

artistic historical

itineraries

of the *B*rescia

territory

THE Camonica Valley



PROVINCIA DI BRESCIA
turismo



From the Lombard kingdom to the Venetian domination

Originally, the territory of Brescia was inhabited by ancient Rhaetian tribes from the Alpine and Ligurian Valleys, on the plain and the Pre-Alps. The **Celtics**, and in particular the Cenomani tribe, settled here during the V cent. BC. They conserved their political identity through the end of the II cent. BC thanks to their good relationship with **Rome**. Under the Emperor Octavian Augustus the inhabitants of the ancient "Brixia" became Roman citizens. In 16 BC, Rome with its armies subjugated the Alpine population, who for millenia enscribed their everyday life, wars and religion into the rocks of the Camonica Valley.

After the end of the Roman Empire (476 AD) and the beginning the barbarian invasions, King Alboin descended to Italy (568) and founded the Lombard kingdom. Brescia became the chief town of a dukedom.

Rotari, Duke of Brescia, was elected King of the Lombards in 636 and seven years later enacted an order that codified the laws of his



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people. A noble woman from Brescia, Ansa, wife of the last king of Lombard, **Desiderius**, founded the monastery of San Salvatore, where their daughter Desideria (better known as **Ermengarda**) retired after being disowned in 771 by her husband Charlemagne, King of the Franks.

During the Carolingian period, the inhabitants of Brescia built numerous castles for

defence against Hungarian incursions.

During the fight between the Italian communes and Emperor Frederick I of Swabia (known as Redbeard), the Augustinian monk **Arnaldo da Brescia** stepped in and roared against the corruption of the clergy and in 1154 he stirred the Roman senate against the Pope Adriano IV. Redbeard captured the friar in the next year, handed him over to the pontiff and sent him to the stake.



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The battle between the Guelphs, who defended the independence of the free communes, and the Ghibellines supporting the emperor, ended in 1298 when the rule of Brescia was entrusted to the Bishop **Berardo Maggi**, who reconciled the opposing factions.

A period of stability, but also oppression, began in 1337 with the rule of the **Visconti family**. They reconstructed Brescia Castle and, except during the short period of Sir **Pandolfo Malatesta** from Rimini (1404-21), stayed in power until the advent of the Republic of Venice (1426).

The **Venetian dominion**, opened a great market for productions in which Brescia excelled (arms, paper, yarn, fabric). The Trompia Valley transported cannons to the Venetian arsenal and the paper mills in Toscolano were well known as far as the Ottoman Empire.

In 1508 France, the Pope, the Empire, Spain, and the Italian seigniories of the Este family, the Gonzagas and the Savoias decided to put an end to the expansion of Venice. There followed a long war in which Brescia suffered the ferocious **Pillage of 1512**, a French plan at the centre of which were Commanders Gaston di Foix and Bayard, the "the pure and fearless knight" who was left wounded. In 1516 Brescia returned to the possession of Venice and remained so until 1796 when **Napoleon** imposed on Europe the new order of the French Revolution.

With the Restoration (1815), the Emperor Frank I of Austria founded the **Lombard-Venetian Kingdom**. The Risorgimento views the Brescia people as protagonists in the famous **Ten Days** (March 23 - April 1, 1849),



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in which they erected barricades and ended Austrian control of the city.

In June 1859, the battle of **San Martino and Solferino** took place in the hills by Lake Garda. Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoia with the French ally Napoleon III liberated Lombardy and Venice from the Austrian dominion.

On October 10, 1943, Benito Mussolini established himself at Lake Garda in Gargnano, founding the Italian Social Republic, better known as the **Republic of Salò**.

the Camonica Valley

Going back up the Camonica Valley, the villages on every plateau on the slopes, where stone towers and bell towers rise, often attract our attention. Inaccessibility was the main defence of the furnaces and the blacksmith's hearths, which existed before the Romans arrived.

To this activity, which sprouted from the nearby mines with water and wood necessary for production, is owed the prosperity that provided for the decorating of the churches with surprising works of art.

A magical religiousness, which lasted for eras, from solar rites of the Camuns who engraved the rocks, to the cult of the Roman divinities and to a Christianity that was greedy for miracles as well as for witches to burn.



TOURIST INFORMATION

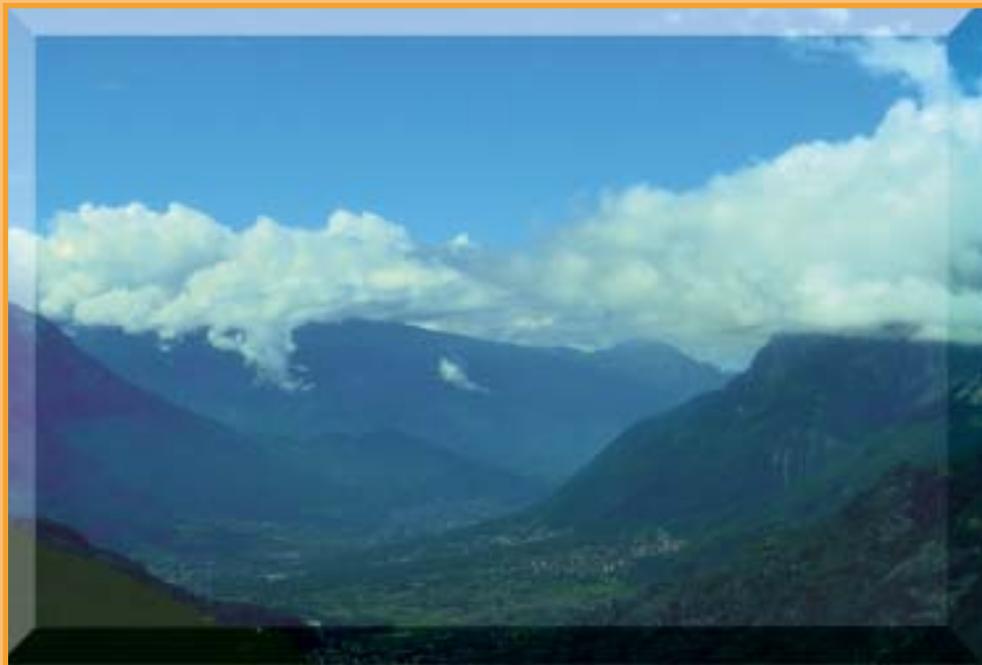
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A BRIEF HISTORY

The numerous rock engravings scattered throughout the valley relate its prehistory. The people of Camonica Valley were subjugated in 16 BC by Proconsul Publius Silius, who went up the valley along the Valeriana road and made Cividate the centre.

