



The River Orfento Entering the Gorge



Looking Across the Sulmona Valley from the aqueduct

task and the opportunity to pick up maps and other information. The trail gets busy on weekends and public holidays.

The walk begins in the main parking area that lies in a bowl just below the town centre. Take the stairs or lift up to the start of Viale Roma. The car park is also the town bus stop from where you can get a connection to Scafa station. Scafa lies on the Pescara – Sulmona – Rome line and has frequent services in both directions.

RAIANO – THE SAN VENANZIO HERMITAGE

This is a short but perfect journey into the impressive Aterno river gorge, visiting a remarkable underground Roman aqueduct and the San Venanzio hermitage that sits protected by towering cliffs – a great deal of interest for minimum effort and in no more than a few hours.

The Aterno river rises in the Monti della Laga north of L’Aquila and runs southeast before squeezing its way through the Gole di Venanzio, a tight gap in the mountains that surround the Sulmona basin. The little town of Raiano was established on an elevated position overlooking the gorge. In the 16th century a hermitage

dedicated to San Venanzio was established in the depths of the canyon – a place of spiritual calm as well as physical security. A water mill was built a little downstream.

The 7km walk leaves the centre of pretty Raiano to run directly into the gorge to the old hermitage, where you can drop to the gushing river. Before descending into the gorge, however, a path forks left and continues ahead on level ground following the fascinating 2,000-year-old underground aqueduct, which you can peek (or climb) into at regular openings. After tracing the now dry aqueduct into the gorge, you need to return to the fork to go down to the hermitage or back to the town. (The walk reduces to 4.5km if you leave out the aqueduct).

The return path from the hermitage follows the bottom of the gorge until it opens out onto meadows below the town. Here we pass a remarkable sulphur spring in the woods – testament to the geothermal nature of much of Abruzzo – before climbing back up to the central piazza of Raiano.

Start outside the main town church of Santa Maria Maggiore. There is a station at Raiano, on the Sulmona – L’Aquila line, served by about 12 trains a day each way. Walk down Viale Abruzzo into the centre.



Punta Aderci. Photo by Riserva Naturale Regionale Punta Aderci

PUNTA ADERCI – THE BEACH AND HEADLAND

In the south, the long Abruzzo coastline becomes a little wilder. Headlands and low cliffs appear, the beaches are less sandy and less crowded and the fascinating fishing platforms, trabocchi, are found at points where the shoals pass close to the shore. At Punta Aderci, just north of the port of Vasto, a small area of this lovely landscape has been preserved from the encroaching light industry in a nature reserve that is a beautiful spot for easy walks with tremendous sea views.

Punta Aderci itself is a promontory that juts into the Adriatic, separating two undeveloped and lovely long beaches. At its rocky foot, the remaining part of the Trabocco di Punta Aderci stands in isolation a little way from the shore. Waves, untamed by concrete breakwaters, crash

onto beaches littered with driftwood and backed by low scrub-covered cliffs. The areas of sand dunes are favoured nesting sites of the emblematic Kentish Plover.

My suggested 4.5km route combines walking along the beaches with stretches of the cliff top and, of course, out onto the panoramic headland. This is a small area, though, and it's easy to make your own itineraries. There are notice boards, board walks, and signposts – you won't get lost. Take your swimming gear, too – this is the antidote to those manicured beach concessions – but mind the waves!

The start point is the reserve car park on the northwest corner of the industrial estate. You will see signs for the reserve from the SS16 coast road just northwest of the turning for Vasto port. Porto di Vasto railway station is very close and it's easy to walk into the reserve. The station is on the Pescara – Foggia – Bari mainline and is served hourly in each direction.

DESCRIPTIONS AND TIMETABLES

The Sulmona Valley Walks [website](#) has free downloads of the GPX files for all four walks. They are numbers 50, 51, 52 and 53 in the Catalogue. And there's lots more about walking in Abruzzo including galleries, blog posts and over 30 detailed walk descriptions in the Sulmona Valley. One blog post even tells you what GPX files are and how to use them!

For details of all train services in Abruzzo go to [Trenitalia.com](#) and for all bus services go to [TUA website](#). Both websites offer useful apps for Android and iPhone.

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.

OUR LOCAL PIZZERIA

By Jake Rupert

When you walk into *Il Capriccio* in the town of Torre de Passeri, the first thing you notice are the smells – pizza cooking in a woodfired oven and meats grilling. The next thing you notice is the hospitality and hubbub.

When my wife and I arrived on a recent Wednesday night, Pasquale Aielli, the owners' son, greeted us warmly and told us sit wherever we wanted as he spread cheese and toppings on a pizza. His father, Tiziano, was at a table of men dropping off a pitcher of good German lager as the *Coppa Italia* final played on the big television. His mother, Rosanna, was chatting up a table of women in the corner.

We took a table at the back of the main room that was freshly painted and retouched during the Covid shutdown. The menus arrived quickly. My wife chose a *Norcina* pizza from the ample selection. I ordered a mixed grill and a side of spinach. Rosanna suggested switching the side to green beans made special earlier in the day.

A half litre of good red house wine and a glass of lager arrived with some bread to munch on and we sat back to watch the show.

A table of women to our left giggled constantly as they tore through four pizzas. Pasquale and Tiziano fired pizzas into the flaming oven and pulled them out almost as quickly, as a steady stream of takeout customers came and went. Salutations were shouted above the din while kids roamed the tables as if everybody were related. A man at the next table finished a pizza and ordered a plate of pasta because he was still hungry.

If towns are like families, *Il Capriccio* is our town's kitchen.

Our food arrived piping hot after about 15 minutes. The pizza was done perfectly. The slightly salty crust was light brown with dark oven-kissed bits on the edges. The homemade tomato sauce tasted like the garden. Sausage, mushrooms, and abundant truffle paste topped a layer of fresh mozzarella. A basil leaf crowned the presentation. "Yum," was my wife's



Pasquale Aielli making pizza

verdict. My veal chop was pink and tasty. The lamb chops had crispy fat edges and tender middles. The pork chop was not over cooked, a rarity. Not heavy on the salt, and each type of meat cooked to its individual qualities, not slapped on the grill and uniformly burned.

On the side, the beans had snap and the simple oil and salt dressing rose above the fray due to the use of top-quality local oil. A great recommendation.

After our meal, Tiziano came over with two shots of genziana liqueur to help us digest as a roar went up from near the television when Napoli almost scored. At the cash register, Pasquale rang up the bill. The machine said €37.50. He asked for €35.

Abruzzese people know food. You can't run a busy family restaurant here without serving great food at fair prices. And *Il Capriccio* is always busy.

Address: Il Capriccio Pizzeria, Via Garibaldi, 203, Torre de'Passeri

Open: Wednesday to Monday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. Closed Tuesdays

Telephone: 085 888 4873. Reservations recommended.

FERMENTED GRAPE JUICE, NATURALLY

By Lucas Lanci

The easiest way to describe natural wine is “nothing added, nothing taken away.” Made with organic grapes, there is no fining (clarifying) and filtration in natural wine, and little to no sulfur (SO₂) is added. Natural wine is not hidden behind additives, chemicals, overuse of wooden barrels, and other tricks to try and make it better or more palatable. Simply put, it is fermented grape juice.

Healthy vines, untreated by chemicals and pesticides, have an abundance of native or indigenous yeast that interacts with the sugars inside of the grapes to create alcohol and carbon dioxide. In conventional wines, lab-grown yeasts are added to the grape juice. Think of the difference between sourdough bread and mass produced bread, or artisan pecorino cheese from the mountains here in Abruzzo and cheese made in a large factory. Each loaf of sourdough bread or artisanal cheese is unique and not perfectly uniform.

Conventional wine makers use lab-grown yeasts and temperature control to speed fermentation and create predictable results. They can use as many as 60 additives. In natural wineries, fermentation is more spontaneous and less predictable.

Conventional winemaking using pesticides and chemicals creates an environment that is easier to control for the people overseeing the operation – “businessmen investing in wine” instead of farmers. Traditionally, winemaking represented just one aspect of a farm, not the only product made or grown. The grapes used to grow among other plants like vegetables, trees, fruits, wheat, and beans, creating a biodiverse environment rich with lively soil, insects, and animals. Many natural winemakers are reverting back to this way of farming. The insects, plants, and animals create an environment that is in balance, without reliance on outside forces such as pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers.

For a novice wine drinker, some natural wines may seem much different than conventional wine in terms of taste and smell. The glass may be cloudy, have sediment, and an unfamiliar bouquet. Today, consumers all over the world are embracing the difference in wines, trying varietals of grapes they have never heard of before and from regions that are lesser known, including Abruzzo.

Here are my three natural wine picks, good for a novice or expert wine drinker and super fun for this summer season.



MATITA ROSSO by Azienda Agricola Matita

Montepulciano d’Abruzzo 100%. A red wine that is lighter than your normal, run-of-the-mill Montepulciano d’Abruzzo, with a hint of freshness. Goes well with grilled meats, pizza, *arrosticini*, and *mortadella di campotosto* or other cured meats from this region

Buy from: Rollingwine.com, [Don Gennaro](#) in Pescara.

