

LE VIE DEL PASCOLO

of Veneto

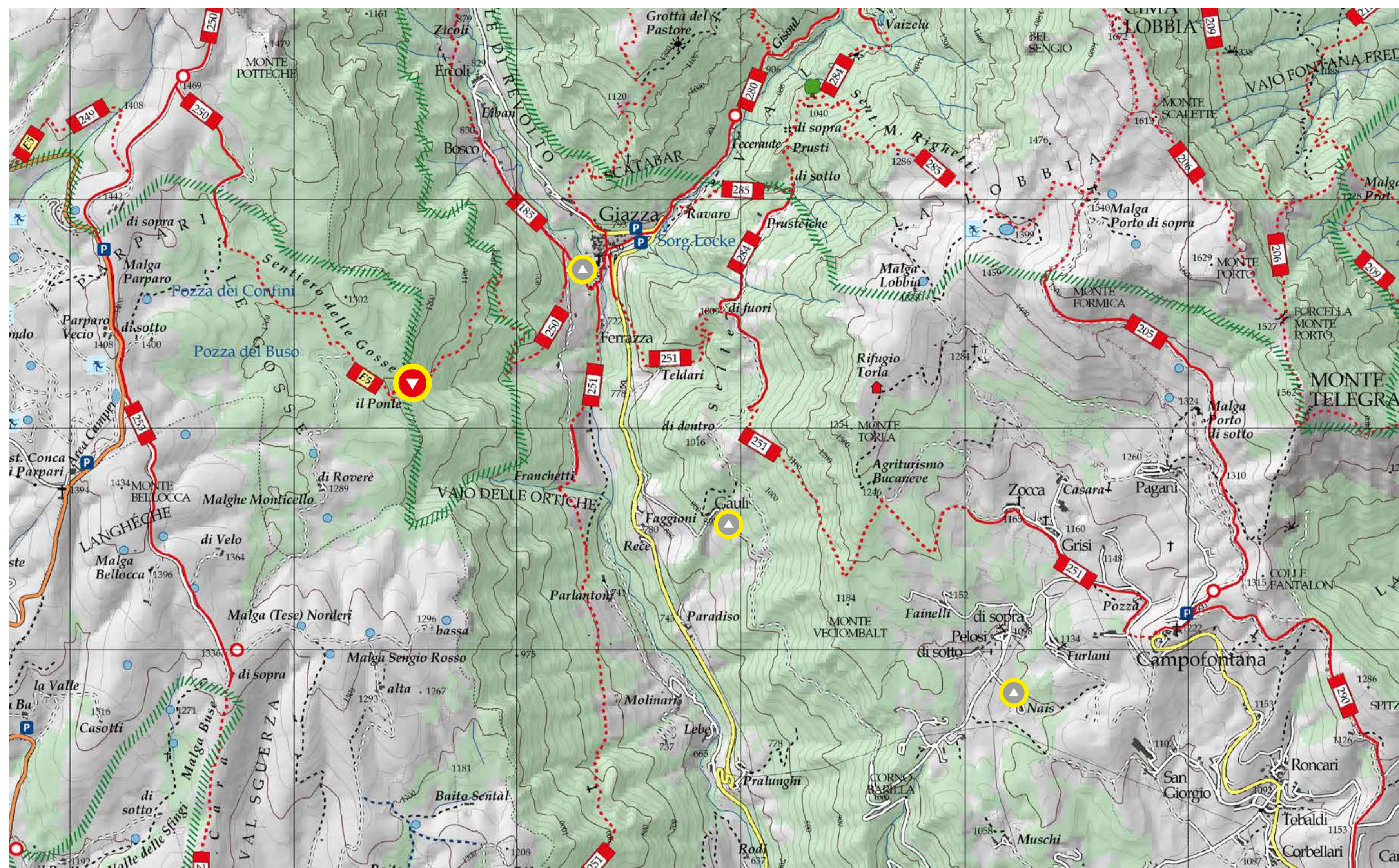
VALORIZATION OF TRANSHUMANCE
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CAI Hiking Trails