In 774 Charlemagne (VIII cent.) entrusted the valley to the monks of Tours, whose presence is recorded by the numerous churches dedicated to St. Martin. Since remote times, the extraction of iron ore and other metals fueled the blast furnaces and workshops which exported their products worldwide.

During his descent to Italy, Redbeard passed through Tonale, finding support from the passionate Ghibelline nobles from the Camonica Valley. Venice, after taking possession of the valley in the XV cent. must have had little trust in them, since it ordered the destruction of many of their castles.

In 1809, Napoleonic soldiers in the northern valley stopped rebel Tyrolese troupes led by Andreas Hofer. On the snowfields of Adamello, in 1915-18, they fought an exhausting trench war.

The bridge over the river reminds us of a millenia of events

In Montecchio the small church of the Oratorio next to the bridge contains an art treasure - The fortresses that once controlled the valley now watch the tourism of the thermal springs - The rediscovery of "The archangel Michael's Fight" in Artogne

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Its strategic trading position helped to increase quickly Darfo's importance, which before the year 1000 became

AT THE DOOR OF THE BRIDGE

The bridge, which was once made of wood, gave access to the fortress which was probably already on Monticolo before 1000 AD. Its possession was disputed, not only because of a toll - that is why the bridge was fitted with a door - but because it gave access to the nearby market. In 1168, "before the Montecchio door", an oath of peace was issued, before the Brescia consul, by the inhabitants of Borno who had constructed a palisade to direct the Oglio River water to their advantage, and by those of Esine. In the long fight, eleven men were killed among which five were vavasours.

a Royal court of the Emperor Henry III and in XII C. had to account for six thousand inhabitants. The first supporter of the Boario thermal springs was the writer Alessandro Manzoni, who, from 1845, drank it daily.



The most important monument at **DARFO BOARIO TERME** is the **Chiesetta dell'Oratorio** (see box on the page 8) in the hamlet of **MONTECCHIO**, which is opposite the apse (with a single lancet window, 1300-1400's) of the parish of **Santa Maria Assunta**. Not far is the risky span of the so called **Roman bridge**, of which the granite and "simona" stone structure was designed by Francesco Cifrondi (1686).

The hamlet of **ERBAN-**



NO, of which the historical centre has been well preserved, is indicated on the road by a Romanesque bell tower with double lancet windows of the **Chiesetta di San Martino**, reduced to a cemetery enclosure which one enters by way of a portal made of "simona" stone and dated 1465. In the chapel, there are frescoes from a period antecedent to Da Cemmo.



Going up to the town, we see the 1500's **Palazzo Federici**, with two trilobated windows on the top floor.



The church of **Santa Maria del Restello**, north and higher elevated, is from the beginning of the XVI C. Here is an admirable series of frescoes, done 1530-40, by Callisto Piazza. In the presbytery at the rear are the



On the external wall of the parish of Gorzone is the **sarcofago di Usone Federici** (1336). The **Castello Federici**, protected high up, is not far from the hamlet; built around 1160 and of long strategic importance. Today, the towers and wall have disappeared and there remains an imposing elegant residence.

Assumption, St. Giorgio and the Princess and on the left, the Decapitation of St. Giovanni Battista.



Going up the road to Angolo Terme, just before the hamlet of GORZONE, you can turn left to the **Parco di Luine**, a hill where prehistoric rock engravings have been discovered (free entry, closed Mon).

The thermal spring vocation goes back to the early 1800's in **ANGOLO TERME** and was concretised for tourists in the 1950's. The parish of **San Lorenzo** is rich with XVII century wood sculptures, of which the portal wings are noteworthy, by the Fantoni

school: fifteen sculptures tell *Episodes of the life of Christ*. The Sanctuary of **San Silvestro** has a great view of the country and valley; built between the XVI-XVIII centuries with an elegant arcade.

Going back towards Darfo, we turn off left to the hamlet of MAZZUNNO.



Next to the parish is the small church of **San Rocco** which contains frescoes from the 1400-1500's by the Pietro da Cemmo school.

From Darfo going



The bridge over the river

towards Brescia we come to **GIANICO**. On the impending mountain with a broad view of the valley, is the Sanctuary of the **Madonna del Monte** (or of the Nativity), constructed in XVIII century on the small church erected in 1536 to invoke protection against the frequent floods. The main

altar piece of the *Nativity of Mary* is by Palma il Giovane.



In **ARTOGNE** it is worth a stop at the church (1400-1500's) of **Santa Maria Elisabetta** on the old Valeriana road. The vault of the presbytery has frescoes recently restored from sleep

under the whitewashing of the time of the plague: it is about a *Fight of the archangel Michael against the forces of*



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A small jewel of painting

The **Chiesetta dell'Oratorio** (or of the Dead) was originally a portico entry to the cemetery where flood victims were buried (1471). The village was destroyed. In following, the walls were raised, recovered with frescoes by the Pietro da Cemmo school.

At the centre of the vault is *Christ* surrounded by *Apostles*, *Evangelists*, *Doctors of the*

Church, Martyrs, Deacons, Confessors, Founders of Orders and Patriarchs. Towards the entry there is a *Madonna of Mercy* who protects the praying under her mantle. The *Universal Judgement* unfolds on the left arch of the contrafaçade. On the far wall, there is a *Madonna on the Throne* and other Saints. On the right wall, an opened window damaged a grand *Crucifixion*. The church is usually open. For information, contact the parish priest (tel. 0364531385).





evil, dated 1568. Other 16th century frescoes can be seen in the nave. The canvasses of the *Via Crucis* deserve attention, said by Pitocchetto, author of another canvass which is now preserved in the parish, attributed to Giacomo Ceruti.