Price: €17



ALTOMARE CONTROVENTO by Vini Controvento

Trebbiano 65%, Malvasia di Candia 15%, Passerina 10%, Fiano 10%
A skin-contact white wine giving the body a more complex, but still refreshing, flavour palate. Great with seafood pasta and sheep cheeses.

Buy from: [Liberty Enoteca](http://LibertyEnoteca) in Lanciano, Rollingwine.com

Price: €15



ROSE' LAB - LUCA BEVILACQUA by Vini Artigianali

Montepulciano d’Abruzzo 100%. A rosé wine that captures what summer in Abruzzo is all about. Very quaffable and enjoyable wine. Bring this to the beach or a picnic with friends.

Buy from: Decanto.it, [Don Gennaro](#) in Pescara.

Price: €15

CLASSIC PIZZICOTTI ABRUZZESI

By Mary Vischetti

One of my favourite cookies are *pizzicotti*. Easy to make, chock-full of chocolate, raisins and walnuts, *pizzicotti* are very popular cookies in Abruzzo. They preserve well for many days, so they are perfect for sweet tables dedicated to special occasions like weddings, first communions, baptisms and parties in general. If you come to my region during the Christmas and Easter holidays, or even during the summer festivities, you will find these delectable cookies in nearly every home. They are usually made ahead, and stay fresh and tasty for the whole festive period. I dare say they are even better several days after baking!

When I make *pizzicotti*, the aroma of chocolate and cinnamon that invades my home brings me back in time, and brings up very strong emotions. My father's grandparents were the owners of a communal wood oven in our hometown. It was a special place where women would go to bake bread for their big families, and where they could spend time together, sharing secrets, asking older women for advice, and just chatting and laughing with friends. Those times were hard ones, and there were not many occasions to have fun, so even baking in the community oven was an amusement for our ancestors.

Classic *pizzicotti* cookies are traditionally made with chopped dark chocolate, raisins, walnuts, and a hint of bitter cocoa, but nowadays you can find modern versions made with hazelnuts, white chocolate and even cranberries! I have tried many different variations and each one is delicious, but the traditional *pizzicotti* are my absolute favourite, because they have a simple and

genuine taste that never tires. Having spent my childhood and adolescence in the Midwest of the USA, I grew up with chocolate chip cookies. I think Abruzzese *pizzicotti* could be an Italian version of this most famous American cookie. Once you taste these sweet and rustic treats, I am sure you will adore them as much as I do.

See the recipe below.

Mary Vischetti is an Abruzzo-based food blogger. Find her on www.unamericanatragliorsi.com



LIVE COOKING CLASS

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine has invited Mary for a Facebook Live to show our followers how to make *pizzicotti*. Watch the class on our [Facebook page](#) on July 9 at 5pm CEST.

PIZZICOTTI ABRUZZESI COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

Makes 30 cookies

- 2 eggs
- 160g granulated sugar
- 130 ml vegetable oil (I use sunflower)
- zest of 1 organic lemon
- 1 tsp vanilla extract or ground cinnamon
- 100 g chopped dark chocolate (or chocolate chips)
- 100g raisins
- 70 - 80g coarsely chopped walnuts
- 1 tbsp bitter cocoa powder (optional)
- 400g all purpose flour
- 8g baking powder (about 1 tsp)

PREPARATION

Break the eggs in a large bowl and add sugar, oil, lemon zest and vanilla or cinnamon. Stir with a hand whisk until the ingredients are blended.

Incorporate chopped chocolate, raisins, chopped walnuts and cocoa. Finally, fold in the sifted flour with the baking powder. Mix the dough with a wooden spoon. It will be very dense. Using a tablespoon, portion the dough and place it on a baking tray covered with parchment paper. Leave some space between the cookies to prevent them from sticking to each other during the baking process.

Bake in a preheated oven at 180° C for about 10 to 12 minutes. Cool and store in a cookie tin for up to 30 days.



OLD-FASHIONED ROSE LIQUEUR

By Antonella Santilli

There are not many people in Abruzzo who haven't inherited from their aunt or grandmother little ornate hand-blown glasses for Rosolio, the sweet, low-alcohol rose petal liqueur, invented centuries ago in a Sicilian convent and popular in Central and Southern Italy. It was *en vogue* in the 1960s, always served at weddings, christenings and birthday buffets. It even featured in such famous Italian movies as was *The Leopard* and *1900*.

Roses used for the liqueur have to be organic, and I prefer the ones from my garden. The intensity of the drink's colour depends on the rose variety. My favourite ones are those small red old-fashioned roses that a while back every woman in Abruzzo managed to grow even in small gardens or had in a vase on a balcony.

My grandmother lived in Gissi, in the Chieti province, and had a tiny garden with a bush of those small red roses. She made Rosolio together with her neighbours. This is the recipe they used, although back then, women measured ingredients "a occhio" (by eye), without a scale, but going by their experience.



INGREDIENTS

- 500 ml pure spirit at 95°
- 500 ml water
- 300 g sugar
- 50 g organic fresh rose petals
- Zest of one organic lemon

PREPARATION

Collect roses when they are still not fully open. Pluck the petals. Remove the white base part of the petals and blend them with 50g of sugar.

Put the rose sugar powder in a jar with an airtight lid together with lemon zest and spirit. Close the jar and leave to rest in a dark cool room for 10 days. After that, add water and 250g of sugar.

Leave to infuse for seven days, shaking it now and then. After a week, filter the liqueur and bottle it. Leave to rest for two months before drinking it.

Antonella Santilli Antonella Santilli

ANCIENT FLATBREAD FROM ABRUZZO

By Kayla Myskow

I first tasted this wonderfully simple bread at my elderly neighbour's house. I had popped round to drop off some post just as she was preparing a very humble yet delicious quick lunch of *pizza scima* and *cime di rapa* (cooked turnip tops/greens). She saw my eyes light up with curiosity as she took her golden freshly baked *pizza scima* out the oven, and insisted on feeding me a piece, still gloriously hot. I left with the recipe and immediately went home and baked one!

Pizza scima, also known as *pizza scema*, is a traditional unleavened bread made with very few simple ingredients. It is a wonderful slightly crunchy accompaniment for cooked vegetables, *salumi* and cheeses, and many other dishes. The name derives from the Italian word *azzimo* which means unleavened (in dialect this became *acime*, then *scima* or *scema*, which means thick/stupid!).



The recipe itself is from around the 1600s, when there was a large Jewish community living along the Trabocchi coastline of Abruzzo. They brought with them various culinary influences.

Although called *pizza*, this bread wasn't topped or stuffed but simply baked under a metal lid called *coppa* in the embers of the fireplace. The typical rhomboid pattern scored into the dough aided the breaking of the bread.

INGREDIENTS

- 500g of 0 flour grano tenero (soft wheat flour)
- 1 glass (250ml) of Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC white wine
- 1/2 glass of water
- 3/4 glass of extra virgin olive oil
- A pinch of salt

PREPARATION

Make a well with the sifted flour and salt. Slowly add the liquid ingredients and mix until you have a homogeneous elastic ball of dough.

Leave it to rest for an hour. Once rested, roll out the dough to your desired thickness (remember this is unleavened bread, it won't rise!), and score the traditional diamond pattern across the top.

Bake at 170°C for 40-45 minutes, until golden brown.

DO YOU HAVE A TRADITIONAL RECIPE FROM ABRUZZO YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE? SEND IT TO EDITOR@ABRUZZISSIMO.COM

Dear editor,

It was a pleasure seeing that there is a magazine devoted to *Il Verde*. I have been practicing law here in the U.S. for 43 years but 6 years ago bought a place in Vasto on the Loggia Ambligh with a beautiful view of the Adriatic. It has been heart breaking to not be able to return to our home during the pandemic but I hope to return at the end of this month.

Although my family's roots are in Campania (Avellino), I fell in love with Vasto in early June 2014. My cousins live in Isernia and I was visiting them. During the visit, I told them I wanted to see the Adriatic Coast and so we drove to Abruzzo and had lunch in a *trabocco* on the coast. After a four hour lunch and five bottles of Cerasuolo, we drove to Vasto for gelato. That's when I fell in love. There is the history, the great food (best of sea and land), the wines (Montepulciano, Pecorino e Trebbiano) but most of all our neighbors who are proud of their culture and city.

After returning home, I told my wife about my visit to Vasto and that I could not get the city out of my mind. She looked on the internet and we decided to visit for Christmas. It is a longer story but it was then that we found our home and by the following September we were owners of a flat in a palazzo with one of the best views in the city. We have since then travelled throughout Abruzzo and are constantly in awe. Since 1996, we have travelled throughout all of Italy including Sicilia and Sardegna and in my view there is no more spectacular region than Abruzzo. *Mare, monte, la cucina e il vino, non c'è nessun paragone ma soprattutto amiamo la gente dura ma anche accogliente.*

According to tradition, Vasto was founded by the Greek hero Diomedes. The Loggia Ambligh is a promenade that stretches from Vasto City



Vasto

Park running along the cliff that passes by the Palazzo D'Avalos which was built in the 1500s and extended after the landslide in 1956 down to a site built by the ancient Romans containing some frescoes and other ruins. Along the scenic promenade there is a magnificent view of the Golfo D'Oro that stretches from Pescara south to Termoli. On a clear day the Isole Tremiti are visible.

