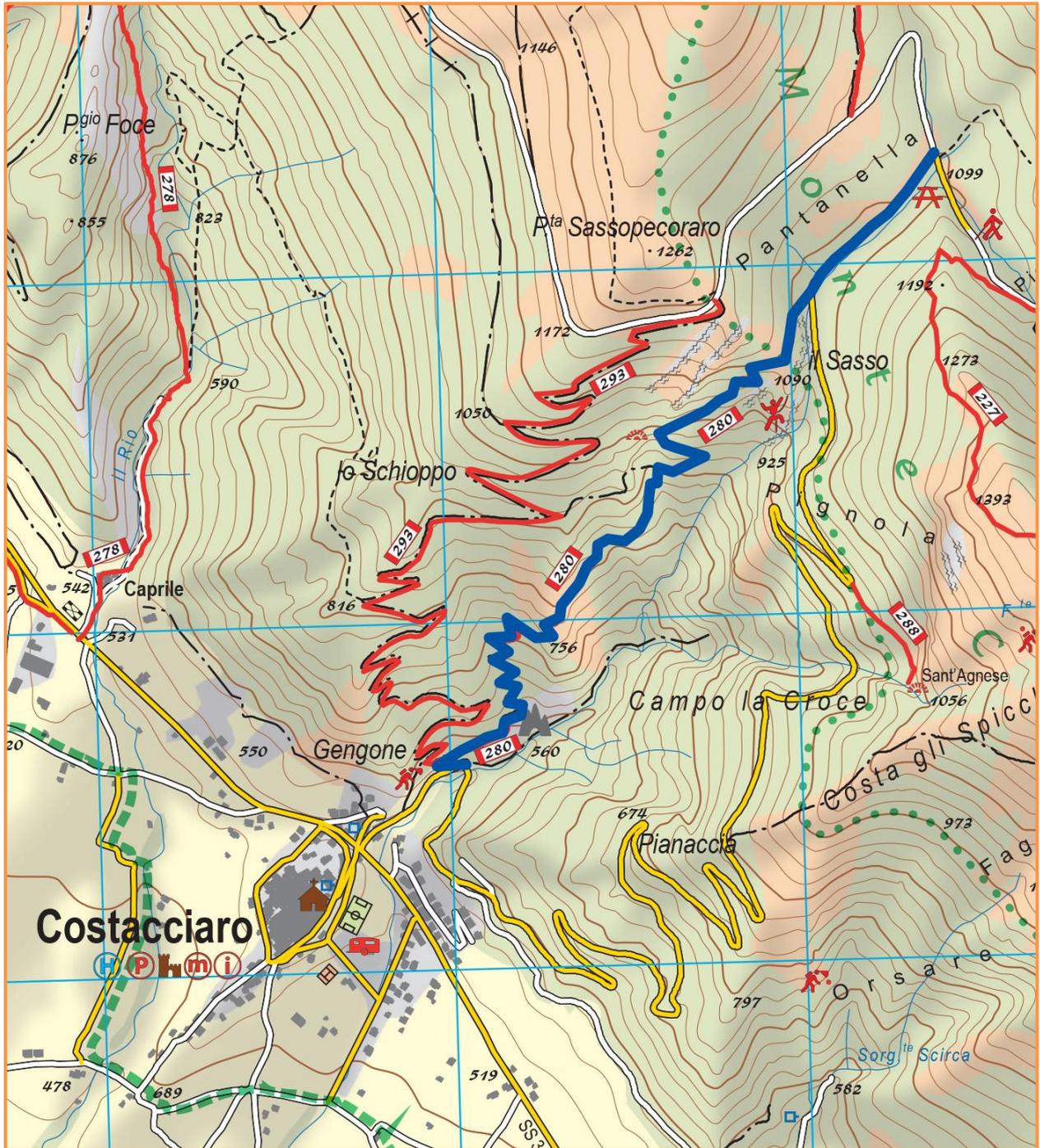


8 ALONG THE OLD ROAD FROM COSTACCIARO TO MONTE CUCCO



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“Man and the Mountain”

(TRAIL N. 280)

Length: 6 km round trip

Difference in elevation: 550 m

Time: 2 hours 30 minutes outward ascent, 1 hour 30 minutes return descent

Difficulty: E

Drinking water available: no

From the S.S. Flaminia, take the road from the village of Costacciaro that rises to Pian delle Macinare: about 200 m after the last house on the left, follow the trail marked no. 280. This is the old road that had been used by the inhabitants of Costacciaro since way back in the Middle Ages to go up the mountain. The mountain has always been a major source of economy for the villages in the foothills of the Park. There were, and still are in part, many activities linked to the mountain: pasture, wood cutting, wild fruit collecting and cultivation of the less precipitous areas.

