

*Walks in and  
around  
Tierna*

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# Walks in and around Lierna

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# Walks in and around Lierna

## Introduction : Lierna 100 years ago

The Lierna you walk around today is a mixture of the old and the new. 100 years ago, as in preceding centuries, the municipality consisted of eleven groups of houses known in Italian as *località* or *frazioni*, linked by country lanes and forming distinct settlements. Some of these have their own small churches or chapels and their own public washstands, still surviving today though virtually unused as such. Although distinct, they were and indeed are, part of the parish and the municipal authority of Lierna.

In the last half century blocks of flats, modern villas and light industrial units have been built on the intervening land which was once vineyards, meadows and orchards. Some of these green spaces still survive and give an open, rural feel to the town. As you walk through the old *località*, have a look at the old buildings. Many fell into disuse and disrepair but in the last twenty years they have been given a new lease of life, restored and ingeniously converted to sophisticated and delightful apartments which reflect the Italian flair for architecture and interior design.

One hundred years ago, Lierna had around 900 inhabitants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century more than 300 people migrated to Argentina and Uruguay, part of a pattern of migration seen all over Italy. Liernese families made their living mostly in agriculture, some in fishing, while a few found employment in the metalworking companies which were being established and developing on this side of the lake; others still as builders. Some families raised silkworms for the silk industry. A spinning mill was situated in the *località* of Grumo and provided employment for some of Lierna's inhabitants, mostly women.

Today there are over 2,000 residents, due in part to the arrival of families from southern Italy but mostly due to the influx of families from neighbouring towns and villages. They found employment in the light industries which grew and flourished along this side of the lake in the twentieth century, such as the Moto Guzzi factory in Mandello. The tourism and hospitality industry, the building trade and the railways have

all been and continue to be important employers while agriculture has become a sideline for a few and the silk industry is gone.

### **Description of a typical traditional building in a *località***

The ground floor with vaulted ceiling was the cowshed and store for agricultural implements. Above this on the first floor hay was kept and there was a large kitchen, often paved in local stone and furnished with benches clustered around a fireplace. Next to the kitchen was a room used for cheese-making. Only the richer families were able to afford a small sitting-room with chairs and a tall cupboard.

On the second floor, reached by a steep staircase, were the bedrooms, paved with terracotta tiles or floorboards. Also on this floor were storerooms for the family's crops and for the raising of silkworms.

A wooden ladder led up to a large attic with small, glassless windows for ventilation. Here were kept maize cobs and chestnuts. Some had wooden balconies used for the drying process and you can still see some in the *località* of Genico (walk 3) and Sornico (walk 2).

Many houses featured extensive and deep cellars for the production and storage of wine and the maturing of cheeses and salamis.

Lacking piped water, people got their supplies from the communal water fountain, examples being those at Genico (walk 3) and Olcianico (walk 2).

I have described three walks which will take you around all the *località* in Lierna. They are suitable for all ages. We hope you enjoy exploring our attractive and interesting little town.

Emily Bianchi Bazzi

*June 2014.*



## Walk One

### Castello and Giussana

Starting Point – Railway Station, Lierna

Total distance – approx. 2.5 km

Highest height reached 265m

Lowest height reached 207m

Approx time required: 1 hr

#### *Via Ducale*

With your back to the station, walk downhill and take the first right along Via Ducale. After passing some blocks of flats, the road narrows and is flanked by mature cedars and other trees which are part of the original gardens of Villa Aurelia, the large brick-built villa visible on your left.

Originally built in 1914, it was purchased by Signor Magnoni, a Turin businessman who made his fortune in textiles, who renamed it after his wife, Aurelia. Worth mentioning are the Liberty style stained glass windows. As you walk along this path, you will pass several other villas with attractive gardens. Turn left at the crossroads, where there is an wayside shrine to Saint Paul, following the sign marked “Riva Bianca”. Take care as you cross the main road and walk down Via S. Francesco to the lake. Turn right in front of the houses and join the road where you will see a chessboard set into the road surface. The small bay you are looking out over is known as Riva Nera, or Black Shore. For countless centuries the lake afforded the principal means of transport for people and goods. It is easy to picture in one’s mind the boats and gondolas which once were moored in the small bay or



drawn up on the shore, together with the scenes of activity as men loaded and unloaded their craft or prepared their nets for fishing.