Vasto Marina's beaches are Bandiera Blu awarded which recognizes its beautiful clear water and where one can see trabocchi and the 19 foot bronze statue of la Sirena which sits on a rock just off shore in the water as a monument to swimmers.

Thank you for your magazine and I look forward to an article on Vasto and Punta Aderci.

Cordiali saluti,

Carmine A. Iannaccone, New Jersey, USA

Send your letters to
editor@abruzzissimo.com

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The Gran Sasso Mountains seen from Civitella Del Tronto, photo by Clare Lusher

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Fontecchio on an old postcard

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Magazine

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Ciao a tutti!

The August issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine is filled with beautiful photos of Abruzzo, fascinating stories, travel tips and traditional recipes.

A local history enthusiast takes us back to the days when Lago Fucino was Italy's third biggest lake and tells how it was drained. Abruzzo would certainly be a different place if the lake was still there, attracting droves of tourists. We take you on a walk around Fontecchio to discover this little-known town in the Sirente-Velino mountain range. You will get the hang of a few Abruzzese proverbs in a local dialect, discover a few cool beautiful caves where you can escape summer's sizzling temperatures, and learn how to make a traditional pumpkin shoots pasta sauce.

There is still time to enter our exciting competition to win a romantic stay in a luxurious geodome surrounded by ancient olive trees in Pianella. Go to page 36 to see how you can enter.

We have also planned a few exciting virtual tours and live cooking demonstrations, which you can join via our [Facebook page](#).

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine is a free publication but we put a lot of love and time into it. If you enjoy reading it please consider giving a small one-off or monthly donation to help us continue our work. Every little bit helps! [Click here](#) to donate.

I love receiving your emails with stories and ideas for future articles, so keep them coming. My email is editor@abruzzissimo.com.

Enjoy reading the latest issue of ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine!

A presto,

Anna Lebedeva

Editor

WHAT'S ON



TAGLIACOZZO FESTIVAL

In August, Tagliacozzo fills with the sounds of music. Local convents, churches, and town squares become venues for classical music and jazz concerts, dance performances and book presentations. Watch *Jesus Christ Superstar* under the stars, listen to Rossini and Tchaikovsky at sunrise or attend a concert in a beech forest at sunset – there will be plenty of unforgettable experiences. Many concerts are free. See the full programme on the [festival's website here](#).

ABRUZZO'S TRADITIONAL COSTUMES AND FABRICS

Add a dose of history and culture to a day on the beach and visit a beautiful exhibition of traditional costumes and fabrics in the Palazzo Valignani in Torrecchia Teatina. You will see beautiful hand-woven bed covers, hand-made linens, colourful headgear and dresses worn in different parts of Abruzzo from the 1800s to the 1920s, some original, others reconstructed. To book your visit (guided tours in Italian can also be arranged) call Francesco 0039 3487629637.

Address: Piazza San Rocco 4, Torrecchia Teatina (in the town hall).

Opening hours: Monday – Friday 9am-12.30pm.

August is always packed with festivals and, while this year's bigger festivals have been cancelled, smaller concerts and outdoor celebrations are still taking place. Art, music, beaches, food and drink – there is something for everyone this August. Even if you cannot visit this year, take note of some of the most exciting annual events for your next trip to Abruzzo. All links are clickable.

MURALS AND STARS IN AIELLI

Every year, the small town of Aielli invites international street artists to paint murals. You can see them work, enjoy live music concerts and, on weekends, fill up on tasty snacks from street food trucks. In August and September, every Saturday and Sunday, join guided tours of the murals (in Italian). In the evening, visit the local astronomical observatory located in a medieval tower (*Torre delle steele*) to learn about stars and planets. For details, go to the [Borgo Universo website](#).



CRAFT BEER FESTIVAL AUGUST 27-31

The annual beer festival Fermenti d'Abruzzo will go ahead in the Porto Turistico di Pescara, with some of the best craft beer producers selling their brew to the thirsty. There will be street food vendors and live music concerts every evening. Beer masters will also share their trade secrets in a series of workshops (in Italian). Check the [festival's Facebook page](#) for the full programme details.





BEACHES ON LAKE BARREA

It is not only in the sea that you can have a refreshing dip in Abruzzo. Lake Barrea has officially opened for swimming. At the moment, bathing is only allowed in three locations: [Lido La Gravara](#), [Ristoro "I Safini"](#) and [Camping Colle Ciglio](#). Services provided include loungers, umbrellas, canoe and paddle boat rentals. The lake is often visited by red deer, so don't be surprised if you see one strolling past your lounger (watch a recent video of a deer on the lake [here](#)). You must book your spot on the beach by contacting the establishments well in advance (click on the links above).



Do you have an idea for an article or want to write for ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine?
Email us at
editor@abruzzissimo.com

DID YOU KNOW?

GHOSTBUSTERS IN ABRUZZO

In 2013, the mayor of the town of Sant'Omero in the province of Teramo invited five ghostbusters from the European Paranormal Activity Society (EPAS) to investigate the cause of mysterious appearances and noises in some locations. Locals had reported sightings of werewolves near an old wash house and voices in the grotto of Santa Maria a Vico church, which was built on the ruins of a pagan temple. The ghost experts' arrival generated a great amount of media coverage, but they didn't seem to find anything goosebumps-worthy. Some said it was just a publicity stunt on the mayor's part to get the news channels talking about the town. However, the ghostbusters had more exciting results in another location in Abruzzo.

Rumours about battle noises, screams and horses' neighing coming from the fortress of Civitella del Tronto persisted in the town. The EPAS team set up their supersensitive equipment around the citadel and registered electromagnetic disturbances as well as something they called "a voice" in a well and three bangs on a microphone left in a grotto under the citadel. Were they bats going around their nightly business? Or spirits? You can see the ghostbusters at work in the fortress in this [video](#) and listen to the mysterious sounds in the grotto in this [audio file](#).

Correction:

In the July issue of the magazine, we wrote that Mario Lanza's father was from Tocco di Casauria. It was actually his mother, Maria Lanza, who was from Tocco – his father was from Molise. Thanks to Eustachio Lanza from Australia for setting us straight!

ONCE THERE WAS A LAKE

By Francesco Proia

According to a recent study by scientists from the University of Pisa, Lago Fucino (Lake Fucino) was the oldest lake in Europe and, probably, in the world. Let's uncover the many myths and records connected to it.



Lac Fucino et les montagnes des Abruzzes, Jean-Joseph-Xavier Bidauld (1789, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

With its surface of 150 square kilometres, Lago Fucino was the third largest lakes in Italy and one of the largest lakes of karstic (irregular limestone) origin in Europe. It was so big that lighthouses had to be erected along the shores to guide fishermen at night. Its waters were so crystalline and clear that Virgil, the famous ancient Roman poet, called the lake “glass-like” in his epic *Aeneid*. Before the 19th century, when Fucino was drained and became Italy’s vegetable garden, the fish from the lake were in demand and highly appreciated in Central Italy, especially in the Vatican where it arrived fresh in tubs filled with Fucino’s water.

TAMING OF THE SHREW

At this point, you might be asking why someone would decide to drain a lake located on a plateau at 600 metres above sea level – a lake so beautiful that all ancient Rome’s aristocracy wanted to have a domus on its magnificent shores? Unfortunately, Lake Fucino had a “manufacturing defect”: without any outflowing streams, it often flooded the nearby cultivations and riparian (on the banks of rivers) towns with catastrophic consequences. It became known for its unpredictable temper across Europe, with water levels rising from four to 21 metres in just a few weeks.

The first one to come up with the idea of draining the lake was the great Julius Caesar,

who hoped that having a breadbasket so close to Rome could end the empire's dependence on the grains from Northern Africa. Over the following centuries, the project was declared impossible by Emperor Augustus, but later realised by Emperor Claudius.

TUNNELS OF CLAUDIUS

In 41AD, Claudius started the most ambitious hydraulic project of the time, building a 6.560-metres-long underground tunnel that would direct the lake's waters to the River Liri, on the other side of Mount Salviano, near Avezzano. It was constructed without any machinery or explosives by the labour force of 30,000 slaves who, for 11 years, manually excavated a canal, six inclined service tunnels and thirty-two wells up to 120 metres deep, standing in muddy water for days, often in complete darkness.

In 52AD, for the inauguration of the lake's drainage, Claudius organised the biggest staged sea battle (*naumachia*, as it was called then) in history. According to the chronicles from that time, the entire city of Rome relocated to the lake's shore to assist with the spectacle, including 19,000 slaves who staged the battle on 50 ships built for the occasion. That is when one of the most famous phrases of ancient Rome's history was born: Hail, Emperor, those who are about to die salute you (*Ave caesar, morituri te salutant*). Quoted by Suetonius in his *De vita Caesarum* (*The Twelve Caesars*) and used in Hollywood films infinite times in different scenes, there are no other testimonies of this phrase's usage except during that epic *naumachia* on Lake Fucino.

