

LE VIE DEL PASCOLO

of Veneto

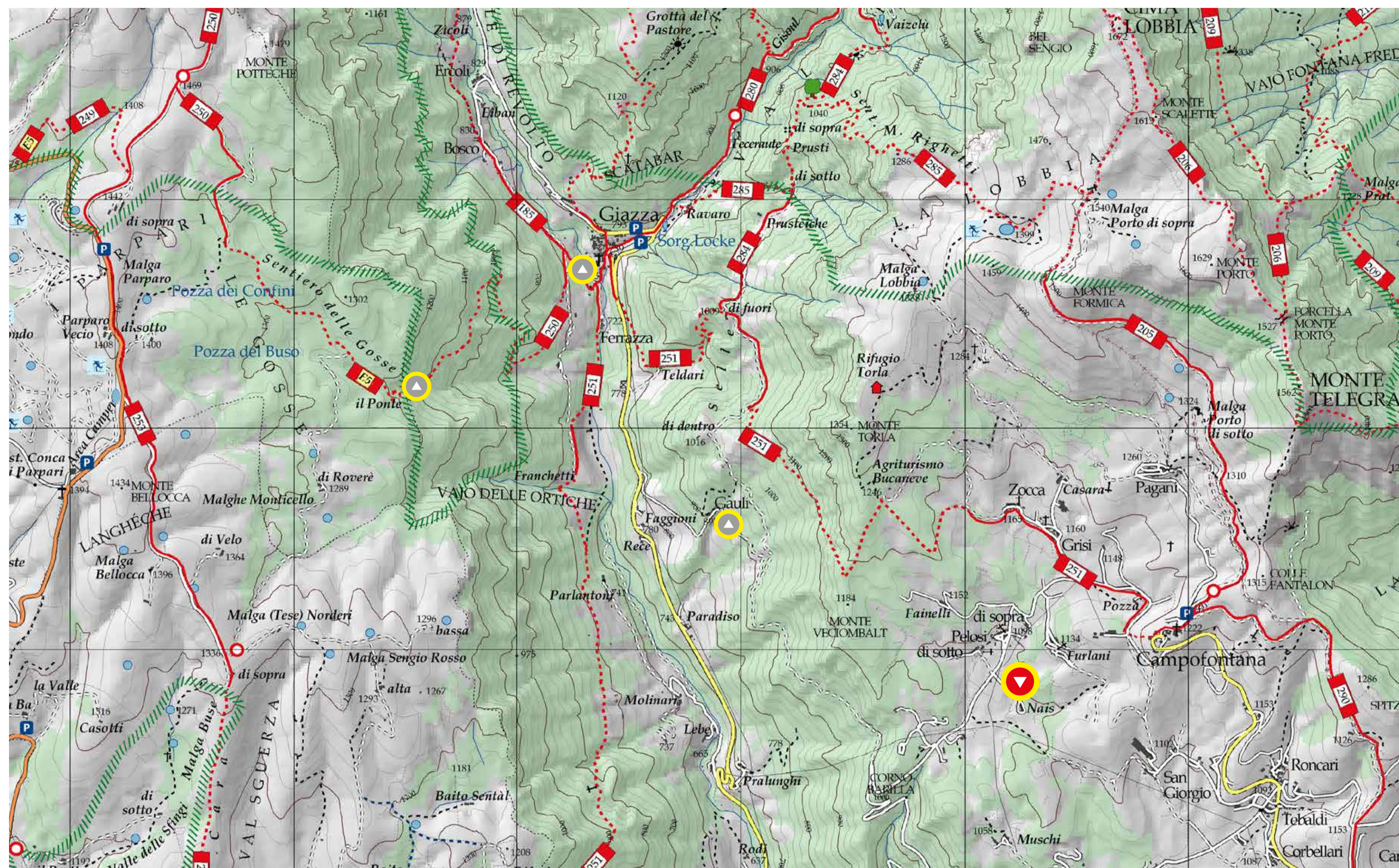
VALORIZATION OF TRANSHUMANCE
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Boundaries of the Regional Natural Park of Lessinia



Elaborazione tratta dalla Carta Turistica per Escursionisti "Lessinia" del Comitato Gruppi Alpini Veronesi, ed. 2022

THE HISTORICAL RURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE HIGH PASTURES OF LESSINIA

The territory of the High Pastures of Lessinia, a mountainous area primarily used for summer grazing, extends across the provinces of Verona, Trento, and Vicenza, covering an area of approximately ten thousand hectares. It is characterized by unique historical features, including traces of prehistoric and historical human activity, as well as the distinctive use of local stone.