### ***Località Castello***

You will see in front of you an old archway – go through this into the old piazza of Saint Maurizio e Lazzaro, the name of the little chapel to your left. The frescos of the saints which decorate it date back to around the mid 17th century while the chapel itself is documented from 1147. It's impossible now to pick out any Romanesque features after its many restorations. Inside are fragmentary remains of frescos depicting Saint Stephen and Saint Sebastian dated to around the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The alter is decorated with a wooden 17<sup>th</sup> century statue of Saint Maurice and a 17<sup>th</sup> century painting of Christ with Marta and Mary. The vestry was added by the inhabitants of Castello in 1838 in gratitude for having been spared the dreadful cholera outbreak two years previously.

**Castello** is a very interesting old part of Lierna. The name derives from a fortified fortress of late Roman origin with a tower built on the north-western side of the promontory, now no longer visible as such but partly incorporated into some of the houses around Piazza Dogali. Passing the chapel, turn left into the Via Scura or Dark street, Note the old house called Casa Panizza with the date of 1745 over the arch. The Panizzas have been a leading family in the life of Castello since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and one branch of the family is responsible even today for the upkeep of the chapel. Many of the buildings here were built between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and during these centuries it would have been a



busy village with commercial as well as residential functions. Were you able to look inside, you would find that some of the old 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century houses still retain original features such as fireplaces with family coats of arms, stone floors and vaulted ceilings.

The Castle features in documented history, for example during the ten year war between Como and Milan (1117 to 1127) when it was conquered and burnt by the Como naval forces. It ceased to have any military use and passed to purely residential use after it was laid siege to by Francesco Sforza II and the Grigioni troops in order to remove one Giangiacoimo Medici (know as the Medeghino) who had held sway over the lake. You may wander about here in the narrow streets, for example taking a right into Piazza Dogali, but all of them are blind alleys and you will have to return eventually to the lake. It is possible to walk part way around Castello by the lakeside walk but at present the paths going either side have not been joined.

### *Riva Bianca*

The walk continues along the road flanking the pretty bay forming Riva Bianca, or White Shore. Several of the trees are mulberries, the leaves of which are food for the silkworm caterpillar which were raised by many Liernese families for the silk industry over at least 200 years up to the 1930s.



There is a bar towards the end of the road. On reaching the end you will see the magnificent Villa Pini built in 1921 by Achille Pini, a Liernese industrialist who had made his fortune in Argentina in the distilling business. Cross the road and walk back towards Lierna. Turn left and almost immediately turn right and walk in front of Ristorante Crotto. You are back on Via Ducale once again. Follow

this to the crossroads you were at before turning down to Riva Bianca, but this time turn left *uphill* and you will come out in front of another *località*, called Giussana. Rest in the little piazzetta to your right and admire the view over the top of Castello across to the Bellagio promontory and the majestic mountain landscape beyond.

### *Giussana*

This small community whose existence is documented from the 15<sup>th</sup> century was like many others dependent on agriculture. Local lore tells of an ancient convent or friarage here but no trace has ever been found of one. All we know of for certain is the chapel of Saint Catherine was used from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century but then deconsecrated and turned into a private dwelling. Today all that remains of it is the mosaic image of the saint and the probable entrance doorway. Some fragments of frescos surviving on the walls of an old building were destroyed when it was demolished in the 60s to make way for the piazza.