For two thousand years, until 1871 when the Fréjus Road Tunnel was built, Claudius' Tunnels were the longest in the world. Gradually, the outflowing tunnels clogged up and nobody, for the next 1700 years, managed to reactivate what was said to be



Emperor Claudius , Jan van der Straet (1589, Metropolitan Museum of Art). You can see the naumachia in the background

the grandest hydraulic construction of antiquity.

ENGINEERING TRIUMPH

In the 19th century, Alessandro Torlonia, one of the richest men in Europe, a nobleman and banker, decided to finish the job that had remained incomplete — a stand-off between human ambition and nature. In 1850, Torlonia set up a company to which draining of the Fucino was contracted by King Ferdinand II. The contract seemed to have been written to try to put Alessandro Torlonia off, anticipating every possible technical and economic difficulty. But the rich nobleman was determined to bend nature to his will. He himself invested half of the project's cost, paid the salaries of 4000 workers for 14 years while the construction was underway, and personally supervised the underground works.



Alessandro Torlonia

Torlonia's enterprise – Operation Grand Caesar – was entrusted to the best French and Swiss hydraulic engineers of the time, firmly anchored in the achievements of ancient Romans. They built a second tunnel, over six kilometres long, which incorporated the existing Roman tunnels. The financial burden of the project was so heavy that Torlonia had to close his bank which, for over 60 years, had been the most important in Italy. It was then that the Prince of Fucino, as he was called, exclaimed: "Either Torlonia drains Lake Fucino or the lake drains him."

After having dumped about one billion cubic metres of lake water into the River Liri, by king's order, Torlonia became the proprietor of 14,000 hectares of land (that used to be under water) for 99 years. Even today, over a century after the drainage, the incredible hydraulic system of Fucino remains a true open-air monument: over 100 kilometres of canals, 250 kilometres of

roads, 240 bridges and almost 700 kilometres of ditches. The enormous reclamation project still reigns over the waters of Fucino, which otherwise would return with all their force. In the 1940s-50s, the Italian state annulled Torlonia's ownership of the land and nationalised it.

The fertile lands of Fucino beat every known record: the cereals harvested after the drainage had two-metre-long stalks and produced a double amount of grains compared to any known variety ever recorded. The potatoes from Fucino are considered among the best in the world and boast the prestigious IGP (*Indicazione Geografica Protetta*) denomination. All because the soil has been fertilised for hundreds of thousands of years by the lake's rich ecosystem.



Tunnels of Claudius



Veduta del lago di Celano nell'Abruzzo, A. D'Anna (1795, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest)

NATURE'S REVENGE?

The battle of Man against Nature had been finally won. Or maybe not?

On December 13, 1915, at 7:53am, the earth shook with the force equivalent to 32 million tons of exploded dynamite, about twice the force of the Hiroshima bomb. The earthquake hit exactly where only a few years previously Lake Fucino was located. Seismographs registered the magnitude of 6.7 and a maximum Mercalli intensity of XI, making the earthquake of Avezzano the second strongest in Italy's history. 30,000 people were killed in the area. The city of Avezzano counted 10,000 dead out of the population of 11,000, and only one house remained standing.

Afterwards, there were many asking whether the earthquake and the lake's drainage could have been connected. Science never gave an answer, but it seems obvious that shifting one billion cubic metres of water in a short period of time from a basin that held such a big lake for more than one million years cannot happen without consequences.



The modern day Fucino Plain. Photo by Of the Village/AdobeStock

LEGENDS OF THE LAKE

Legends always surrounded Lago Fucino. In the Middle Ages, many spoke about a fairy-tale castle built on the lake. Castello di Ortucchio was one of a kind, constructed on



Lake Fucino on an old map

a small islet, accessible only by boat from an internal dock. The castle is still standing, although without the lake it has lost its uniqueness. The most fascinating legend is that of the lake's monster, which pre-dates the Loch Ness monster by 2,000 years. In the poem *Alexandra* dating back to the 3rd century BC, Lycophron, a Hellenistic Greek poet, talks about a crystal-clear river called Python, which snaked through the lake without mixing its waters. Among locals there were stories about strange whirlpools in the locality named Petogna, near Luco dei Marsi, site of the lake's only natural sinkhole, so a legend of a fearsome monster was born. The Roman naturalist author Pliny, however, mentioned in some of his works that among numerous fish species in Fucino there might have been a strange one, with eight fins. Who knows whether all that was true or just legends? We will never find out, as Lake Fucino is gone forever.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The entrance to the major tunnel is still visible near the town of Capistrello. Restoration works to make the tunnels more accessible are underway at the moment. However, due to bureaucratic obstacles, the site is not well managed. Call the local office of archaeology and cultural heritage at 0039 3669615633 to see if a visit is possible. Also keep an eye on their [Facebook page](#) where occasional guided tours of the underground tunnels from Capistrello are announced.

Francesco Proia is a journalist and director of www.marsicalive.it. He has written books [Lake Dust](#) (in English), [Polvere del Lago](#) and [Il Principe del Lago](#).

Translated by Anna Lebedeva.

EVEN THE ONION TURNS INTO GARLIC – ABRUZZO IN PROVERBS

By Daniela Gentile

If you want to learn more about Abruzzo, you will always find interesting material in local proverbs. These short sentences hold the popular wisdom of a community – including life lessons and advice on how to deal with most common situations.

Abruzzo is a rural region, historically a land of shepherds and farmers. For this reason, in Abruzzo's proverbs you can find many references to animals and to a simple life dedicated to sustenance and frugality. They are short, to the point and have the simple humour that reflects the "strong and gentle" (*forte e gentile*) character of Abruzzese people.

Very often these proverbs are introduced by "My grandfather used to say..." or "Do you know what my mother always said?"

Because this is how they are passed down: from generation to generation, standing the test of time thanks to their universal value.

Let me share with you a few of the most common Abruzzese proverbs. Part of my family comes from Cocullo, in the province of L'Aquila, which is why I present the proverbs in the dialect that is most familiar to me, the *cocullese* dialect. While traveling through Abruzzo, you might hear the same proverbs pronounced in a different dialect, with slight variations.

Photo by Paul Scheuermeir, Civitaquana, 1930



DOPO GLI CUMBIETT' ESCE GLI DIFIETT'

Italian: *Dopo i confetti escono i difetti.*

English: After the sugared almonds come the flaws.

All the flaws and problems in a couple usually emerge after the marriage. Confetti (sugared almonds) are used all over Italy to celebrate marriage.

A SCIACQUÀ LA COCC' AGL'ASN, C' S' RIMETT' TIEMP' E SAPON'

Italian: *A lavare la testa dell'asino, ci si rimette tempo e sapone.*

English: You will waste time and soap in trying to wash a donkey's head.

Even though donkeys are not particularly unintelligent, in places where they were – or still are – used as work animals, “donkey” can be a synonym for “a non-intelligent or stubborn person.” The meaning of this proverb is that trying to reason with stubborn people is useless and even inconvenient.

VALE CCHIÙ N' SUOLD' DE SPARAGN' CHE CENTO DE GUADAGN'

Italian: *Vale di più un soldo risparmiato che cento soldi guadagnati.*

English: A coin saved is worth more than a hundred coins earned.

This proverb wants to highlight the great value attached to savings and frugality, especially in older times.

DAGL' E DAGL', PURE LA CIPOLL' DIVENTA AGL'

Italian: *Dai e dai, anche la cipolla diventa aglio.*

English: By dint of insisting, even the onion turns into garlic.

If you persist in something, you can obtain even the most unlikely results.

GL' GUAI D' LA PAGNAT' L'SA LA CHUCCHIAR'

Italian: *I guai della pignatta li sa il cucchiaino di legno.*

English: Only the wooden spoon knows the troubles of the cooking pot.

This proverb aims at warning that only we ourselves, or those closest to us, really know our life and troubles; just as only the spoon truly knows the content of the pot since it is in close contact with it. The proverb is an exhortation not to judge someone else's life.

Finally, here is one of my favourite proverbs from Abruzzo that always cheers me up, even in the most difficult situations:

QUANN' UN' VED' SCUR', NN È SEMBR' NOTT'

Italian: *Quando uno vede scuro, non è sempre notte.*

English: When you see everything dark, it's not always night.

It means that very often things are not as bad as they may seem. I think it's a positive proverb that comes in handy to tackle the challenges that life can present.

Daniela Gentile is a certified (DITALS) Italian language teacher based in L'Aquila where she runs an Italian school.

www.gentilmenteschool.com

A DAY IN FONTECCHIO

by Valeria Pica

The small Medieval village of Fontecchio in the Province of L'Aquila makes for a great day trip destination. Walk its old streets brimming with history and explore the village's cultural projects aimed at reviving the community.



Fontecchio. Photo via Comune di Fontecchio/Facebook

Fontecchio is nestled on a mountain slope in the Sirente-Velino Regional Park. The town's origins go far back, to the times of Italic tribes that lived in this stretch of the Aterno Valley and whose traces have been found in the area – but very little is known about them. Some of the village's Medieval and Renaissance buildings sit on Roman foundations revealing its past. Fontecchio was scarred by two big sieges that marked its history and traditions. In 1425, the mercenary Braccio Fortebraccio da Montone ravaged the area, but courageous locals defended Fontecchio. The Spanish

Army arrived at the town's gates in 1648. According to local legend, the siege lasted 50 days but, at the end, Marquise Corvi fired a musket from his palace and killed the head of the assailants, saving the town. Since then, every evening at 8pm, the clock tower in Fontecchio rings 50 times to remind of the siege and the glorious victory.