The small rustic church of **Sant'Andrea** (XV C.) on the outside presents some frescoes dated XVI-XVII centuries. Inside, are 15th century votive frescoes. For a visit to these two Artoigne churches, ask at the gates of the nearest houses.

PIAN CAMUNO boasts of a rather original XV century construction complex: **Santa Maria della Rotonda** has in fact an arcade in front of the

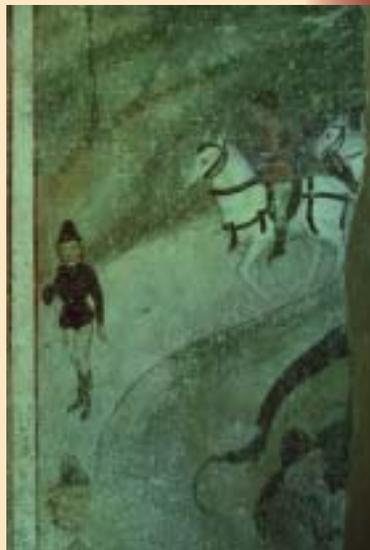
presbytery, supported by a column made of "simona" stone. From behind a wooden grill in the arcade the nuns used to watch church functions. The XV-XVI century frescoes are by the Da Cemmo school.



Not far from here, the small church of **Santa Giulia** (XV cent.) preserves the Romanesque absidioles and the squat bell tower from the original building. For the visit to the two churches, contact the parish priest, tel.

0364591506 - 3336606258.

The **Medieval Tower** near the centre of the town has a square plan, with a roof with two slopes and is on the corner of a wide building.



When the Roman legions arrived in the Camonica Valley

The theatre and the amphitheatre in Cividate entertained the people in the valley - Frescoes by Romanino in Bienno and those by Pietro da Cemmo in Esine - Where the art of working iron by mechanical hammer survives

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CIVIDATE CAMUNO

became the capital of the people of the Camonica Valley (Civitas Camunnorum) when the Romans conquered the



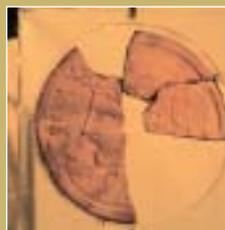
valley in 16 BC. There were the forum, the thermal springs and the temples. In 1973, there came to light, leaning against the flanks of the hill, the **theatre** - parallel portico walls can be seen behind the stage, with two double staircases at the sides - and the **amphitheatre**, of which can be distinguished a small section of the perimeter wall made of fluvial cobblestones and mortar and traces of radial elements that support the stands. This archeological area forms the Theatre and the Amphitheatre Park, an



exceptional just like of the ancient *Civitas Camunnorum*. (Tel. 0364344858)



The centre of the town is dominated by the bulk of the **Medieval Tower**, of in the XIII century and rebuilt in the following century. For information and booking: tel. 0364341244, Pro Loco.



Skin scrapers for cleaning off ointments

Part of the mosaic floor of the thermal springs has been reconstructed in the **National Museum of Archeology of the Camonica Valley**. The statue of Minerva (I AD) is a symbol of the museum, found in 1986 in

Breno. The *oscillum* (I AD) is a curious object. It is a stone disc that has on one side a maenad and on the other a Satyr. It rotated within its own diameter like a goodluck charm in a house. Some iron skin scrapers, used in the bath houses for cleaning ointments from the body, are probably local productions. Hours: 8.30-14.00, closed Mon. if not a holiday; free entrance (tel. 0364344301).



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that includes, in the Brescia territory, the churches of St. Antonio in Breno and St. Maria della Neve in Pisogne.



Objects coming from the excavations of Cividate and from the valley sites are collected in the **Archeology Museum** (see box), located near the highway turnoff.



Another significant monument in Cividate is the small church of **St. Stefano** on a cliff and reached by an 18th C. staircase. In 1969, there emerged proto-Christian and also pre-Roman and prehistoric remains. Research on the side walls of the church estimates its origin to be from the Carolingian period.

BIUNNO is at the centre of an ideal "Romanino Route"



The **Parish of St. Maria Annunziata** (XIV-XV

cent.) in Biunno has walls in the presbytery frescoed by the Renaissance painter with the *Mary's Wedding* on the right, the *Presentation at the Temple* on the left and an unidentified scene at the back. The main altar piece is by Fiamminghino (1632). The *Sibyls* within the arch are by Giovanni Pietro da Cemmo and the *Evangelists and Doctors of the Church* on the vault are by his helper. The nave is completely refinished with votive offerings and various frescoes that, except



When the Roman legions...

for the ceiling, seem to have been whitewashed after the church became a lazaret house during the plague. Among the artists of the painted series cited are Paolo da Cailina and the Maestro di Bienna. Noteworthy is a series of "photograms" that tell the *Stories of St. Francesco* and, below, a *Macabre Dance*.

 The Parish of the **Saints Faustino and Giovita** (XVII cent.) was built according to the plan by Bagnadore. The portal is made of Sarnico Stone and the statues of the saints on the façade are attributed to Beniamino Simoni.

 The frescoes in the nave are by Fiamminghino. Bienna, from 1500, was the most important centre in the Valley for iron work. In the crafts zone of the town, it is



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possible to visit the **Forge museum**; a hammer put in motion by water from the King's vase, with a ventilated oven from a sophisticated mechanism and the **Mill museum**. The Pro loco organises visits to the two museums. Booking tel. 0364300307.

 Since 1964, respecting the original structure, reconstruction has been under way for the **Hermitage of Saints Pietro and Paolo**, an imposing complex for which the first stone was placed in 1230 by St. Antonio da Padova. The cloister is interesting for its big cistern at the

centre. On the hill dominated by the big statue Christ the King (1929) is the Sanctuary of **Santa Maria Maddalena** (XV cent.). Here are frescoes from the 1500's and a *Crucifixion* from 1480, other than 7 of the 12 statues (the others were stolen in 1981) of the *Mourning* by Beniamino Simoni.