Turning to face the cluster of houses, cross the road and take the right-hand fork of the two in front of you and walk uphill to another small cluster of houses forming the *località* of Ciserino, another agricultural community and of probable similar age to Giussana. Here at one time land belonging to the parish of Varenna was cultivated by Liernese families. Turn right at the water tap onto a cobbled path which as you walk along gradually becomes a grass track between vegetable patches, orchards and open meadows. On your left you can see another *località* – that of Genico. You will presently see the now disused Seminary, built in 1957 by the Order of Claretian Fathers on land generously donated by Liernese families. You reach a metalled road where you turn right, to go downhill. Turn right again on reaching Via della Libertà at the “stop” sign, take a shortcut path about 50m further on your left at the corner of the old “Flockart” factory (which used to manufacture flocked paper), continue to the junction with Via Parodi, turn right to go down under the railway bridge and then right once more to return to the station.

## Walk Two

### Casate, Grumo, Muggiasco and Olcianico

Starting Point – Parish church of *Sant’Ambrogio*

Total distance – Approx 3km

Highest height reached 311m

Lowest height reached 207m

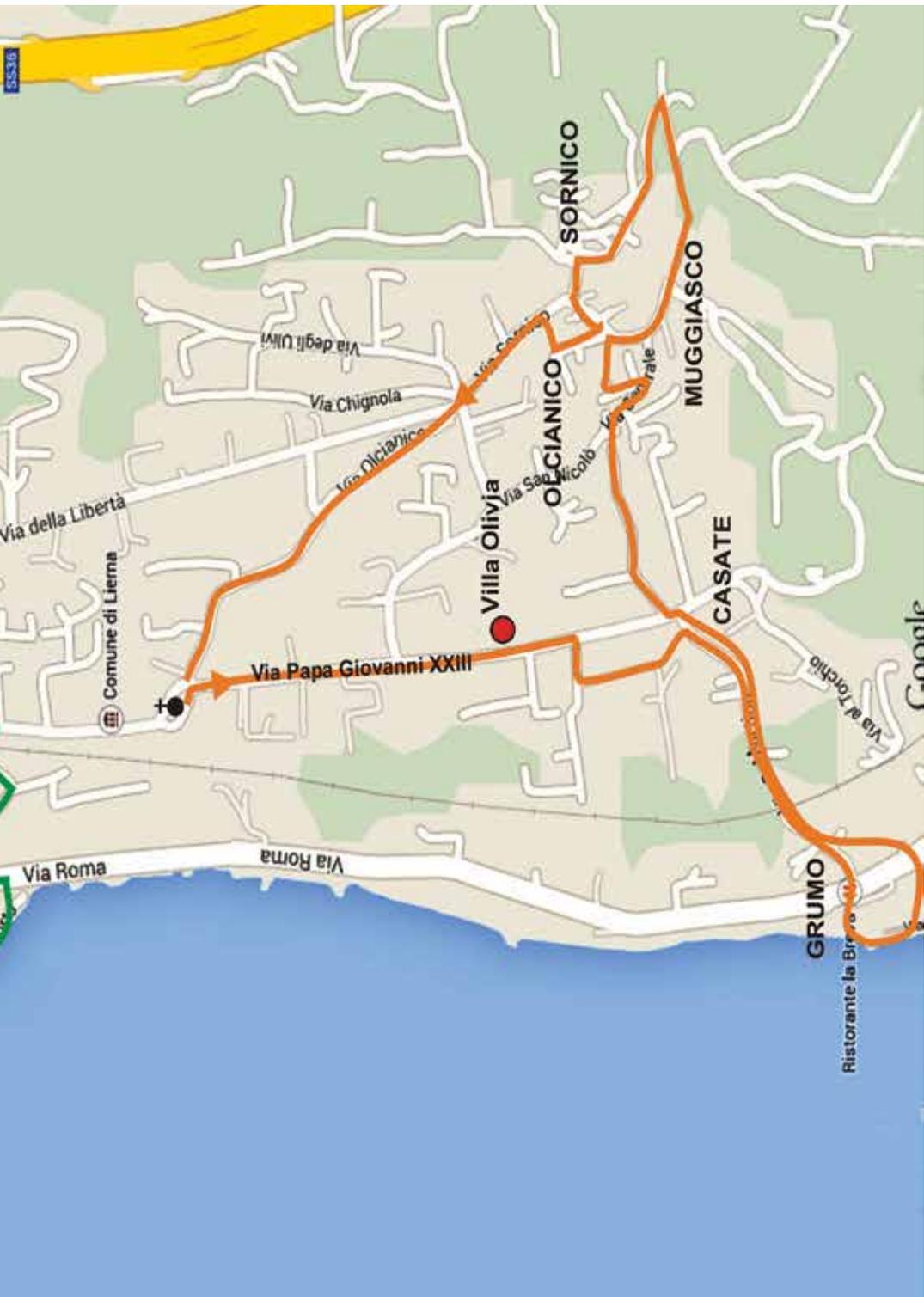
Approx time required 1hr 30 mins

#### *The Parish Church of Saint Ambrose*

The church you see today was built in 1626 on the site of a more modest, unadorned edifice, which in its turn replaced an even earlier one. It was enlarged and late Baroque features added in 1778. The main altar dates from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, as do the wooden choir stalls. To the left is a 16<sup>th</sup> century altar dedicated to Saint Anthony built of gorgeously coloured marble. The Liberty style window in the façade representing Saint Ambrose is by the Milanese artist Luigi Fontana. The frescoes in the ceiling of the nave depicting scenes from the life of Saint Ambrose and the central medallion in the apse of the Sermon on the Mount were painted by the Bergamascan painter Umberto Marigliani in 1935, as were the frescoes of the major prophets and the evangelists and the paintings of Saint Theresa and Saint Giovanni Bosco in two side chapels. He restored the two large paintings in the apse of the Adoration of the Magi and the Slaughter of the Innocents, painted in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown painter. Above the door to the right can be seen a large painting by Giovan