Today, the town faces its challenges like many other rural areas in Abruzzo. However, the local community has created many art and culture projects attracting international artists in an effort to revive the town. Spend a day in the town, and you will explore many layers of its past and present.

WHAT TO SEE

MEDIEVAL FOUNTAIN

For centuries, the main square, Piazza del Popolo, was Fontecchio's commercial and religious center, as well as a meeting place for residents and visitors. Artisans' workshops overlooked the square, there was a municipal oven, the parish church and, in the centre of it all, the 14th-century fountain fed by the waters from the nearby mountains. The slaughterhouse and tannery, which used to be located not far from the fountain, made Fontecchio a thriving trade town until the 1800s.

The fountain is decorated with carvings of plants, human figures and masks spouting jets of water. The frescoed wall depicting the Virgin Mary and Infant Jesus serve as a beautiful backdrop. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most impressive squares in the whole Subequana Valley.

Medieval fountain



Torre dell'Orologio

THE CLOCK TOWER

The town's medieval layout of Fontecchio is still intact and in many ways still well preserved. Advancing from the Piazza del Popolo towards the centre of the village, you will see the 14th-century square Clock Tower (*Torre dell'Orologio*) with the entrance gate that used to be part of the wall which once surrounded the town. The clock is Roman style, typical for old convents, which started counting the hours from 6pm, the time of prayer, making four rounds to cover the full day. Three other gates existed in Fontecchio and are still visible today.

SPAZIO DELLA MEMORIA

The Spazio della Memoria is a permanent photo exhibition by Roberto Grillo showing old and new images of L'Aquila. The three main sections show the Remote Past, the Recent Past, and the Present Time telling the story of the city before and after the earthquake of 2009. The photos are displayed on the building next to the clock tower.



Terzo Paradiso installation

MAP VILLAGE MURALS

CONVENTO DI SAN FRANCESCO AND TERZO PARADISO

A ten-minute walk from the village brings you to the convent of San Francesco. Built in the 13th century and renovated in early 1700, it still retains stratifications of the various reconstructions. The walls are adorned by fading medieval frescoes by Giotto's school and fragments of Renaissance paintings depicting both sacred scenes and scenes of daily life. Behind the convent, an installation by Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto can be seen.

Villagers and pupils from the schools in the area participated in creating the installation called Terzo Paradiso (Third Paradise). They brought stones and rubble from their houses destroyed by the earthquake in 2009, which badly damaged Fontecchio. The infinity symbol they constructed represents the renewed union of the community after the natural disaster.

Address: Via San Pio, 6.

Walking from San Francesco Convent to the hamlet of San Pio, you can see the temporary housing modules (*MAP-Moduli Abitativi Provvisori*) village built after the earthquake to house people forced to leave their homes. Many of our village's 350 residents still live here. On the town's invitation, a group of Italian and international artists started painting the walls of the houses with colourful murals. A local cultural association is also working on a project to bring artists-in-residence to homes in Fontecchio to make the village a place of intercultural and artistic exchange in the years to come.

OASIS OF FONTECCHIO

This small park and wildlife sanctuary has a small pond, an equipped picnic area, and a short walking trail along the river. You can see roe deer, barn owls, and hawks recovering from injuries before they can be released back in the wild.

Address: Via del Rio, 3. Open on request. Call 0039 3287174225.

OUTSIDE FONTECCHIO

Following the river, you can discover some interesting sites such as an old privately-owned mill and the ruins of an ancient Roman bridge. Just past the bridge, the trail continues up to the mountains to Pagliare di Fontecchio, a village built in the 15th century. Local farming families used to bring their livestock here in summer months. There they also cultivated wheat, potatoes, spelt, and lentils. Nowadays, the ancient stone houses have been turned into holiday homes where families can escape the heat and enjoy stunning panoramic views of the surrounding mountains. Pagliare di Fontecchio can also be reached by car (it is marked on Google Maps for easy navigation).

WHERE TO EAT

RISTORANTE DEL RIO

A family-run restaurant serving simple pasta and meat dishes.

Address: Strada Statale 261. Tel.: 0039 0862850010.

Opening hours: Monday – Thursday and Saturday 12.30 – 2.30pm, 7pm – 10pm. Friday and Sunday lunch only.

RISTORANTE IL SIRENTE

Located in the Convent of San Francis, this elegant restaurant offers a small selection of traditional dishes.

Address: Via San Pio, 1. Tel.: 0039 086285376.



A street in Fontecchio

Opening hours: Wednesday – Saturday 12pm – 2.30pm, 7.30pm – 10pm, Tuesday and Sunday lunch only. Closed on Monday.

Valeria Pica is a Fontecchio local, professional tour guide and art historian. To organise tours in English, you can contact her at valpica@gmail.com.



JOIN VALERIA FOR
A VIRTUAL WALK AROUND
FONTECCHIO ON
OUR [FACEBOOK PAGE](#)

AUGUST 6 @ 5PM CEST/11AM
EST/8AM PST

A HEART FOR ROME, BUT A PULL TOWARDS ABRUZZO

By Linda Dini Jenkins

How one couple created a home in the hills of Penne and became passionate advocates for Abruzzese cuisine

Stephen Hughes did not come to Abruzzo in the usual manner. By his own admission, Hughes was born into a rather eccentric American family: one of six children, a math professor father who went to Europe on a two-year sabbatical and never left, and 16 schools (mostly in the UK) by the time he was 16. He holds both American and British passports and has been fluent in Italian for many years.

He spent the “best” two years of his childhood in Rome, but during the second year, the family rented a tiny cottage in the mountains of Abruzzo. “It left an indelible impression on me,” he says. “Years later, I

returned to Abruzzo for my own sabbatical and ended up buying land.” One parcel near Penne was planned for four houses. Hughes sold three of the plots and, with his wife, Marion, built a house on the plot on the top of the hill. Today, that’s Casa del Colle, a luxury five-bedroom villa nestled among 2.5 acres of olive and fruit trees which they rent out in the summer.

Although he dropped out of school at 16, Stephen went back as a mature student and studied law. He became a partner in a law firm and has expertise helping National Health Service organizations with commercial issues.

Stephen Hughes working in his olive grove



Now basically retired, Stephen – who splits his time between the Penne area and Bristol, UK – is a trustee of a community farm near Bristol and a volunteer at a cookery school where he imports talent to offer cooking classes in Abruzzo.

But Casa del Colle didn't happen overnight. It was built over a five-year period, from 2008 – 2013 and, because of its rural location, involved a lot of planning and permissions from the authorities. They chose this area because of its unspoiled nature, especially the mountains, which have enabled the area to retain so many of its traditional roots.

Stephen and Marion also have an additional nine hectares and an old farmhouse. He farms the land – comprising 500 olive trees – and harvests the olives every year. He ships them and sells them in the UK. His dream is to one day renovate the old farmhouse into a dedicated cooking school.

A PASSION FOR FOOD AND GOOD WORKS

"I love the approach to food and eating here in Abruzzo. You eat what is seasonal and what is local," he explains. "You cook what your mother cooked, and she cooks what her mother cooked. I love the close connection between the land and the local traditions of cooking and food."

He works closely with the not-for-profit cooking school back in Bristol, [Square Food](#), which every year reaches around 800 people of all ages, abilities and walks of life, teaching them to cook good food from scratch. It's clearly his passion: Stephen co-hosts a tour with Square Food – Between the Mountains and the Sea – featuring a week-long food and cooking adventure in Abruzzo, with all the profits going to help the charity's great work. In hosting these tours, Stephen says he wants to share that passion and give something back to a local economy with traditions that he cherishes and the families and farmers who have made such an impact on his life.

"I love what this part of Italy means for me and want to share it," he says. "I have a passion for how rural Italy has retained a connection with the land and local food (and food traditions) that I feel we have lost; a connection that isn't simply a nostalgic backward look at a way of life that most of the western world is losing, but an approach to food that we need to rediscover."

"We sometimes worry that we have an overly romantic view of this 'traditional life,' he says, "And we know it's different for the young people who need to leave and find jobs elsewhere. But for part-time residents – with the benefit of a retirement income – it makes being here a rewarding and very enjoyable experience."

TRUST AND REPUTATION

This avid mountain lover has wise words for anyone thinking about moving to Abruzzo. "Don't move here just because it's affordable. And don't be too 'Western European' about how things are done," he advises. "There is generally a right solution, but you will reach it by a circuitous route more often than not. If you try to be too commercial about your approach, you will find communicating very frustrating. Trust and reputation are far more important here than a written contract." And that advice comes from a retired solicitor!

Stephen and Marion came in January this year and have spent the lockdown at Casa del Colle. They can't think of a better place to have spent the time during these "strange changes to our world." Because they are newly retired, how much time they spend in Abruzzo is still up in the air. "My ideal was always 50/50 between Penne and Bristol," he says. "But with three children, two grandchildren and a house back in the UK, we shall see."