 At one end of the town of **PRESTINE** is the **Sanctuary della Madonna**,



PALADIN OF THE FAITH

Every last Sunday in July, the faithfuls meet on pilgrimage at the Sanctuary of St. Glisente. He was, according to the legend, a paladin of Charlemagne who put down his weapons and began preaching, which converted all the inhabitants of the Valley. Fearing the loss of humility, he turned to God and a voice guided him up the mountain, where he stayed in a cave repenting, nourished by roots and wild fruit from a trained bear, while a sheep gave him milk.

which contains some frescoes as votive offerings and, behind the altar, a *Crucifixion* and a *Madonna of Mercy* attributed to Maestro Erratico di Bienna.



BERZO INFERIORE is

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dominated by the **Parish of San Lorenzo**, reconstructed in 1415 and enlarged in 1600. It contains interesting frescoes from 1400-1500, some attributed to Giovanni Pietro da Cemmo. At almost 2000 metres, on a homonymous mountain, is the Sanctuary of **St. Glisente**,

with a crypt from the XIV cent. divided into two sections; the largest has three small naves, with a cross vault supported by low granite columns.



In **ESINE**, there is one of the most impressive and best preserved pictorial monuments in the Camonica Valley:



the Church of **Santa Maria Assunta** (see box).



In Esine, note the **Chiesa della Trinità**, reconstructed in XII cent. over the previous building of 771, which was the first parish. It contains frescoes from the da Cemmo school.

The colours of Pietro da Cemmo relive

Reconstructed between 1460-1485 over earlier buildings, **Santa Maria Assunta** was the first church in Esine (dates back between VII-VIII cent.). The façade was added in 1776. The fre-

scoes on the inside, restored, have regained the colour that was faded with time: they were executed by Giovanni Pietro da Cemmo and others from his school (1491-93). On the triumphal arch, *Eternal Father among angels*, at the sides, *Annunciation* and below, *Passion of Christ*. In the presbytery on the right, *Nativity* and *Adoration of the Magicians*, at the back, the great *Crucifixion* and on the left, *Assumption of the Virgin*. In the centre of the vault, *Christ Blessing*.



The green and quiet valley inspired meditation

The blessed Amedeo Mendez de Sjlva chose a place high above from which one can see a long length of the Oglio river - St. Fermo, St. Cristina and St. Glisente communicated with each other from mountain to mountain by lighting bonfires



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The oldest bell tower in **MALEGNO** is the Romanesque one of the small Church of **Santa Maria dell'Ospedale** (XIV cent.) on the Oglio River near the bridge to Cividate.



The **old Parish** is dedicated, as the one erected nearby in the 1700's, to St.



Andrea. It is a Romanesque building from the XII century with reconstruction between the V-VII C. Next to the portal in "simona" stone on the north side (1420), there are exterior frescoes from XV-XVI C. There are others in the interior: the oldest (XIV-XV C) are in the presbytery.

Going up from Malegno towards Borno, there is a turn off on the right to **LOZIO**,



where the Nobili family was massacred in their **castle** (ruins above the hamlet VILLA) on Christmas Day 1410 as punishment for their hostility against Milan.



In **OSSIMO INFERIORE** it is possible to see V cent. frescoes in the church of **St. Rocco**. A turn off on the left of the road to Borno takes us (we are in the territory of the





Desires of sainthood of a noble Spaniard



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It was the Spaniard, Amedeo Mendez de Sjlva, who was later beatified, who edified (1469) the Convent-Sanctuary dell'Annunciata. The entry is made of "simona" stone which probably goes back to the XII C. On the triumphal arch of the church, there are 33 framed frescoes with the *Life of Jesus*, from the Da Cemmo school (second half of the XV C.): the *Crucifixion* is in the centre.

A *Deposition* fresco, attributed to Paolo da Cailina, is on the far wall of the second chapel on the left. In the choir chapel there are frescoes dated 1475 and signed by Pietro da Cemmo, amongst which, on the left wall, is the *Wedding of the Virgin*. Below the church are the crypt and the catacombs, tunnels which - following a XVII C. macabre taste -

preserve the remains of friars. The monastery also contains the cell-museum of the Blessed Innocenzo da Berzo.



San Fermo al monte (XVI cent.), with a small portico with three arches.

commune of **PIANCOGNO**, a town we come to by way of the panoramic Via Vigne) to the **Sanctuary dell'Annunciata**.

In **BORNO**, on one side of the square (octagonal XVII cent. fountain), the parvis of

the XVIII century parochial of **Saints Martino and Giovanni Battista** widens. The frescoes are by Sante Cattaneo (1780).



To its right is the **Oratorio di Sant'Antonio** (XIV-XV C. structure). Here is the fresco of *St. Mary on the throne between Saints*, attributed to Romanino or to Callisto Piazza.

Among the interesting churches in Borno are **San Fiorino** on the road to Lova, of which the presbytery could be from the XI century, and



A CAROLINGIAN LEGEND

The three churches Santa Cristina di Lozio (west of the hamlet Sucinva), San Glisente di Berzo Inferiore and San Fermo, recall the Carolingian legend of Fermo, Glisente and Cristina. They went into hermitage in the mountains of the region, communicating to each other with bonfires to show their survival. Legends like this (there is one about four sisters on Mount Isola of Lake Iseo) tell of the ancient sending of messages by bonfire, from tower to tower, to warn against imminent military danger or danger of another nature.

The Via Crucis told by 198 wooden “extras”

The sanctuary in Cerverno preserves the 14 stations of woodcraft masterpieces from the 18th century Camonica Valley - The frescoes by Romanino in St. Anthony of Breno and the legend of St. Obizio of Niardo

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From time immemorial, the **Castle**, with ruins which distinguish walls from eras



between the 12th and 16th centuries, guarded **BRENO** and the valley. The hill has been inhabited since remote times. From one depth of the courtyard, remains have emerged which go back to Paleolithic times, perhaps 9000 years BC: the oldest traces of human life in the Camonica Valley. The small **St. Michael's Church** - the foundation can be distinguished - was here before the year 1000. For a visit, contact Pro loco, tel, 036422970.