SS336

Comune di Lierna

SORNICO

MUGGIASCO

ORSIANICO

CASATE

Villa Oliva

GRUMO

Ristorante la Br...

Google

Via della Libertà

Via degli Ulivi

Via Chignola

Via Nicianico

Via S. Nicola

Via S. Trale

Via Papa Giovanni XXIII

Via Roma

Via Roma

Via al Torchio

Battista Macolino depicting the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary with St Dominic and Saint Catherine of Sierna, painted in 1628.

Leaving the piazza in front of the main entrance to the church, proceed to the right along Via Papa Giovanni XXIII in the direction of the cemetery. The building to your right is the old people's home while to your left, fronted by steps, is the octagonal Oratory of the Crucifix built in 1841. To the left of this is the relatively modern (1950) grotto of the Madonna. The large modern building behind is the modern Oratory in which children receive catechism lessons and recreational activities are organized for them at weekends. The source of funding for all these buildings came largely from donations and fund-raising activities carried out over many years by Liernese families.



In the small piazza and adjoining the Oratory of the H Crucifix is the old elementary school in use until the 60's, now converted to provide space for civic use.

You are now walking along the road lined by the Stations of the Cross. Presently you reach the cemetery, the entrance being guarded by 13 tall Italian cypress trees planted in 1923 as a memorial to each of those soldiers killed in the First World War whose names are to be found on the crosses beneath. The cemetery entrance was designed and built in 1922 by Giannino Castiglioni, the architect and sculptor who resided in Lierna for many years, and funded partly from his own pocket. (see [Walk 3](#)) Also his design are the small chapel of St. Michael and the family crypts of the Spada, Micheli, Balbiani and Costa families. Note also the Manzoni family vault in which are buried some of Alessandro Manzoni, the famous writer's descendents.