Boundaries of the Regional Natural Park of Lessinia



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

*“CARGÀR MONTAGNA”,
 THE PRACTICE OF
 GRAZING: MALGHE
 AND PAGHE IN LESSINIA*



Cattle grazing at Malga Camporetrato (Erbezzo)

Lessinia has always been a territory dedicated to livestock grazing, developing over time from prehistory to the present day parallel to human evolution. Although there were naturally open spaces with vegetation in the higher areas of the plateau, used by both wild animals and early proto-historic shepherds, as evidenced by various findings in Valon del Malera and other summit areas (Sauro, 2010), it is important to highlight that the majority of pastures characterizing the current Lessinia territory can be considered secondary, resulting from a progressive anthropic intervention of deforestation. This process developed from the hills to the lower mountains, gradually extending in the medieval and modern ages to the mid-highland area of the territory, also following the settlement of Teutonic colonists (the Cimbri, Zimber, i.e., carpenters, loggers) in central-eastern Lessinia.

“CARGÀR MONTAGNA”

Moving with livestock in search of the best grazing territories according to the seasons has always been, regardless of the species raised, a characteristic feature of traditional pastoralism. For flocks of goats and sheep, these movements were true transhumance, i.e., progressive passages from one pasture to another, mostly over medium to long distances from the lowland and even coastal areas to the Prealps and the Alps. These transhumance journeys could last several weeks and took place uphill in spring and downhill in late summer and early autumn.

As for cattle, their movements were more limited in both distance and duration. The practice of summer grazing for cattle in the highlands is

known as “alpeggio” or, as it is still commonly referred to in the Lessinia region, “cargàr montagna,” which means loading the mountain. For centuries, the high pastures of Lessinia have been an ideal place for the summer stay of livestock, as evidenced by the presence of over a hundred mountain huts on the plateau between Veneto and Trentino.

THE MALGA (OR “MONTAGNA”)

The grazing territories on the plateau are divided into specific silvo-pastoral units that are seasonally utilized and known as “malghe.” The term “malga” does not refer to a single or a collection of buildings for summer grazing, nor does it imply a hospitality structure for rural mountain dining, which is a concept widely spread among tourists visiting Lessinia. The malga, or “montagna” as it is still referred to by the local communities, is a functional territorial unit that consists of pastures, more or less extensive areas of woodland and mown meadows, a



Flock of Brogna sheep grazing at the end of summer (Foto: Marco Malvezzi)

building for milk processing and the residence of the herders (baito), a facility for cheese aging (casara), and a separate stable for housing the livestock. Additional structures include a pigsty, an icehouse, and, considering the karst nature of the territory, crucial watering troughs for the animals (Ottaviani, 1991).

Currently, the buildings and structures of the malghe in Lessinia have lost their original function as described above, except for a few specific cases where some functions are still maintained. For example, cheese production and aging take place at malghe such as Fanta and Preta di Sotto in the municipality of Sant’Anna d’Alfaedo, as well as at malghe Lessinia and Camporetrato in the municipality of Erbezzo.

The herders still reside at the malghe during the summer grazing period at locations such as Coè di Ala, Fittanze, Lessinia, Camporetrato, Gaibana, Folignano di Cima, and Folignano di Mezzo..

THE PAGHE

The concept of malga is so closely tied to its intended function since the Late Middle Ages that the unit of measurement associated with it does not refer to the surface area but is directly related to the livestock. The “paga” (plural: “paghe”) measures the carrying capacity of the malga based on different species and ages.

One “paga” corresponds to the load of: one adult dairy cow, two yearling heifers in their second season of grazing, four yearling heifers in their first season of grazing, eight sheep, one adult horse (1.5 paghe)..

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Haymaking and grazing at Malga Boldera

RULES OF RESPECT

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