During the plague of 1630, everywhere was lime-whitewashed. This fate touched the paintings in the

Church of **St. Anthony the abbot** with the loss of frescoes in the nave. Those in the presbytery, however, were saved. The frescoes by Romanino (1535) are fragmented, although you can still distinguish the full, lively narration and taste for extravagant detail. Preceding these are the cross vault frescoes (*Evangelists and Doctors of the Church*). On the outside, we note the pink sandstone portal with decorations and frescoes. The church is usually managed by the neighbouring gastronomy shop. For information, contact the town hall 036422041.



There are important





paintings preserved in the nearby **Parish of St. Saviour**, a grand baroque structure. Among these are a Romanino (*Sacred Conversation*) and a Moretto (*St. Mary and St. Anne*). The main altar piece is a *Transfiguration* by Palma Senior. In an altar on the right, there is the *Christ Weeping*, from the wooden group by Beniamino Simoni (18th C).

THE XIV STATION ON THE VIA CRUCIS

“Christ Weeping”, protected by an 18th C gate in the second altar of St. Saviour, is actually the fourteenth station on the *Via Crucis* in Cerveno (see this same itinerary). The artist Beniamino Simoni, never left it to the Cervense, perhaps because of a dispute over the payment or the artistic planning. At first it ended up in the church of St. Maurizio of Breno, then it was dismantled with part of it in St. Saviour, where it was recently reassembled.



The neighbouring **Parochial House** merits attention for its façade with a portal with double lancet windows. It is from the Middle Ages, and perhaps even Lombard.

Other interesting churches in Breno are **St. Maurizio**, the old parish of the 16th C with the chapel of the dead next to it, and **St. Valentino** with a Renaissance portico. It contains frescoes from the 16th C attributed to Maestro di Nave and others, dated 1484, attributed to Giovanni Pietro da Cemmo.

From Breno, going toward Edolo, we find on the right a turn off to NIARDO. The church of **St. Giorgio** (see box), which is isolated in the highland, can be reached with a short walk.



The church of **St. Giorgio** in Niardo is of the XV C. The nave was added in the XVIII C and the portico in the XIX C. On the walls on the left of the presbytery there are two frescoes dated 1486 and attributed to Maestro Erratico from Bienna: *St. Obizio*. and *St. Mary of Mercy*. Below, there are frescoes dated 1560. The other frescoes below, on the wall on the right, are perhaps by Maestro



ST. OBIZIO TIRED OF BLOOD

Obizio from Niardo, joined up with Father Graziadio in the battle of Malamorte on July 7, 1191 in which perhaps ten thousand from Bergamo and Cremona who had passed by Oglio over a pontoon bridge, perished, mostly by drowning. Obizio, who survived miraculously, lived in penitence in Niardo with four children and his wife, who in the end allowed him to pursue his vocation. Obizio withdrew at the monastery of St. Giulia in the Brescia area, where he was buried in 1204. When the monastery was closed at the end of the 18th C, the saint was carried on shoulders to Niardo.

The Via Crucis told



di Nave. For a visit, contact the parish-priest, tel. 0364330160



Passing through Braone, we reach **CETO**. The hamlet of NADRO is dominated by the palace-castle **tower**.



The 17th C Vivarini house contains the **Reserve didactic Museum** which organises excursions on foot to the engraved rocks. Booking: tel. 0364433465.



Going up to **CIMBERGO**, we can admire the impressive **Castle**,



destroyed by fire in the XVIII C: beyond the portal with a white granite Gothic arch, there remain the ruins of three massive walls and parts of a surrounding wall that once descended to the town.



To visit one of the most important monuments in the Camonica Valley, the

Sanctuary of Via Crucis (see box), we reach **CERVE-NO** on the slopes across the valley.

At the top of the flight of steps of the Sanctuary, a door on the right takes you directly to the **Parish of St. Martino in Tours**, passing under a very large painting by Andrea Celesti: *St. Martin's Death and*



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triumph of his soul. There are traces of 15th C frescoes on the walls and a noteworthy wood carving by Andrea Fantoni. A curiosity: A *funeral catafalque* from the 17th C is in the chapel on the right side, and was placed at the center of the nave to represent the deceased, during the “in memory of” ceremonies. In the ancient **Oratory della Madonna del Carmine**, recently, frescoes from the XV-XVI centuries with intere-

sting dialectal writings, have been restored.



On the road back to Breno, we turn off to **LOSINE**.

At the highest point, is **St.**

Maria del Castello, con-

structed in the XII C and which preserves its Romanesque

apse and hooded bell tower. The fresco, the *Pantocrator*,

is on the inside. There is also a curious little votive fresco from the 1700's that represents a fire.



Passion sculpted in wood

The incomparable **Sanctuary of the Via Crucis** in Cerveno is a religious homage to a population made wealthy by mining and blast furnace industries. The façade of this unique building, which has a staircase with 14 chapels on its sides, looks over the town's small square. The stations are represented by sets of wood and clay sculptures (198 statues), works (1752-64) by Beniamino Simoni from Saviore, with the intervention (1764) of Donato and Grazioso Fantoni. The fourteenth station is today in the Parish of Breno. Its replacement in the sanctuary was made in 1869 by the Milanese Selleroni. The frescoes on the walls are by Scotti and the Corbellini brothers.

For information and guided tours: tel. 0364434014.



Prehistoric comic strips engraved in rock

A collection of the 170 thousand rock engravings in the Camonica Valley is concentrated in Naquane Park - The Romanesque churches of St. Siro and St. Salvatore in Capo di Ponte - The gigantic St. Cristopher in Andrista

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CAPO DI PONTE is in the centre of the Camonica Valley, in the most concentrated area of rock engravings, and where - according to the legend - evangelization in the valley started. Cemmo was the first inhabited nucleus, which in the XIII century, was the main administrative office of the Valley. Here, blast furnaces produced the iron from Mount Concarena and the Scalve Valley.

 To the left of the river Oglio, in the NAQUANE area, is the **National Park of Rock**

Engravings, established in 1955 and managed by the Camonica centre for prehistoric studies. It includes roughly a hundred decorated scenes. Open: march-september 8.30 - 19.30; october-february 8.30 - 16.30.