## *Casate*

Ignore the left turn up Via San Niccolò and after walking approx 100 metres further on, turn right by the grey fence and then almost immediately turn left along a road marked *Strada Privata* (there is right of access on foot). You'll soon pass under an arch formed by the house above and find yourself in *Piazza Centrale*, the heart of Casate. Have a look around you and imagine life as it once was (see introduction to the Walks). Take the left-hand cobbled alleyway at the top end of the piazza and turn right when you reach the junction. You are now in Via San Martino. Walk down this pleasant country lane with views of the mountains and the lake, leaving the houses behind you. Presently you pass under a railway bridge and will see the little church of San Martino on your left. The present church was built in 1868 on the site of a much earlier church and ancient burial ground which fell into ruin in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, largely with donations from Liernese who had emigrated to South America. In 1789 human remains and tombstones were discovered near the ruins. The bones were placed in two niches in the front of the rebuilt church. There were once many legends and stories of ghostly shimmering lights to be seen in the night in the fields nearby, as well as stories of deaths from the plague, cholera and other diseases, no doubt partly owing their origin to these mysterious bones.

## *Grumo or La Punta*

Walk straight on past the entrance to *La Brea* restaurant and cross the main road, using the mirror to help you check for traffic. There is a ramp and some steps leading down to the lake. The beach has recently been re-landscaped



and its facilities rebuilt. It's a great place for a dip in the lake and for sunbathing in summer, a favourite with both local and visiting families. Walk along until you reach the stream and the short cobbled road which takes you back to the main road. The large complex of holiday flats here was developed from the 19<sup>th</sup> century silk spinning-mill. Cross the road and the car park, taking the cobbled lane which joins up with Via San Martino. (Note: you may instead carry on along the main road to your right where you will see on the left, just before the entrance to the road tunnel, the old quarry for the so-called black marble, abandoned more than 50 years ago. It was here that a rare dinosaur fossil was found around 1930). Follow Via San Martino back up the hill, cross the road and take the old lane marked Via Muggiasco.

### *Muggiasco*

When you reach the top of the lane, turn right at the junction into old Muggiasco along Via Centrale. After approximately 50 metres turn left along Via alla Corte. Presently you will seem to be at a dead end, but look to your right and you will see a flight of steps. The street passes underneath some houses and archways. You come out into a small piazza. Keep right on until you come out at a pretty wayside shrine to the Madonna. Turn right down the road. You come to the only covered wash-house in Lierna, built in 1847 and recently restored. On the back wall is a painting of the Madonna.

Follow the stony road alongside the streambed. At the top is another public washstand. Turn left here continuing along a cobbled road up the incline to the church of San Michele.



## *Sornico*

Sornicans are very proud of this attractive rural chapel with its simple, neat design, and keep it in excellent repair. Originally built in the early 1600s on the site of a 12<sup>th</sup> century church, the painting on the façade representing Saint Michael was added in 1826 while most of the inside walls of the church were decorated with frescoes at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. September 29<sup>th</sup> (St Michael's day) is celebrated in Sornico with a street festival and fireworks.

Carry on along the road into Sornico. The little alleyways leading off to the left and right can be entered. Note the birthplace of Luigi Taruselli who is commemorated on a stone plaque. He emigrated to San Francisco where he died in 1939, leaving money to benefit his birthplace.

After passing under a small house spanning the road, turn left and carry on downhill until you are almost level with the shrine to the Madonna at the beginning of *Via alla Corte* which you passed along earlier. Immediately before this, turn right along a straight, cobbled road which takes you to the adjoining *località* of Olcianico.

## *Olcianico*

You find yourself in a small piazza called *Piazza della Madonna* with a water tap and one of the oldest painted shrines in Lierna showing the Madonna holding the body of Jesus. Follow either of the cobbled alleyways to the main road and turn left. After approximately 20 metres the road widens, forming Piazza T.Grossi. Cross diagonally across it and take the road called Via Olcianico. Walk down here back to the church enjoying the excellent views of the mountains rising above the western side of the lake.

## Walk Three

### Villa to Genico

Starting Point – Lierna town centre, opposite Sister’s Café

Total distance – approx. 2 km

Highest height reached 311m

Lowest height reached 207m

Approx time required 1.5 hrs

#### *Bancola*

Opposite Sister’s Café leading down towards the lake is a narrow alley. Take this and you’ll very shortly be on the lakeside, known as **Bancola**. On your right as you face the lake is the boathouse and walled garden of Villa Castiglioni, the home and studio of the notable 20<sup>th</sup> century sculptor Giannino Castiglioni. You can look across the lake to the Bellagio promontory with the large Villa Serbelloni, though the village visible on it is not Bellagio but Pescallo, Bellagio being on the other side. The twin peaked mountain behind is Monte di Tremezzo. Directly opposite you is the village of Limonta.