Unlike many other mountainous regions in Italy, the High Pastures of Lessinia have not been affected by the abandonment of the countryside following the economic boom, globalization, and the transformation of livestock farming from extensive to intensive and industrial systems. This area has managed to maintain a thriving productive fabric and preserve a landscape that is highly valued by tourists interested in local and sustainable production, as well as the ecosystem services provided by rural areas. Several factors contribute to the current suc-



Scorcio di paesaggio rurale sugli alti pascoli della Lessinia (Foto: Matteo Tacconi)

cess of the nominated area. The accessibility and scenic beauty of the mountain pastures, along with the gentle landscape, make it appealing to hikers and families, who form the basis of rural tourism. The presence of highly appreciated local products, such as "sbatul" gnocchi, cheeses (including the Slow Food Presidium Monte Veronese di Malga), and the Brogna sheep breed, which represents local biodiversity, also attracts gastronomic tourism to the region.

Human presence in this territory dates back to ancient times, from Neolithic shepherds to the permanent settlement of Germanic populations known as the "Cimbri" during the Middle Ages. The Cimbri, who have survived as a linguistic minority to this day, have contributed to the recent development of tourism focused on environmental and cul-

tural values. The rural landscape of the High Pastures of Lessinia contains numerous elements and signs of this history. The remains of ancient pastoral structures, which have been mapped and cataloged, are widespread in the Lessinia pastures, as are the numerous historical buildings still used for pastoral activities.

The key element that characterizes the landscape of the High Pastures is the "malga," locally known as the "montagna." The "paga," an ancient and typical unit of measurement, is still used to define the grazing area of a "montagna." A "paga" corresponds to the grazing area required to meet the nutritional needs of a single adult bovine throughout the grazing period. Throughout history, human activity has significantly shaped this territory, from deforestation and the creation of paths and routes between the plains and the mountains to the construction of dry stone walls delineating the boundaries of the mountain pastures. One of the most distinctive features of the landscape is the use of the local rocks in various man-made elements. Over the centuries, the development of pastoral activities has led to the construction of stone buildings used as shelters during the grazing period, as well as for livestock rearing and product processing. Stone wells for collecting rainwater and troughs for watering livestock are also common in the area. Another aspect related to human activity is the management of forest areas, which historically involved charcoal production. This activity, along with the trade in ice, contributed to the mountain communities' livelihoods for many years.

Two significant events have shaped the landscape of the High Pastures in the last century. The first is the First World War when the strategic importance of Lessinia as a border area with the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to the construction of roads connecting the towns with the mountainous region. This infrastructure development resulted in rapid territorial development. Trenches, tunnels, and military positions were also constructed, blending into the landscape and still visible today. The second event is the establishment of the Regional Natural Park of Lessinia in 1990, aimed at protecting the natural, historical, environmental, and ethnic characteristics of the area. The creation of the park has also led to the growth of a museum network comprising numerous internationally significant structures.

In recent decades, the crisis of the "contrade" system, which forms the social fabric of the Lessinia region, and the consequent closure of many small family-run farms, have led to changes in mountain livestock farming. New entrepreneurial choices, combined with the desire of local residents to remain in the territory, have resulted in the tran-

sformation of some dairy farms into beef farms and a rediscovery of sheep and goat farming, particularly through projects aimed at enhancing the native Brogna sheep breed. Furthermore, payments from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have revolutionized the economic evaluation of pasture use. Despite these changes, the livestock sector continues to play a central role in the local economy and serves as a guardian of the environment, as it has for centuries.

The next challenge for the High Pastures of Lessinia will be managing the current changes through the valorization of local production, safeguarding sustainable production methods, protecting the territory, promoting specialized employment policies, engaging in dialogue with higher institutions, and selecting forms of responsible tourism. Preserving the historical rural landscape of the High Pastures of Lessinia and implementing policies to manage its future evolution will ensure pro-



Tipico esempio di edifici di malga sugli alti pascoli della Lessinia - Malga Scortigara di Fondo (Foto: Marco Malvezzi)

per environmental management, sustainable economic growth, and employment opportunities for those who choose to continue living in these mountains.

Text excerpted from the Candidacy Dossier of the High Pastures of Lessinia in the National Register of Historical Rural Landscapes.

RULES OF RESPECT

Rules of the Environmental Plan of the Regional Natural Park of Lessinia (D. C. Regione Veneto n. 42/1997)