The rock engravings are scattered all along the Camonica Valley. Their discovery, even if the people here already knew about them and called them "pitoti" (puppets), is owed to Professor Laeng, who in 1908, acknowledged the first of the **Boulders of Cemmo**.



Next to this, is the **Didactic Museum of Prehistoric Art - Life Archeodromo - Experimental Archeology**. Open everyday in July and August 9.00-12.30 and 13.30-18.00; from September to June 9.00-12.30 and 13.30-17.30). This is an experimental reconstruction of prehistoric artifacts (wagons, looms, drills), showing their use, inviting visitors to try out weaving with yarn and working with flint-stone and bone. The museum heads the reconstruction of a prehistoric village where it is possible to live like the ancestors of the Valley 5000 years ago. For information: telephone 036442148.



THE DAILY LIFE OF THE "PITOTTI"

For millenia, they were hidden with earth and musk. Since the first decade of the XX century, about 170 thousand prehistoric figures, telling eight millenia of history of the Camonica Valley, have been identified. The first signs of human presence came after the last ice-age: about ten thousand years ago, a hunting people, attracted by the elk and the deer, arrived in the area. Elk are prevalent in the most ancient engravings. This was the "*protocamonica*" phase, which was followed by a period of abandonment perhaps due to a change of climate. In 6000 B.C. (neolithic), began the *second phase*. With the practice of agriculture, drawings are more schematic, abstract, and symbolic including praying figures, solar discs, proof of religious sentiments. The *third phase*, between the IV and II centuries B.C., is witness to monumental compositions such as menhir statues often with a solar disc in the place of the head, symbolic objects (necklaces, collars, daggers, jewelry) in the mid-section and daily life scenes in the lower section. The *last phase* coincides with the Iron Age up to the Roman conquest. Warriors and fighting scenes and even huts are engraved, along with work in the fields and four-wheeled wagons.



Romanesque architecture in the Brescia territory, rises from a rock spur.



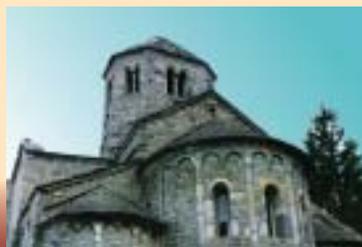
The **Monastery of St. Salvatore**, from the XI-XII centuries, is on the slopes of the mountain left of the river Oglio and is half hidden behind the trees.

It is a jewel of Romanesque Burgundian style in Italy with its octagonal lantern tower which rises with the severity of a tower, ennobled by double lancet win-

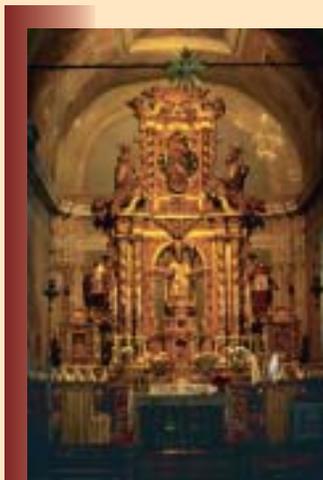
dows. The interior has three naves with a transept. The central apse is bordered by two smaller and shorter ones. The original covering remains only over the lateral naves, while the central one has a cross vault. On the capitals, birds of prey, hippogriffs, mermaids and vegetable motifs are sculpted. Above the left side of the second column's capital, there is a sleeping figure in the shade of an arbour alluding to the bible scene of Noah. This mona-



In Cemmo, the **Parish of St. Siro** (see box on the page 23) a milestone in



Prehistoric comic strips



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stery is privately owned. For visits: Pro Loco, tel. 036442080.

In **SELLERO**, it is worth visiting the old parish of **St. Desiderio**, both for the monumental frame by the Ramuses that frames the altar piece by Antonio Paglia, and for the 15th century frescoes (one is on the exterior). The bell tower (16th century) perhaps had a cusp, as a 17th century representation of this church, which was frescoed in the ex-chapel of St. Rocco (no visits), testifies.



From Cedegolo, we go up to **CEVO** along the road that passes by the hamlet of **ANDRISTA**, with the cemetery in which is the church of **Saints Nazaro and Celso** (XV cent., rebuilt XVII cent.). The noteworthy gigantic fresco, *St. Christopher*, attributed to Giovanni Pietro from Cemmo, completely occupies the wall height of the lateral walls. For a visit, contact the local food store.



In Cevo, which is also sur-

rounded by a small cemetery, there is the Romanesque church of **St. Sisto**, rebuilt in the XVI century and restored in the XIX cent. Note the double lancet windows of the bell tower.



From Cevo, we return to the end of the valley, towards **BERZO DEMO**. The parish of BERZO, dedicated to **St. Eusebio**, preserves a master-

piece wood engraving attributed to Pietro Ramus: his "ancon" (arch) of the main altar on which his student, Giovan Battista Zotti, also worked. In DEMO, on a rock

between the state road and the Oglio River, there is the curious triangular bell tower of the 16th century church of **St. Zenone**.



The oldest church in the Valley

The Parish of St. Siro was built on the site of a Roman building, some pieces of which were used in the construction of the church. Even before that, there was a prehistoric castle. The Longobard origin of the church (VIII cent.) is deducible from a dedication to St. Siro, patron of Pavia, which was the capital of the Longobard Kingdom. As well as scholarly theories there are many legends that point to it as the oldest church in the valley. The founding is attributed to St. Siro (IV cent.) or to Charlemagne (VIII cent.).

The present Romanesque building was built up between the XI-XII centuries and was remodelled in the XV century when the the bell tower was raised. The church has three naves, divided by white marble columns from Vezza, ending with three apses side by side. Frescoes are visible on the walls of the small cell in front of the crypt.

The entrance faces south: here in the decoration are repeating zoomorphic and vegetable motifs. At the base of the walls on both sides of the portal, are the lion and the lamb, symbols of strength and mercy.