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

RESTORING A NOBLE PALACE

By Bimbi Bellhouse

Many dream of restoring a noble palace, but only a few get such an opportunity.

We are starting a series of articles about a massive restoration project undertaken by a group of friends who want to turn an abandoned *palazzo* into a luxurious residency. Follow their adventures, ups and downs as they undertake a costly and challenging restoration in the small town of Casoli.

Some years ago, we bought a farmhouse outside Casoli, in the province of Chieti. While walking in the historic centre of this beautiful hilltop town, I often admired the abandoned palace in the historic centre. Once grand and magnificent, it stood empty, shabby and sad as a reminder of glorious days gone by. I had only ever seen it from the street and had wondered what might be found behind its imposing facades; I secretly thought that it would be the most marvellous thing to be able to bring the palazzo back to life and to restore it to its rightful place in the heart of the community.

Finally, 15 years ago, I got a chance to see inside it. The owners, the Ricci family, invited me to see it. At that point the house had been empty for over 20 years. The family had left the building forever, moving to their palazzi in Francavilla and Rome. They had been in residence during the tumultuous World War II years, housing first the Germans and then, after 1943, the Allies who were made very welcome by the family. When I first saw it, the historic building was still in sound shape: the water-tight metal roof, installed as a precaution, was



Palazzo Ricci

in place, the top floors were tidy and the family chapel was in perfect order, with candlesticks and prayer books in place, a poignant reminder of those who had lived there for centuries but had now gone. Over the years, the first and ground floors had been leased to the town hall,



The town of Casoli

partly as a school, partly as council offices. The fabulous shuttered windows, giving onto the garden, at that point still kept tidy, were evocative of past times.

Palazzo Ricci was first mentioned in the cadastral records in 1522. Back then, it was just a *casata*, a humble dwelling, from which can be traced not only the development of the property into a palace but also the fortunes of the Ricci family throughout the succeeding centuries. In 1767 we find the first mention of what will evolve into the splendid garden behind the house. The family originally used it as a vegetable garden but as the house became grander, this green space was turned into a recreational private park close to the existing boundaries of the town. It included its own well, noted at that time and still now in the same place. Palazzo Ricci as we know it today was built in 1799 and at that time

officially described as a “Casa Palazziata del Barone Ricci, sita nel Rione del Sole.”

Another interesting fact is that the Ricci family, from 1772 onwards, followed an unusual policy of primogeniture, deciding to leave the whole inheritance to the oldest male heir rather than splitting it equally amongst the family.

The Ricci family itself has been in the Chietino since the time when a powerful Feudal Lord of the Orsini family, one of the most illustrious and noblest houses of Italy – counting five Popes in its number – granted it the Feudal Rights of a “Noble Count” on 300 hectares of land towards the end of the 1400s. The family was always politically active through the centuries and had a significant impact on the life of the citizens of Casoli, being in large part both paternalistic and philanthropic in their role as one of the most important families in the region.



Stained glass doors in Palazzo Ricci

The Ricci family were already thinking of selling – hence their first invitation 15 years ago – but at that time there was no economic sense in buying it. Certainly not at the outrageously high price that was suggested. There were practically no foreigners in the area and no tourism, so it would have been impossible to make a success of it at that time.

Years passed and we were busy with work, with family and friends. Every year, however, someone would mention Palazzo Ricci to me and, even though the price fell year by year, it was still not enough to make me think seriously about it as a project. Then one day, in 2018, our clients and friends from Utah, USA came to stay. We went into town for the Patron Saint’s celebration,

which is the highlight of the year for Casoli and its people. I showed them the historic centre, the castle with its views to the sea and to the mountains, and we walked around the town enjoying the vibrancy of the day. With time to kill before lunch, I thought it would be great to show them the abandoned palace, suspended in time, in the heart of the town.

Shortly after their return to the US, they called me to say they loved the palazzo, wanted to give the historic building a second chance and whether I could help them realise their dream. It sounded scary and exhilarating at the same time. I said “yes.”

<https://palazzoricci.club>

COOL CAVES FOR SUMMER ADVENTURES

By Anna Lebedeva

When summer temperatures rise to sizzling hot, seek shelter in cool caves. Abruzzo has many spectacular caverns: some of them offer easy short itineraries; others, less accessible, appeal to thrill seekers.



Grotta del Cervo, one of the two caves of the Pietrasecca complex. Photo via grottedipietrasecca.it

GROTTE DI PIETRASECCA

There are more than 500 explored caves in Abruzzo and each has something unique to offer. “The *Grotta Nera* in Pennapiedimonte, in the Parco Nazionale della Majella, is one of very few in the world made of Moonmilk, a type of white creamy calcite substance,” explains Ezio Burri, professor from L’Aquila University and a former president of the Speleological Association of Abruzzo. “There are also many smaller caverns which served as shelters for prehistoric tribes, as well as caves used for centuries as hermitages by monks. New caves, big and small, are found in Abruzzo regularly, with many of them are still waiting to be discovered.”

Part of a large natural reserve which covers over 100 hectares, this cave system will make you feel like a real explorer-speleologist. Two caves, *Grotta del Cervo* and *Grotta dell’Ovito* can be visited on guided tours. Both are a fascinating labyrinth of stalactites and stalagmites, lakes, streams and narrow corridors. The *Grotta del Cervo* is 2.5km long and was discovered only in the 1980s. Scientists were delighted to find here a treasure-trove of materials to study: ancient Roman coins from the 4th century, as well as bones of



Grotta dell'Ovito. Photo via grottedipietrasecca.it

a bear, lynx, cave lion and deer, all dating back to the Pleistocene, the geological epoch that lasted from about 2,580,000 to 11,700 years ago.

You can choose from three types of itineraries: a basic tourist one (suitable for children and adults), which lasts one hour; a longer, more adventurous one which will take you deeper in the cave and require walking in straight corridors and knee-deep water; and, the ultimate adventure itinerary lasting eight hours, that requires some mental and physical fitness. On longer routes you will be able to see 11 colonies of resident bats. All necessary equipment is provided.

Address: Carsoli (AQ), Via del Popolo. Enter "Riserva Naturale Grotte di Pietrasecca" in Google Maps to get there.

Opening hours: vary depending on the month. In summer, there are four entrance slots: 9am, 11.30am, 3pm and 5pm. Check the opening times for each cave on the [website](#). Booking is required. Tickets from €12 to €90 depending on the itinerary. See the tours descriptions (in Italian) [here](#).



Grotte di Stiffe. Photo via Grotte di Stiffe/Facebook

GROTTE DI STIFFE

One of the region's main tourist attractions, the Grotte di Stiffe, registers up to 600 visitors per day in summer months. Even the current pandemic has not dampened people's curiosity and, since the lockdown finished two months ago, more than 6000 tourists visited the cave.

The length of the cave is 2.6km but most of it remains unexplored, with the tourist itinerary running for 700 metres through caverns along the underground stream. In the *Sala della Cascata* you'll see a magnificent waterfall dropping from a height of 20 metres, at its best and fullest in spring. In the oldest part of the cave glistens the 5-metres-deep Black Lake. Here the guide can show you bat fossils incastrated in calcareous formations. The visit lasts about one hour and is suitable for both children and adults. The temperature in the cave is always around +10C, so bring a warm jacket.

Make sure you have a face mask and gloves (you'll have to wear them during your tour as the rails in the cave cannot be cleaned with disinfectants).

Grotta del Cavallone. Photo via Grotta del Cavallone/Facebook

Address: San Demetrio Nè Vestini (AQ). The location is well signposted. Enter "Grotte di Stiffe" in your Google Maps for directions.

Opening hours: April 1 – October 15 from 10am to 6pm, October 16 – March 31 from 10am to 5pm. Some guides speak basic English. Booking is required by calling at 333 7851582, 0862 810834 or [online](#). Price: €10.

GROTTA DEL CAVALLONE

Like many caves in Abruzzo, the *Grotta del Cavallone* provided shelter to men in pre-historic times and, later, to many shepherds. First explored in the mid-17th century, it became the second cave in Italy to be turned into a tourist attraction, in 1893. The *Grotta del Cavallone* extends for more than two kilometres and is divided into a main gallery and several smaller caverns with lakes, tunnels, underground pools and magnificent stalactites and stalagmites. The itinerary is about an hour long.

Located near Lama dei Peligni at an altitude of 1300 metres, the cave is accessed via cable car, which is an adventure in itself. They are more like cable "baskets" that were more common in the old days, so the ride is certainly not for the faint-hearted. If you are lucky, you might spot a



pair of golden eagles that live in this part of the Valle di Taranta.

At the moment, the cableway is undergoing a major overhaul and the cave is closed to the public. Keep an eye on their [website](#) for updates.

GROTTA SCURA

Reached by an easy trail from the small village of Bolognano, the *Grotta Scura* is small but fascinating, with breath-taking panoramic views over the Orta Valley. Archaeologists have found evidence of a Neolithic Age settlement in the cave. The main part of the *Grotta Scura* is gated, so you would need to hire a guide or visit it with an organised group. Once you get deeper into the cave, the guide will show you microbial colonies that glow silver in the dark and can only be seen if you have an LED lamp on your helmet.

