

MONTE RICCO AND MONTE CASTELLO PATH n. 6

DISTANCE: about 5 Km

DIFFERENCE IN ALTITUDE: about 300m from the foot of the hill

WALKING TIME: 4 hours the entire circuit, including the detour to M.Castello. Only 45 minutes the asphalted road to reach the starting point.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: none

BEST SEASONS: spring, summer, autumn and winter

Geology. Monte Ricco (329 m) is almost entirely composed of volcanic rock, rhyolite; a big quarry in the lower area of the northern flank contains some sedimentary rocks: the 'scaglia rossa' and the Euganean marl. In this quarry and in the sedimentary rocks some important fossils have recently been found. They are kept in the Museo Geopaleontologico of Cava Bomba, in the village of Cinto Euganeo. The Rocca di Monselice is composed of trachite, a darker volcanic rock.

Flora. The southern slope is covered with Mediterranean vegetation: pubescent oak (*Quercus pubescens*), holm oak (*Quercus ilex*), cane-apple (*Arbutus unedo*), heather and sage leaved cistus (*Cistus salvifolius*). The northern flank is completely covered with woods of chestnut (*Castanea sativa*); there are also some specimens of birch (*Betulla pendula*), planted by men, just below the hermitage. On the south-east sunnier flank the typical vegetation includes woods of holly oak (*Quercus ilex*) with cane-apple and heather. The detour to Monte Castello leads to a wood of chestnut with flowering ash and pubescent oak; the undergrowth is rich in hawthorn (*Crateus monogyna*), butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and some specimens of sumac (*Rhus cotinus*).

Fauna. During the mating season you may see the kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and the sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*); the rare crag martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*), the thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) and the black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) build their nests here. The common rock thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) and the wall creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) spend the winter here. The small pools forming in the quarries are the ideal habitat for amphibians like the green toad (*Bufo viridis*) and the frog (*Rana latastei*). The shrew (*Suncus etruscus*), the smallest insectivorous mammal, has been found on Monte Castello. The fresh and wet undergrowth of chestnut wood hosts molluscs like the pretty *Cepaea nemoralis* and the helix (*Helix pomatia*); also some amphibians like the fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) can be found here.

History and art. A historically relevant building is Santa Domenica's hermitage; it was inhabited by Franciscan friars up until some years ago. Near the main building there is a small church with a false cloister, similar in its architecture to a XII century monastery, and it is dedicated to San Giovanni Evangelista of Montericco. The history of the hill is closely connected to the history of Monselice; quarrying and the production of rhyolite (a hard and solid volcanic rock used as building material) and limestone rock have drastically changed the outlines of the hill.