For visits: Pro Loco tel. 036442080



Faith procured visions of Madonnas and witches

At the beginning of the 1500's, the inquisitors set fire to tens of people at the stake - In Sonico, generosity of the crusader and chastity of the wife were rewarded - Frescoes by Paolo da Cailina Junior at St. John the Baptist Church in Edolo

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ITINERARY

EDOLO is at the junction of ss 42, which follows the main course of the river Oglio from Tonale Pass to lake Iseo, and ss 39, which takes you to Aprica Pass and to Valtellina.



Here during the Roman times, there was already a post stage where a parish was erected in the VIII century. Today, it is the parish of **The Birth of St. Mary**. The construction, which is the fruit of a 16th century restructuring

and expansions from the 17th century on, contains various woodworks. Among these, the pulpit, attributed to Pietro Ramus, is interesting. The most ancient frescoes are in the prebtery. The walls on the left portray the *Presentation of Mary at the Temple*, by Paolo da Cailina Junior.



In the historic center, we

find many noble residences. **Zuelli House** is the most interesting, at 40, Via Cesare Battisti. By its appearance, it could have been built in the 16th century, but the street level reveals

more ancient architectural elements. In particular, there is a capital with three almost barbaric figures and an inscription in near Gothic characters. The date, 1350, is barely readable.



The most significant monument in Edolo is the Church of **St. John the Baptist** (see box).





Intuitions of perspectives of Paolo da Cailina

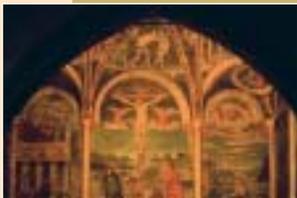
The frescoes by Paolo da Cailina Junior, in the presbytery of the Church of **St. John the Baptist** in Edolo, have been perfectly preserved for us. The present building is the fruit of reconstruction done at the beginning of the 16th century. The painter must have worked during the period of

1530-35. On the far wall, is the great *Crucifixion*, between *Jesus's Baptism* (on the right) and the *Decapitation of the Baptist* (left). On the vault are the *Eternal Father with Saints* and the *Story of Adam and Eve*. The *Story of the Baptist* is on the lateral wall and *Sibyl and Prophets* in the sub-arch. The figures were dynamically arranged by the artist in a planned play on perspectives which exploit the architectural space in a balanced way. The church is open every day: 8.00-12.00 and 14.45-19.00.



BURNING WITCHES WAS A BUSINESS

In 1510, the bishop Paolo Zane, accompanied by Dominican friar inquisitors came to Edolo to interrogate and send sixty or so witches to the stake. Some were judged in Cemmo, Bienno and Pisogne. In 1517, there were another seventy at the stake, and the following year, another wave of executions. The accusations were always the same: adoring Satan, copulating with the demon, killing and eating children, desecrated corpses. The witches met, flying on their sticks and bewitched horses, at Tonale Pass. In the end, Venice sent two bishops and an inquisitor to the Camonica Valley to investigate, not the witches, but the accusers, suspected of avidity: in fact, the burnt witches were stripped of all belongings which were then given to the church.



Faith procured visions



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Going in the direction of Aprica from Edolo, we arrive in **CORTENO GOLGI**. The small church of **St. Martino**

Franco, perhaps built between the X-XI centuries, is next to a village on a hill. Around here, you can see remains of wide walls, perhaps from a prehistoric castle, and later a fortress. There are lengths decorated in small arches on the outside of the square presbytery, rebuilt in the 17th century. The interior has traces of frescoes from the 15th and maybe 16th centuries. The floor is done in



rustic stone slabs. It is not easy to visit the interior, however, because of restoration about to begin.



Taking the ss 42 from Edolo southbound, **SONICO** is on the left. The wooden stature of *St. Mary on the throne with the Baby Jesus*, from the second half of the 16th century, is a pilgrim destination in the Sanctuary of **St. Mary of Pradella** (XV cent., much remodelled).



In the hamlet of **RINO**,

THE CHASTE WIFE OF THE CRUSADER

The origin of the Sanctuary of St. Mary of Pradella goes back to the apparition of St. Mary. In the August of long ago 1100, she appeared before Lorenzo degli Adamini, known as Pagot, the captain of the crusaders in Terrasanta in the Camonica Valley, and before his wife, Dominica delle Tisie di Mu. A chaste woman, kept in waiting for the return of her warrior, she was worthy of that occasion in which water gushed from the spring, water considered blessed by the faithfuls.



next to the bridge in St. Antonio square, there is a **tower** which was probably built before the year 1000, with an adjoining block of houses from the XIII and XIV centuries. Interestingly, there are a door with a Gothic arch, and above, a coat of arms dated 1742.



Martinengo Palace, which was once a castle, was built in the centre of **MALONNO**. According to legend, the **tower**, of which the left corner stone bears the date, 1341, was the only surviving structure of a landslide that swept the town away. The



palace was constructed by the Celeri family in the 16th century. On the ground level, it has a portico with columns made of stones from Sarnico.

The Malisia Tower (XIII cent.) is a bit north of the palace. It is waiting to be reconstructed after having been half destroyed by fire a few years ago. In the high part of the town, **Bona Tower**, with its upper level rebuilt, rises above the surrounding houses. Further up the mountain, is the **Blast furnace**, which was already active in the 1600's and produced cast iron until the second half of the 1800's.

The imposing Parish of the **Saints Faustino and Giovita**, which contains numerous paintings, is south of the village, on a cliff. The most interesting painting is a canvas of the *Deposition*, of uncertain origin, for which there are the names Paolo da Cailina Junior, Moretto and Moroni.

 From Edolo towards Tonale, we take the turn off for **MONNO**, with the baroque parish of the **Saints Peter and Paul**, which preserves the massive 15th century tower from a previous building.



In the high part of the town is the Church of the **Saints Fabiano and Sebastiano**, from the 18th century, with its refined late baroque portal in sculpted white marble from Vezza.



In **INCUDINE**, there is curious and widespread evidence of a religious people between the XVII and XIX centuries: in the sacristy of the parish of **St. Maurizio**, numerous *ex voto* have been conserved, all dedicated to St. Vito, coming from the church of St. Anne, which is 1800 metres high near the top of St. Vito. The graces received are not only for the recovered herds or those rescued from epidemics, but also for people saved from the river, from overturned wagons and from diseases. A visit is possible exclusively with the authorisation from the parish priest, tel. 036471511.

