

MONTE DELLA MADONNA PATH

LENGTH: 5,4 Km including detours

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE: about 350 m.

WALKING TIME: 4 hours including detours

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: medium

BEST SEASON: spring, summer, autumn

Geology. From a geological point of view Monte della Madonna (523 m.) together with the nearby Monte Grande can be considered as belonging to the same whole. It still preserves the remains of ancient sedimentary layers, above all near Sella Fiorine, where, in the past, interesting marine fossils were found. Worth of notice, on the southern slope not far from the old little church of St. Anthony, are the outcrops of trachyte.

Flora. Following the path you have the chance to walk amid some of the most charming woods of the Euganean Hills. The different sunlight exposure near the top of Monte della Madonna gives rise to a great variety of vegetation. You can find the Mediterranean maquis side by side with an alpine flora, for example the bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), the birch (*Betula Pendula*) and the beech (*Fagus Sylvatica*).

Fauna. The Saint Felicita cave is the favourite shelter for bats (*Eptesicus serotinus*) and the pool is the breeding site for the fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*). The viper (*Vipera aspis*) has occasionally been seen and it is the only poisonous snake of the Euganean Hills. Among the coleoptera you can find the byctiscus populi (*Byctiscus betulae*) whose larva develops within the curled leaves of the hazel and the May-bug (*Melolontha melolontha*). During the spring you can hear the hoopoe (*Upupa hepops*) and the cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), which nest in this area.

History and Art. Worth a visit are the church of Saint Anthony Abate and the cave of Saint Felicita. The little church was an ancient monastery which was built in the 13th century where once stood a hermitage. The wide cave, partly natural, which lies in front of the little church-bell, was chosen by Saint Felicita to live in as a hermit. On the summit of the hill stands the sanctuary devoted to the Virgin of the Mount which dates back to 1253. The monastery consists of a very simple building with inside a 13th century-old statue of the Virgin Mary and of a small Benedictine monastery ruled by the Abbey of Praglia.