To book a visit, contact Majambiente at 0039 085922343 or send a WhatsApp message

to 0039 347 0367084. For organised group visits, check their [online calendar](#).

OTHER CAVES

Aspiring speleologists and adventurous types can visit many other fascinating caves accompanied by expert guides. Speleologist Valerio Natarelli has visited a good deal of them. "As a speleologist specialising in archaeology, I love the Grotta dei Callarelli, Grotta del Mortaio and Grotta Riparo," he admits. "They are all located in the Orta Valley and used to be frequented by prehistoric men." He says one of the latest discoveries, the Grotta della Lupa in Roccamorice, is also magnificent but is still being explored and only speleologists with experience can tackle it.

To arrange a private caving adventure, contact one of the registered speleological guides listed [here](#). "Based on your level of fitness and experience, the knowledgeable guides will suggest the most suitable caves and plan your visit," says Ezio Burri.

Grotta Scura. Photo by Jacqui Matthews-Price



WILDLIFE ON YOUR DOORSTEP


By Clare Lusher

Abruzzo has great appeal for wildlife photographers, and you do not need to venture too far to find subjects for your portraits. In this photo essay, a wildlife photographer showcases the hidden world within a few steps from her house.

The mountain ranges of the Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park, the presence of the Apennine wolf and the Marsican brown bear, along with all of the other wonderful and abundant wildlife in the region were enough of a draw for me to want to live here with my partner who had decided to move to Civitella del Tronto.

During the lockdown I did not need to walk

beyond the boundaries of our property or indeed the town itself to find subjects for my photography. From the river running at the bottom of the valley to the fields above the house, and with enough time spent slowly and carefully searching through undergrowth and quietly watching the trees and skies, I found wildlife aplenty to photograph just within a 500-metre radius of home.



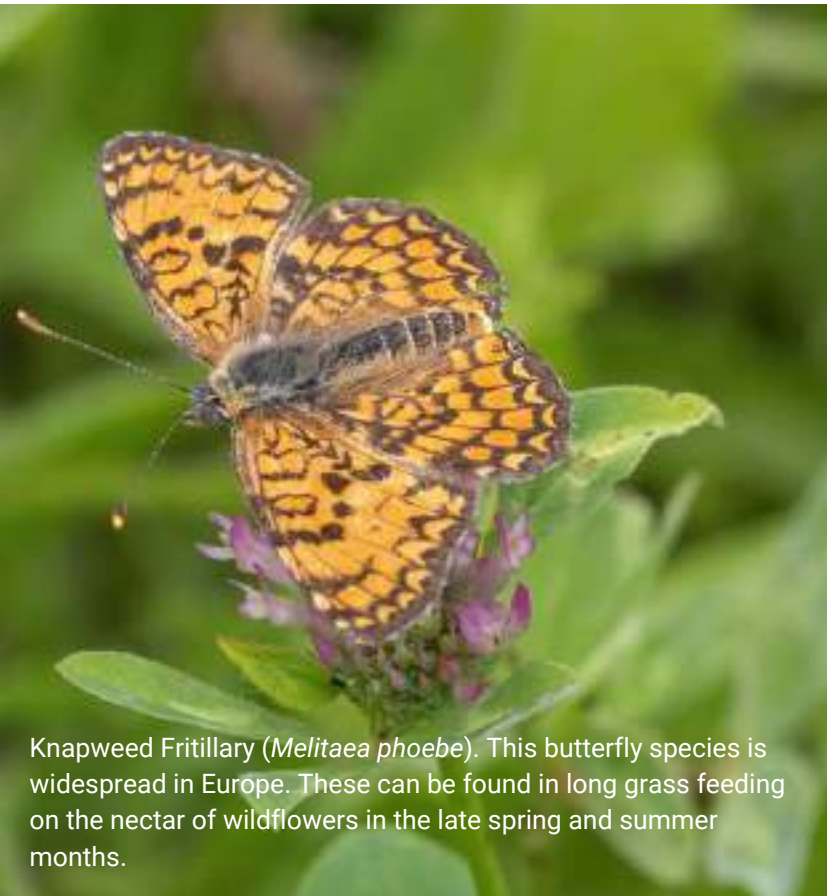
Civitella del Tronto. The town is located in the Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park and was built on the former settlement of Beregra.



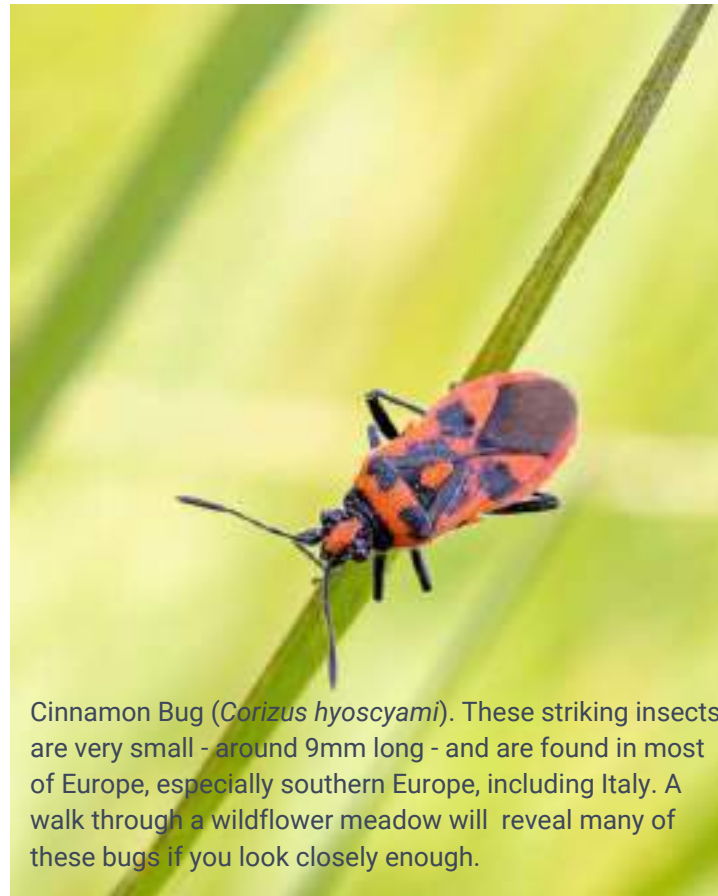
Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*). This is a small heathland butterfly which can be found between April and October. Found in meadows and rocky areas they will regularly settle on wildflowers for nectar and to rest.



Northern Italian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis siculus* ssp. *campestris*). These are fairly laid-back reptiles which live in woodpiles and covered areas over winter here in Italy and seem to move to trees and other areas during the summer months. I have managed to get fairly close to these animals and photograph them by sitting quietly and gaining their trust.



Knapweed Fritillary (*Melitaea phoebe*). This butterfly species is widespread in Europe. These can be found in long grass feeding on the nectar of wildflowers in the late spring and summer months.



Cinnamon Bug (*Corizus hyoscyami*). These striking insects are very small - around 9mm long - and are found in most of Europe, especially southern Europe, including Italy. A walk through a wildflower meadow will reveal many of these bugs if you look closely enough.



Santa Croce looking towards Civitella del Tronto. Views across wheat fields in this rural area. The sun peeks through a cloudy sky on a warm evening.



Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). A large predatory bird species, they are persecuted in many countries by landowners and farmers, but they are beautiful and superbly well-adapted birds. I am able to watch a pair of Buzzards here as they soar above the house hunting for food. They are currently rearing chicks so are busy parents and consequently extremely active in the day.



Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*). This passerine bird species is extremely common, although not necessarily seen the most often as they are small, light and very quiet birds in contrast to some of the noisier birds heard within the hedgerows in Italy. I was fortunate to notice that a wren had nested in an outhouse next to our home. I spent time watching and unobtrusively taking photographs as this parent wren repeatedly visited her nest each day to feed her young. She successfully raised two young wrens both of which fledged safely.



Pool Frog (*Pelophylax lessonae*). A European frog species which may be declining due to human encroachment and water pollution from farm run-off (nitrates). These are vocal frogs and can be heard most often in the evening.

PHOTOGRAPHING WILDLIFE

For anyone wishing to learn how to photograph wildlife, the initial outlay is always in obtaining camera equipment and time spent learning how to use it. A good macro lens such as a 100mm macro can be bought as both professional and entry-level models and are great if you want to get very close to your wildlife subjects and produce beautifully detailed and artful images.

Similarly, to get close to distant subjects including birds and mammals – which tend to shy away from a camera and indeed humans – a telephoto lens is essential. Start with a cheaper second-hand telephoto lens such as those produced by Tamron and Sigma. An extender, which works by increasing the focal length of the lens, can be a good investment in time for bird photography. You may also want

to purchase a sturdy tripod and gimbal head. Last but not least, you will require a lot of patience. Spend time reading about and watching your chosen photographic subject, be it a bird, insect, mammal or even plant. Wildlife photography should be as much about learning about your subject (behaviour, breeding, life cycles) as a study of how to take a pleasing and technically proficient image.

