

Sommocolonia

The hilltop town of Sommocolonia was established as a fortress and lookout by the Romans. The town was all but destroyed by American bombardment during WW2, and subsequently rebuilt. There is a memorial to the Partisans and American troops who lost their lives in the assault. The walk, most of which is well signposted and marked **■ ■** by the Club Alpino Italiano (CAI), takes you up through chestnut forests which provided the flour which was a staple of the local diet.

Leaving Casa Fontana go eastwards along via di Mezzo. At Porta Macchiaia continue straight ahead down into the village of **Fornacetta**. The Palazzo on the crest to the left is the Villa Angeli, built by the Marchese Francesco Angeli in the early 17thC. It was acquired by the Comune after WW2 and was until recently used as a school for the hospitality industry. It is currently empty pending necessary anti-earthquake strengthening. The large Liberty style villa below you on the left, "Villa Buenos Aires", now flatted, was built in the 1920's by Ferruccio Togneri, who had emigrated to Argentina in the 19thC. In the centre of Fornacetta the road forks in front of the church of Santa Maria Assunta, which was reconstructed in the mid 18th by Giuseppe Bonaccorsi, a famous musician with the Teatro Giglio in Lucca, who retired to his Fornacetta birthplace and extended the church and restored the historic organ. At the church the road forks, the right hand lane leading down to the terraced farmland of Bugliano. We will take the **left** hand road, which continues up through Fornacetta until it again forks. The right hand lane is the mule track which wound its way up to Tiglio and the ancient Giuncheto Jasper quarries. Again take the **left** hand lane, which leads up to meet the public road. Turn left (northwards) along the road and follow the public road down to Barga. At via **Cesare Biondi**, turn **right**, up the hill towards a small group of houses. At this point you join the ancient Via dei Remi (Road of the Oars) which was constructed to transport timber, by teams of oxen, from the Appenine forests down to the River Serchio below Barga. From there it was carried by the river to the shipyards of Pisa which built and repaired the Tuscan fleet. At the houses go to the left, through the woods above the houses of Ponte di Catagnana, until you again join the public road. Turn left, for about 150 metres, then to the right, across the bridge and to the right again climbing up the road which leads to the village of Catagnana. Look out for the CAI markers and do not turn up to the village and church but continue until on the left there is a signboard with details of the walk. Continue ahead along the public road which then becomes a cobbled mule track, winding up through the chestnut forest.

In the past the trees were coppiced, which involved cutting the trees down regularly and allowing five new saplings to grow from the stump. This produced new growth and useful firewood. This mule track was, until after WW2 the only access to Sommocolonia and was well constructed with cobbles, steps and edging stones. On the right hand side of the track you will see a small votive chapel dedicated to S. Rocco.

Continue up to Sommocolonia, a picturesque village with two churches. The church of San Rocco stands in a small piazza commemorating the Liberation in 1944. Higher up in the village is the church of San Frediano, with free-standing campanile. The parish church was completely rebuilt after being destroyed in WW2. From the terrace in front of the church there is a panoramic view of the Serchio valley with Barga in the foreground. Higher still are the remains of the fortress and a war memorial. The story of the black American Buffalo Soldiers is part of the history of Sommocolonia. Walk back down the narrow streets of the village and retrace your path down the mule track until you come to the tiny chapel dedicated to S Rocco. Shortly afterwards another track branches off to the right signposted to Albiano (B2 **■ ■**) Take this track to the right, then right again, down to a bridge over the Rio Villese, then up again until you reach the public road, going down to the left. After about 800 metres (half a mile) there is a junction. Take the public road to the right, in front of the yellow house, past several newly built houses and into the village

of **Albiano**, which has a small bar and restaurant in the main Piazza.

Turning back and retracing your steps until you see a long yellow house above you to the left: to the right you will find a path leading down beside a newly reconstructed house. This path leads down through the chestnut forests, at one point crossing diagonally over the tarred road, until it meets the main road from Barga to Castelvecchio Pascoli. Directly opposite there is a roadside shrine. Here the path leads down between walled gardens to the bridge over the Corsonna. Cross the bridge and pass the ruins of a large water mill. The millstones are still in place, and there are stalls which once housed the mules used to haul the flour up the track which zig-zags up to Barga. This mill was unique in that in addition to the flour mill there was a silkworm hatchery and spinning factory on the upper floors. Now structurally unsound it is fenced off. Follow the track up the bank, through the small hamlet of Lato where the road curves round to the right. shortly afterwards a steep tarred lane rises to the left. Follow this till you rejoin the main road, and then turn to the left again, back into Barga. Arriving at the pine tree in front of the Hotel and Bar Alpino, turn to the left, up Via Cesare Biondi until you come to via dell'Acquedotto on the right. Go down via dell'Acquedotto. On your left you will see a grand gate, flanked by a pair of gatehouses. Go in and on your right you will find the Villa Angeli (referred to at the start of the walk) now part of the school. Go back out of the gate. Straight ahead is via del Giardino, a narrow lane which leads down to the shops of the Giardino area but turn to the left, where you will see the Duomo above the houses of Barga Vecchia. The road is flanked on the left by the acquedotto built in the 15thC over the Fontanamaggio stream. On the right is Park Kennedy laid out in the 1950's, when the river was culverted. As you pass under the acquedotto, the walls to your right are the city walls reconstructed in the 13thC. The road leads back up to Porta Macchiaia and into Barga Vecchia. Take the first road on your left, via della Speranza, which leads up to the Duomo. Further up on your right you will find the small church of **San Felice**, also known as the Chiesa della Misericordia, and the Piazza Verzani, from which there is a fine view over Fornacetta and across the valley to Sommocolonia on the hilltop to the left. From the Piazza there is a gate beside the church which leads down through a series of small piazzette to Casa Fontana