#### *Villa*

Walk along the lakeside path towards and under the jetty for the ferry. Just before the small harbour, turn left along *Via al Porto*. Cross the road with care, and walk up the street called *Via Don Carlo Gnocchi* to the left of the baker’s shop.



You are now in **Villa**, so called because there was once a Roman villa located partly in what is now *Piazza IV Novembre*, the main square. A black and white Roman mosaic floor, columnar stones and part of a wall were discovered here in *circa* 1876. It has been restored and is now on display in Lecco museum housed in the Palazzo Belgioioso. The main square assumed its present form in 1929. Before that it was a large vineyard without trees or steps or the fountain designed by the same Giannino Castiglioni, (now sadly no longer functioning). Walk 20m up *Via Don Carlo Gnocchi* to a small square flanked on your right by a pretty little archway. You now have a choice of routes. If you turn right along *Via S. Bernardo* you'll come to the little chapel built in 1830 and dedicated to this saint. Inside, above the altar, there is an outstanding oil painting by Onorato Andina representing S. Bernardo. The alleyway widens to a road which bends around to the left and goes over the railway bridge. Alternatively, instead of turning along *Via San Bernardo*, continue along *Via Don Carlo Gnocchi* up the hill where you come out in a larger square. Take the right-hand alley up the hill and go over the railway bridge.

### **Genico**

Now turn left and cross the road to the post office. Walk up *Via della Libertà*, taking the short cut, *Via Genico*, which you'll see straight ahead of you after approximately 50metres. When the path joins the road, you'll see the sign on your right to **Genico** as well as



mountain footpath signs to walks 71,72 and the *Sentiero del Viandante*, a long distance footpath running along the lakeshore from Colico to Abbadia. Cross the road and walk up. This was the only road to Genico until the 1990's when a wider road was built linking

in to the seminary road. Walk up the steps and keep on the new road until you reach a water tap and some path signposts. On your right is the disused Claretian seminary, built in 1957 on land generously donated by Liernese families.

Take a left following the signpost for path 71 then almost immediately turn right. Walk up the steepish hill to the junction with the new road. Your efforts will be rewarded: if you turn around, splendid views across the lake and of the surrounding mountains are available from this, the most isolated and most scenic of Lierna's *località*. Its peace and quiet were forever shattered by the opening of the motorway in 1987.

Cross over the new Genico road and follow the steep path up to the centre of the *località*. On the right of the square is a little *cappelletta* dedicated to the *Regina del Santissimo Rosario*. The chapel was rebuilt few years ago, but its origin dates back to XVIII century. If you wander about the alleyways you can see some houses with wooden balconies, where crops were once laid out to dry, some handmade wooden ladders and at the top of the *località* is a water fountain and stone trough, once the community's water supply. Two sundials are painted on old house walls. There is also a painting of Saint Lucia holding a bowl containing two eyeballs (mediaeval tradition has it that her eyes were gouged out prior to her execution). On a more cheerful note, you can purchase home-made fresh cheese from Signora Carri at the house in the corner of the square (no number - the name on the doorbell is Virgino Carri). Just ring for service.



Return back down to the town centre by the same route you came up. Alternatively, when you reach the new Genico road, turn left along it. At a bend you will see a path going off to the left. Follow it for approximately 100m until you reach two houses on either side of

the path. The one on the left used to be a water mill for the grinding of wheat and maize produced in the village. Later it was also used to turn an olive press. The structure was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and lovingly restored by descendants of the original Panizza family that built and operated it down the centuries. Inside there is the olive press, pulleys, grindstone, granite water channels and various agricultural and domestic implements.

It is best to return down to the town centre retracing your steps at this point.

in collaboration



## Villa Olivia

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