Before you begin to follow the trail, take a look at the beautiful strata of pink limestone on your left, where the well-known, 40 meter-deep Buca di Mazzapane opens and descends steeply with a 20 m difference in elevation. Following heavy rainfall, a jet of water rises up the channel and pours out of the hole of this unusual karst phenomenon. This is explained by the impermeable pink limestone formation, which prevents water from the deep water tables passing through, forcing it to accumulate in large quantities and to finally rise to the surface.

A few steps later, our trail begins: the first stretch is quite wide and easy, evidence that carts and animals used to link the mountain and the valley would pass this way. This is an interesting road not only because it is full of memories and traditions in use until recent times, but also because throughout the valley of the Fosse Secca, which the road crosses, different strata of this geological series come to the surface: pink limestone, white limestone, fucoid marlstone,

majolica limestone, grey limestone, solid limestone.

Continue along the trail into the wood. Here the scaglia rossa gives way to scaglia bianca formations. A few steps on, a fucoid marlstone formation appears, formed by easily eroded rocks giving rise to frequent phenomena, such as cuttings and landslides etc.

The trail winds steeply upwards in tight bends, through the wild valley of Fosse Secca in all its beauty. You'll find thick layers of majolica limestone interspersed with flint nodules. This gradually gives way to a thin layer of grey limestone and to solid limestone as far as the summit.

Nature and man have shaped and blended this extraordinary landscape along the entire trail; hidden caves in the recesses of the rocky walls, often covered with wild vegetation, alternate with obvious traces of man's hard work to open a passage through the rock.

The trail has a few difficult stretches, some steep and some partially blocked by landslides. At one particular point in the walk marked by a commemorative stone at approximately 900 m, the rock forms a sort of shelter. The story goes that the Blessed Thomas of Costacciaro rested here on his visits to the San Girolamo Hermitage. This gives the trail takes a mystical-meditative importance and enables the hiker to immerse himself in natural peace and to find a religious dimension once more.

Continue through a cool beech grove, where the path rises steeply up to a height of 1000 m. From this point, a well-signposted deviation starts towards the “Androne del Forno” a



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few meters away. This impressive and somewhat unsettling place reveals unusual geological features: it is actually the result of erosion by the ancient Fosse Secca stream, which used to flow



through it. Subsequently, man added to the work begun by nature and exploited these rocks to extract building stone. The solid limestone had been “softened” by water and was, therefore, easier to work with. The local inhabitants named it “travertine.” Turn back to Trail 280 and follow an exposed, stony ridge at the foot of the so-called Sasso, a rocky mass rising like a massive tooth above the visitor and surrounding nature. Your gaze stretches from this point over extensive panoramas: to your right towers the massif of Monte Cucco, below lies the valley of the River Chiascio with medieval Costacciaro standing out against the cultivated fields. On the opposite side is the valley of Pantanella, with its green meadows surrounded by the silhouette of Monte

Le Gronde and Col d’Orlando. Trail 280 has nearly come to an end. On your right is the limestone wall of Pignola, at the base of which is the Cave of St. Agnese, hidden among the beech trees (see insert).

The old mountain road ends when Trail 280 joins the asphalted road from Costacciaro to Pian delle Macinare: this is where our trail also comes to an end. You now have the choice of returning back to the same path, or continuing down to the pleasant valley of Pantanella and beyond to Pian delle Macinare traveling along the asphalted road for a bit more than a kilometer.

Here, you’ll find the Mainardi refuge hut, where you can get something to eat (check opening times before you start, as it depends on the time of year). The building, like the entire surrounding territory, belongs to the “Native Men of Costacciaro” Agricultural Society (see insert at the bottom of Route 5).



The Cave of St. Agnese and the legend of the petrified sheep

The story goes that Agnese, a young woman from Costacciaro, wished to follow a spiritual calling, against her father's wishes. A shepherd helped her find a solitary place, where she could lose herself in contemplation of God, and showed her the enormous cave, which would later take her name. Agnese thanked him and asked him not to reveal her refuge of prayer to anyone. However, the man did not fail to reveal her secret to the girl's father, who immediately went to her, tied her with a rope to his horse's tail and dragged her over the rough terrain of Monte Cucco. When Agnes, torn and disfigured, met the shepherd, who had betrayed her, she put a curse on him and he was immediately turned into stone, together with his sheep, his dog, his knife and the bread and cheese he was holding in his hand. After this extraordinary event, her father understood his daughter's profound vocation and set her free to follow her calling. Thus, Agnese spent many years as a hermit inside the cave.

In fact, about 200 m from the cave, in the meadows of Pignola, you can find a rocky formation, which resembles the shape of a man, a dog, some sheep, a knife and some bread and cheese. The local people were impressed by this tale and refer to the formation as the “pecore tarmite,” which means “petrified sheep” in dialect.