Clare Lusher is an imaging scientist and wildlife photographer based in Abruzzo. She offers one-to-one teaching for beginner and intermediate photographers and is always happy to spend time in the company of other photographers and hikers.

www.clarelusherphotography.com

MEET, EAT AND BE MERRY

By Katrina King

The little-known village of Cansano, in the province of L'Aquila, has only 200 people and not many know it. Even the Abruzzesi get it confused with the town of Canzano in the Teramo province. On the road between Sulmona and Campo di Giove, at an altitude of 900 metres, it has harsh winters but in summer, it is a place to escape the heat and enjoy the cooler mountain climate.

There are a few places to eat in the town but the *Locanda Cansanese* is my favourite. My partner, Jacopo, who is from Cansano, introduced me to the *Locanda*. Ezio Ciampaglione, head chef and owner, has lived in Cansano all his life, so he understands that it is not only a business and livelihood for him but it is also a place that is strongly interweaved in the social fabric of the small town: a place for locals to meet and a way to bring people from out of town.

The *Locanda Cansanese* has a modern feel with a slick slate bar but the wooden chairs and marble-topped tables built by a local craftsman add more traditional touches. The pub itself is small and welcoming, and the walls are adorned with photos and newspaper articles about Cansano's past. Unlike some local pubs where being a *straniero* (foreigner) gets you stared at, *Locanda Cansanese* makes you feel at home, and people often come from nearby towns for dinner or simply stop in for an *aperitivo*.

Last year before Christmas, we took some friends to eat at the *Locanda*. With our Christmas jumpers on, we met just after midday and toasted to our good fortune. We had reserved the back room where the eight adults and one toddler fitted in comfortably, men at one end, women at the other, and the toddler running in between. As is customary with Italian lunches, we ate until we



were ready to burst, paused, and then ate some more, as the wine and beer flowed freely. Appetisers included local seasonal vegetables, sausages, prosciutto, cured meats, and cheese. The main menu boasted a variety of traditional food, including a number of pasta dishes, gnocchi, and plenty of meat, as well as options for vegetarians and vegans. I'm told the traditional *arrosticini* are particularly good but being vegetarian, I've never tried them! It was all rounded off with a home-made dessert and a cheeky glass of local liqueurs *genziana*, *limoncello*, or in my case, a sweet *ratafia*. Our long lunch cost us about €30 per person and we all left feeling full and happy. It is set to become our little tradition to meet up there, eat, drink and have fun.

Address: Piazza XX Settembre, Cansano (AQ)

Open: Friday to Wednesday 11am - 3pm, 4pm - 2am. Closed Thursdays. Telephone: 333 543 6676. Reservations recommended. Indoor and outdoor (summer only) seating.

PUMPKIN SHOOTS PASTA SAUCE

By Leonardo Visconti

My mother comes from a big family of 10 children from the small village of Villa Sant'Angelo. Since I was a little boy, she taught me how to respect food and to not waste anything. This precept created many recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. The vegetable garden was, and still is, the cornerstone of our daily life, which helped to get through harsh winters with preserved greens and vegetables.

One of my favourite traditional recipes is this simple pasta sauce that we call "the joy of the vegetable garden" (*la gioia dell'orto*). Its central ingredient is the

tenerone, a pumpkin shoot consisting of the plant's tip, leaves and soft stem. For the recipe, use only the top 2 leaves with the stem. Sometimes you will find a very small pumpkin, which can also be used. With this recipe I want to share my family's traditions, which have always inspired me and reflect typical flavours of my native area in Abruzzo.

Leonardo Visconti is the owner and chef of Visconti Kitchen & Cooking Experience. Together with his Canadian wife Jaynie, they created their Cooking Experience — a project rooted in pride, family traditions, and a love of good food.



LA GIOIA DELL'ORTO

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 people

- 5 or 6 *teneroni* pumpkin shoots
- 1 courgette, grilled and cut into strips
- ½ medium-sized eggplant, grilled and cut into strips
- basil cream (see below)
- ½ tablespoon garlic cream (see below)
- ½ cup vegetable broth (preferably, homemade)
- 10 cherry tomatoes
- generous amount of extra virgin olive oil

Basil Cream

- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- large bunch of washed basil
- 3 cups of vegetable broth (preferably, homemade)

Garlic Cream

- 100 g extra virgin olive oil
- 1 whole head of garlic

PREPARATION

Wash and blanch *teneroni* in boiling salted water for about 3-5 minutes, drain, and set aside.

Make Basil Cream:

Fry the sliced shallot in two tablespoons of olive oil on medium heat. Once golden, add potatoes and 3 cups of vegetable broth. When the potatoes are soft, put the mixture in a blender with the fresh basil and mix until creamy. Set aside.

Make Garlic Cream:

Peel the garlic cloves and remove the garlic germs (the light green sprout in the centre of the clove). Cut the garlic clove in half and, using a paring knife or your fingernail, pry the germ out. Put the garlic cloves and olive oil together and, using a blender, mix until smooth.

In a large frying pan, mix 1 tablespoon of olive oil, ½ tablespoon of garlic cream and the 10 cherry tomatoes and cook for about three minutes on medium heat. Add the grilled vegetables and *teneroni* to the tomato mixture. Add two heaped tablespoons of basil cream and ½ cup of vegetable broth, stir over a low heat and salt to taste.

Cook your pasta (*maccheroni alla chitarra* pasta is good for this sauce). Mix your cooked pasta with the vegetable sauce and serve hot.

GREEN FIGS IN OIL

By Connie De Vincentis

The fig season is almost here! But some of them are still unripe and, if you want to try something new, this traditional recipe is for you.

Here in Tocco da Casauria, where I live and run my home restaurant, there are so many abandoned fig trees, we collect huge quantities of them. The trees seem to always produce, even without man's intervention. Although the fruit is smaller if the trees don't get their yearly pruning, when there is a balance of sun and rain, they are quite happy to grow independently. Obviously, the best way to eat them is fresh off the tree, but they are also perfect for winter preserves.

You don't need to wait until figs ripen to make preserves. You can use green figs! Here in Tocco, my husband's family made their own *fichi sott'olio* – that's right, figs in oil. Green unripe figs are turned into delicious preserves. I learned the recipe from my mother-in-law, Donnina.

The sweet and sour *fichi sott'olio* are good as appetisers and can also accompany roasts and stews. I am happy to share the recipes with you and hope you enjoy them as much as we do.

Only the figs that come out in August and September can be used for this month's recipe. The early ones that we have in July are the so-called *fioroni*. They are not as firm, have less flavour and are not suitable for this recipe. Wear gloves when picking unripe figs as they ooze a milky liquid that can irritate your skin.

In the next issue I will share a sweet version of the recipe that my mother-in-law used to call "fake figs in oil."

Connie De Vincentis runs a home restaurant and cooking school in Tocco da Casauria.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg of small, green, firm, unripe figs
- 300 grams of sugar
- 300 grams of water
- 700 ml of white vinegar
- ½ litre of olive oil
- 150 grams sea salt
- 1 teaspoon of pepper corns
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
- Pinch of hot chilli seeds

PREPARATION

Mix sugar, water, vinegar, salt and the spices in a pot stirring often until sugar and salt are dissolved. When the temperature reaches about 70C (hot but not boiling), take the pot off the flame.

Wash the figs well and cut off their stem. Place them in a wide pot or a solid plastic tub, so as to create a single layer only. Pour the liquid over the figs and leave in infusion for at least 36 hours, stirring 3 or 4 times.

After the infusion, take the figs out of the liquid and place them in a single layer on a cotton tablecloth, folded over for thickness, and leave in a dry place for 24 hours. After the first 24 hours, replace the cloth with a dry one and repeat the procedure turning the figs around.

When finished (48 hours of drying), place figs in layers in jars pouring olive oil on every layer until full. Figs must be covered with oil. Make sure you there are no air pockets (move the figs slightly with a wooden skewer, to help the oil to fill the jar evenly).

Seal and preserve in a dark, cool room or pantry.

PEACHES IN CERASUOLO WINE

By Carla D'Angelo

I first tasted *pesche al vino* (peaches in wine) in the house of an Abruzzese friend on a hot summer day. She is originally from the region of Campania, where this boozy dessert is very popular. Having moved to Abruzzo, she added a local twist to the recipe by soaking peaches in Cerasuolo, the Abruzzo-style rosé wine. Darker and more structured, it lends this refreshing summer dessert more character.

Crunchy nectarines are my favourite for this recipe but any type of peach with firm flesh will do. It looks beautiful served in wine glasses or old-fashioned glass dessert bowls.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 4 people

- 4 nectarines, sliced in 8-16 segments
- 250ml Cerasuolo wine
- 4 tbsp sugar
- A few leaves of fresh mint, sage and lemon balm, chopped

PREPARATION

Add the sugar to the wine and blend it thoroughly until dissolved. Put the sliced peaches in the wine and stir in a few sprinkles of chopped herbs. Leave the peaches in the fridge overnight. Serve chilled in wine glasses or glass dessert bowls with fresh aromatic herbs and a few sprinkles of sugar.



DO YOU KNOW A TRADITIONAL RECIPE FROM ABRUZZO YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE? SEND IT TO EDITOR@ABRUZZISSIMO.COM