A treasure in every church of golden carved wood

On the land along the border of the ancient Valeriana road, which since Roman times, took you to the alpine passes; the wood is the main ingredient that dynasties of sculptors used to build monumental scenes around altars

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The high river Oglio reached from the Roman era by way of the Valeriana road, which from Brescia climbed through the Trompia Valley, passed through the Camonica Valley, and then branched off and up to Vezza d'Oglio towards Valtellina.

From **PONTE DI LEGNO** today, there passes ss 42, which takes you to Tonale Pass (through which travelled the Emperor Frederick Redbeard on his

descents to Italy), and ss 300, which takes you to Gavia Pass. These border people were described by a Venetian from the 1600's as "shrewd, ready, resolute, ferocious and brave and skilled with arms, and able to deal with any danger".



The parish of Ponte di Legno, dedicated to the **Holy Trinity**, was built in 1685 in baroque style with a 16th century bell tower next to it. The



main altar is made up of a monumental and compact ensemble, with imposing statues: it is the best synthesis of all the wood sculptures in the valley. It is attributed to the wood carving shop of Domenico and Giovan Battista Ramus; the frontal, however, is attributed to Zotti.

On the way to Gavia, there are three churches of some interest, all of the artwork being of woodcraft. The church of **St. John the**



SCULPTED WOOD FROM THE HIGH VALLEY

Wood sculpture of the Camonica Valley was produced, especially in the upper Valley between the 15th and the 18th centuries. The Ramus family from Edolo (active from 1630 to the end of the 1700's also in the Trento region) had its big school from which descended two generations of sculptors. The most famous names of artists are Giovan Battista Zotti, Piccini and Andrea Fantoni (originally from Roveta in the territory of Bergamo). Beniamino Simoni is worth remembering as well, a native of Valsaviore and author of the Way of the Cross in Cervenno. Golden statues, sumptuous altars, baroque decorations are surprises that, thanks to their work, the visitor can see the most secluded little church in the Valley.



Baptist in ZOANNO is noteworthy for its 1700's style bell tower made of visible rocks and frescoed by Corbellini. The Chapel of the Dead is next to it. Further on is the 1600's parish of the **Saints Fabiano and Sebastiano** in PRECASAGLIO. Five statues from the Andrea Fantoni (1716) workshop are striking on the baroque tribune of the main altar. The tribune is attributed to Giovan Battista and Pietro Ramus.

Below the town of PEZZO, the small church of **St. Apollonio in deserto** in Daligno is impressive for its

form and location. The typical alpine architecture goes back to a bit after the year 1000, but was later estimated even to be from the XII century. In the apse, there are frescoes from the 16th century.

In **TEMU'**, the parish of **St. Bartolomeo** (XVII cent., restructured XIX cent.) contains a woodwork collection. The main altar has a frontal, tabernacle and monumental frame from the workshop of Giovan Battista Zotti; while the frontals of the two side altars are attributed to Piccini: on the left, on the altar of St. Antonio, is the *Miracle of the*



A treasure in every church

Ostia (sacrificial victim), on the right, the *Nativity*.

The small church of **St. Alexander** is between the hamlets LECANU' and Vione, along a flat, scenic path for a pleasant walk. It has preserved a 13th century bell tower with double lancet windows and small windows.

The inhabitants of **VIONE** were jokingly called "doctors" by the other valley families. In 1460, a priest actually established the first school, which lasted until 1705. The ancient origin of the site was made evident by the discovery of the

Longobard necropolis. Charlemagne had the Castle of Polagra destroyed, which was said to have six towers, because it was considered a pagan hideout.



The parish of **St. Remigio** preserves half of the Romanesque apses (XII-XIII cent.) made of alternating white ashlar and grey stone. The building was erected at the end of the 16th century, the interior is striking for its elegant late Gothic style. Some paintings from the 1500-1600's are preserved here from the Lombard and

Venetian schools, some of quality workmanship. The fresco of *the abbot St. Anthony* (XVI cent.) is on the left wall. The main altar piece (XVII cent.) is a work by Giuseppe Bulgarini. The tabernacle and the deposit storages for relics are by Domenico Ramus. The frontal artist is unknown.

Wood carving works rom



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the Ramus workshop can also be seen in STADOLINA in the church of **St. Giacomo**, with a monumental frame by Giovan Battista Ramus (1645), and in CANE in the parish of **St. Gregorio Magno**.



The powerful and branched out Federici family from the Camonica Valley was always ready to take the opportunity to extend their power and the autonomy of Brescia, lining up with the Ghibellines who supported Redbeard, and thereafter with the Viscontis who contended for the valley against Venice.

In **VEZZA D'OGGIO**, from the XV to the XVII century, there lived a "tranquillo" branch of this family. The **Federici Palace** is abandoned today, but on the road to the hill of the parish we note the beautiful portal built in 1563 by Pompeo Federici for the residence which once engulfed both a small church and a **medieval tower** (XIV cent.), visible from a back courtyard: short and squatty, and made of regular granite ashlar, with three windows with Gothic arches.



On a precipice along the



ancient Valeriana road, which we cover in a short walk, we see the church of **St.**

Clemente. It is among the oldest in the valley (XII cent, restructured XVI cent), with a drystone bell tower with elegant double lancet windows and a pyramidal cusp. On the edges of the big rocks, there are traces of an old people's home for pilgrims.



Artistic historical itineraries: the Camonica Valley

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Frescos by Pietro da Cemmo in St. Maria Assunta in Esine



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Sanctuary of the Annunciata in Piancogno



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Small Church of the Oratory in Montecchio



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BRENO

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Wooden Sculptures in the Sanctuary of Via Crucis in Cerveno



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Wooden Sculptures by the Ramuses in the Parish of Vione



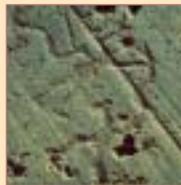
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Park of the Rock Engravings in Capo di Ponte



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EDOLO

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Paolo da Cailina Junior in the Church of St. Giovanni Battista

